

# FOREST AND AGROFORESTRY PROMOTERS (FAP NGO CAMEROON)

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## Presentation on water Stigmatization for the Mbororo indigenous minority group in Cameroon



Jaff Francis FAP NGO Cameroon coordinator inspecting trees in the watershed

Forest and Agroforestry Promoters ( FAP Cameroon) was created in May 2001 by indigenes of the North West Region who have interest in the sustainable management of natural and wetland resources. The organization is registered with the government of Cameroon with reference number: 137/E31/067/SCAB

FAP's mission is to promote the sustainable management of the natural and wetland resources in the Western highlands of Cameroon

### Introduction

Water catchment protection is part of every water supply project and water shed resources management has become very important in order to tackle the actual problems and achieve sustainable satisfaction of basic needs of the village population, rapid population growth and the search for basic requirement like food, fuel, fodder domestic water, shelter etc have led to invasion and destruction of upland forest and water shed, subsequent misuse of the exposed hill slopes through intensive agriculture, grazing and degradation of forest soil and water resources. Increasing human and livestock population reduces many intake areas to productive wasteland due to rapid transformation of forest into farms, timber and fuel wood gathering, overgrazing and depletion of soil structure and fertility. This causes social economic conflict and undermines efforts to improve the lives of large numbers of poor people who depend on these resources for survival. As population increases so do water needs.

Shortage and contamination of drinking water sources are already felt through out in the North West Region of Cameroon despite an annual rainfall of about 2500mm.

Programs for the management of watershed resources are therefore needed to salvage the situation. The main objective of watershed resource management is to ensure a sustainable use of the natural resource of watersheds.

**The group facing stigmatization:** The Mbororo pastoralist indigenous people are cattle herders who migrated into Cameroon in 1905 from North Africa through Sudan and Niger in search of pasture for their cattle. The colonial masters of Cameroon recognized them as Cameroonians and since then, they are Cameroonians with all rights and responsibilities. The Mbororo number about 80,000 in the North West region. In January 1996, Cameroon had a new constitution, which is still operational today. This constitution provides that the state shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the rights of indigenous populations in accordance with the law. This provision of the constitution notwithstanding, little has been done by the state to preserve and protect the rights of the Mbororo minority indigenous population. The Mbororos being mostly illiterates and minority group are easily manipulated by their host {politicians, Farmers and traditional rulers etc.} who continue to consider them as non-land owning communities. As such, they face exclusion and have limited access to public services and basic rights to enjoy the natural resource of the country.

They are mostly illiterate and due to their far off settlement they do not have access to public services such as stand taps for good drinking water like other Cameroonians since they live at the fringes of the villages where majority of non Mbororo village communities water sources are found {watershed areas}. Although they reside around the water source, majority of the village water projects are initiated and constructed without their involvement since they are considered as strangers without landed properties and have no right or voice in any decision making process. Their source of drinking water are always blocked to catch the water for the benefit of non Mbororo in clustered villages, since they live around the water catchments areas they become caretakers of the water source and are intimidated to leave their settlement areas when their cattle or they themselves in the quest for drinking water have to enter the catchment areas.



Mbororo women fetching water on a doubtful source



Mbororo children

**How they are affected:** The stigmatization of the Mbororo communities to provide them safe drinking water is actually seen in the fact that after catching water around their residence by the non Mbororos a solid fence is

constructed to protect the water sources, no standtap is provided to them to have access to save drinking water, stand taps are constructed some 7-12 kilometers away from the Mbororo residence which means for them to get access to save drinking water they have to trek to 7-12 kilometres while the non mbororos cluster villagers access save drinking water within few meters. This puts more work load on to the Mbororo women who are the principal household chores workers. Sometime people are force to make use of water of doubtful quality which usually results to some water borne diseases such as cholera which has been in alarming in Cameroon in the past two years. The fact that the Mbororo people are not seen as members of the village and therefore puts them is a stage of strangership, the Mbororo community is excluded from water management committee as well as from the initial planning phase to develop and protect water source. This is a recurrent problem in the entire region and this puts the Mbororo community as a group of people who are experiencing stigmatization

They graze their cattle in a purely traditional manner, but migrate to the valleys during the dry season in search of green pastures for their cattle in a practice called transhumance. They are equally stigmatized by farmers who block canal and water drinking points from their cattle during the transhumant period.



Mbororo residence



Mbororo cattle

**Relevance to stigmatization:** The Mbororos migrated into Cameroon when all other tribes had settled on defined pieces of land and as a result, they are considered by their farming neighbors as strangers who should not own land despite the fact that they need land, pasture and water at all cost for grazing. When the Mbororos came into Cameroon, they established a tradition to pay royalties to non Mbororo traditional leaders to permit them graze their cattle within a particular chiefdoms. The quest for grazing land in an environment of increasing population of farmers puts the Mbororos on daily conflicts with neighbours and stigmatisation by the same people. Farmers cultivate crops along the valleys and block their cattle accessing drinking water. Despite the fact that there is a national law {Article 15 of Ordinance No. 74 – 1 of 6th July 1974} establishing rules governing land tenure in Cameroon.

The Mbororo community and their cattle are living close to the water that they have been exploiting freely but because of the non Mbororo villagers interest in catching water to the more cluster settlement about 7-10 kilometers they are deprived their rights and that of their cattle from exploiting the available water source, pastoral resources and other natural resources.

Identifying those who suffer from stigmatization is important because measures can be taken towards creating awareness and supporting the stigmatised people and involving them in water project and other projects within the



community they belong. Also the Mbororo people live more closer to the water catchment areas and can play a very vital role in protecting the water sources from wild fire and water catchment from animals thereby adding value to the water catchment source and making water more available especially during the dry season when water is needed most.

The frequent destruction of catchment areas either by wild fire or animals that results to contamination of water sources can be attributed to non involvement of the mbororos in water projects and management committees of these projects.

The mbororo/grasers that do not see themselves as part of the beneficiaries of these water projects therefore have no stake in the water chain management. This makes the water catchment areas to be invaded by wildfire each year and they are accused by the non-Mbororo villagers as the authors of the wild fire which most often comes from hunters who are non mbororos.

Women faces the impact of this stigmatization more because they are traditionally responsible for domestic activities such as washing of dresses, preparing food for the family, fetching of drinkable water etc. They trek for kilometers to fetch water for the domestic use.



Farmers grazers conflict resolution meeting      Bee keeping for Mbororos in the watershed

**Measures taken to address stigmatization:** The Mbororo Social and Cultural Association better known by its acronym MBOSCUDA was set up in 1992 in conformity with the law on freedom of Associations. It is an umbrella association of the Mbororo people that is working towards the demarginalisation and stigmatization of Mbororo people in Cameroon especially in the North West Region.

FAP NGO Cameroon went into partnership agreement with MBOSCUDA to work together in the North West Region to creat and implant farmers-grazers dialogue platforms. This partnership started in 2008 with an aim of reducing the violation of the Mbororo people's right and improving their access to land and pastoral resources. The pilot phase of the process of access to land and pastoral resources was in Ngoketunjia division which is only one out of the seven Divisions in the North West Region. Some of the main activities carried out included putting in place dialogue of platforms and the holding of sensitization workshops. The outcome of this is that Mbororo grazers are seen fully involved in amicable dialogue process to resolve farmers/grazers conflicts.

FAP NGO Cameroon and MBOSCUA with the support of the Netherlands Development organization started the pilot phase which was very successful in resolving many conflicts and stigmatization of the Mbororo people.

Many conflicts that the government officials extort money from were resolved amicably by the platform members who are made up of farmers, grazers and some administrators.

This approach can be used to resolve water stigmatization in Cameroon.