

## **GENDER AND LIVESTOCK FARMING IN LAIMBWELAND, CAMEROON, 1980S-2011**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Livestock farming in Laimbweland in the North West Region of Cameroon has witnessed momentous changes in the past three decades. Preceding the economic crisis of the mid 1980s livestock rearing was primarily a male dominated activity but the crisis led to women ‘invasion’ of this space. They became actively involved in livestock farming habitually for money-making reasons to increase the family income and also to address other socio-economic needs. The rising phenomenon of single parenthood has equally made some women to become livestock breeders to take care of their children. This study investigates Laimbwe women involvement in livestock farming and impact in Cameroon which prior to the 1980s remained stereotypically gender biased. This research draws from the methods and techniques of individual, group, focus group discussions, sample surveys and observation to explain the changes witnessed in the livestock sector in Laimbweland.

**Keywords:** Livestock, gender, economic crisis, Laimbwe, Cameroon

## **INTRODUCTION: SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY AND CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

Several international measures initiated from the 1970s to 1995 were geared at the empowerment of women the world over. The period 1975 to 1985 was declared by the UN as the International Decade for Women. In 1985, the Nairobi World Conference of Women Forum was organised and in 1995 the Beijing Conference on Women also took place. Through these international gatherings, the stage was set for an international awareness to empower and integrate women more than ever before into the development processes of countries of the world. In spite of these efforts, women exclusion or under-representation in matters of sustainable development continuously animate scholarship on gender and women studies (Fonjong, 2001, p. 223; Mwangola, 2006, pp. 6-7; Kitetu 2006, pp. 8-9; Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, 2006, pp. 10-11; Aboderin, 2006, pp. 23-25).

This study is significant in several ways. Livestock farming in many parts of Cameroon for a very long time was dominated by men while women played mainly supporting roles. The financial and economic challenges facing world economies since the 1980s has called into question the marginal role of women in the livestock sector in some parts of the world. International and national Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) like Heifer Project International (HPI) together with other development partners have engaged or advocated the engagement of women groups and associations on a full time basis in the rearing of goats, pigs and other domestic animals for economic and socio-cultural roles. They argue that the participation of men, women and children in livestock farming has attained varying degrees in different regions of the world (Tangka, Jabbar and Shapiro, 2000; Fonjong, 2001, pp. 223-234; [www.ifad.org/gender/thematic/livestock/live\\_2.htm](http://www.ifad.org/gender/thematic/livestock/live_2.htm); Kumar, 2007, pp. 503-520 Shafiq, 2008, pp. 18-22; Waters-Bayer and Letty, 2010, pp. 31-50; Improvement, A/60/165) and need to be sustained if the problems of sustainable development must find lasting solutions.

Besides, the benefits of livestock rearing in developing economies cannot be undermined. Livestock is food for the home, used for entertainment, a source of income, provides the nutrition needs of rural families, provides manure for the soil, is raw materials and also provides social and cultural identity to the population. Livestock is also used for sacrifices, payment of fines, to solicit the services of traditional healers, used during funerals, weddings, thanksgiving and Christmas. Before new couples in some cultures get into a new house, neighbours are offered goats. From the sale of livestock, the money is used to buy food, medicines, send children to school, buy soap, clothes and shoes to look presentable. Goats in several Cameroonian societies are pets for children; provide friendship and given names (Tangka, Jabbar and Shapiro, 2000, pp. 1 and 8; Agro-Special 3, 2006, p. 24; Ndang and Tazuh, 2010, pp. 3-4; Mutua *et al*, 2010, p. 47). This explains the sentimental attachment some people male and/or female attach to the keeping of livestock.

In some communities, women play nominal roles in the livestock sector but in others they are more visible than men. This is re-enforced by traditional gender division of labour, the farming systems, demographic and environmental factors. In developing countries in general, men largely take decisions on livestock production and general herd management while women specialise in dairy-related activities and manage vulnerable animals. When women own small ruminants, these are managed together with the other animals owned by the family (Tangka, Jabbar and Shapiro, 2000, p. 1). There is need to move away from this retrogressive thinking to an embracing and productive activities for both men and women.

While there is gender stereotype in the livestock sector in developing economies, in Bolivia and Ethiopia, women manage livestock and men cultivate crops. Similarly, in the Andes of Latin America women are major livestock managers and own a great percentage of the animals. They carry out herding and direct animals to appropriate pastures. In many rural communities, women do the dairy related activities like head loading and sale of milk in the northern part of Cameroon (Mutua *et al*, 2010, pp. 43-46; [www.ifad.org/gender/thematic/livestock/live\\_2.html](http://www.ifad.org/gender/thematic/livestock/live_2.html). <http://www.fao.org/docrep/U1200T/u1200T0g.htm>; <http://www.Irrd.org/Irrd17/6/baye17060.htm>. While this is the case, in the great lakes region of Central Africa, women generally hold inferior social positions and are excluded from dealing directly with livestock. These differences in the role of women in economic related activities need to be neutralised for a better utilisation of available human and natural resources.

Generally speaking, women involvement in livestock production in developing countries has not been given the attention it deserves. Yet the success in livestock rearing should take into consideration the effective involvement of women. Many of them are closely involved in animal husbandry activities in diverse ways (Shafiq, 2008, p. 18). They are knowledgeable in livestock management and related diseases. Besides, women need more support to attain equality with men, strengthen their local organisations and improve their access to education and training. There is also need to promote gender equality in the livestock services and organisations (Waters-Bayer and Letty, 2010: 31). According to the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number one, the full involvement of women in livestock can reduce hunger and poverty through food, income, transport, insurance and other services to households (Waters-Bayer and Letty, 2010, p. 32). Women empowerment through livestock and its related activities is likely to reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS which can address MDG six. As this explains the importance of women empowerment for sustainable development, their situation is better captured within conceptual frames of analysis.

Studies on gender have resulted in different frames of analyses or approaches. Among these approaches are cultural dualism, social evolution, Harvard, People Oriented Planning, Moser and Longwe or Women Empowerment as propounded by De Beauvoir, Boserup and March *et al* (De Beauvoir, 1952; Inkeles and Smith, 1974; Women and National Development, 1977; March *et al*, 1999). Contemporary frames of analyses include the maternal, equality and feminine-expressive frames. The maternal frame highlights women's roles as mothers, nurturers and caregivers and the equality emphasises women's sameness with men as bearers of civil and political rights and as labour participants and occupiers of professional roles. Meanwhile the feminine-expressive frame reclaims feminine stereotypes and attire and uses them in a playful, self-parodying way to call women to action (Goss and Heaney, 2010, pp. 29-31). Most of these analytical frameworks are built on western centred empirical observations of western societies. These have their shortcomings when used to examine other societies of the world like the Laimbwe of Cameroon.

While this study recognises the different frames of analyses, it interrogates the Longwe frame of analysis in which the practical aspect of women equality with men has been discussed. According to the framework, women's empowerment enables women to take an equal place with men and participate equally in the development process by having equal access to factors of production as men (March *et al*, 1999, p. 92). This study questions such a framework by stating that the Laimbwe

women of the North West Region of Cameroon have in different ways used factors of production and also wielded political power which determined their power (Kah, 2004).

## **METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED**

The methodology employed in this study was pluri-disciplinary and used over several years. We organised four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and face-to-face interviews with women and men in the area of study. From these we found changes in livestock farming from what obtained in the past. We inquired from those we interviewed the factors responsible for these changes and the ramifications on gender relations and sustainable development. We also used the technique of observation to explain the changes that took place in livestock farming in Laimbwe land. Documents like files in the Regional Archives in Bamenda (RAB) and the National Archives in Buea (NAB), letters, and petitions from the archives of the *Kuiifuai* regulatory society in Bu were consulted to obtain information about the evolution of livestock rearing. Through these methods and techniques we were able to appreciate the historical evolution of the Laimbwe economy with focus on the livestock economy. Besides, from a sample survey of the study area which involves principally three polities namely Bu, Mbengkas and Baisso, we noted with interest the fact that gender stereotypes still exist in the livestock sector. Resistance to it was very strong some years back but this has been on the decline. Today a good number of women keep livestock for various purposes.

## **LOCATION AND ECONOMY OF LAIMBWE OF LAIMBWE ETHNIC GROUP**

The Laimbwe like other ethnic groups of the West and North West Regions are a semi-Bantu speaking people. They belong specifically to the Tikar speaking people who trace their origin to Ndobu and Bankim in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon; their ancestral home (Amaazee, 1964, p. 54; Cheng, 1996; EYPIC Workshop, 1999; Ngwoh, 2006, pp. 14-15; Asang, 2008). Studies about the Tikar, a contested terminology today, (Jeffreys, 1940, p. 32; Jeffreys, 1952, pp. 141-153; Chilver and Kaberry, 1970, pp. 249-257; Fowler and Zeitlyn, 1996, pp. 1-16), in the historiography of the North West Region excludes the Laimbwe among the ethnic groups that are associated with the Tikars (Mafiamba, 1969, pp. 59-90; Nkwi, 1987, pp. 15 and 23; Fanso, 1989, p. 35).

The Laimbwe people cultivate food and cash crops like maize, cocoyams, rice and coffee. They are also engaged in related activities like hunting, pig and goat rearing, lumbering and fishing. The Laimbwe socio-political structure is centralised. It is similar in many respects to that of the matrilineal fondoms of Kom, Kuk, and Bafmeng. The *Laimbwe* language is spoken in three of its principal polities of Bu, Mbengkas and Baisso. It is also spoken in neighbouring Mughom, Endeng, Teitengem, Aguli and Mbongkesso polities and hamlets. These are all under its sphere of influence. While Mughom, Endeng, Teitengem and Aguli speak a variant of the Widikum language, Mbongkesso blends *Laimbwe* and *Itanghi-Kom*,<sup>1</sup> a result of the mixing of cultures at the edge of the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve.

The Laimbwe people are located in the North West Region of Cameroon (**See Fig. 1**).<sup>2</sup> The territory straddles the Menchum and Boyo Divisions and constitutes three polities. Bu is the largest settlement and Baisso the smallest and the first to be settled following the migration of the Laimbwe people from hill-top settlement of Ndewum near Bafmeng.<sup>3</sup> The census statistics for Bu, Mbengkas and Baisso at independence were 1,118, 530 and 185 respectively. In 1979 the population of Bu

was 6,944 with a work force of 2,701 while Mbengkas had a population of 1,978 and a working population of about 900. The estimate for the population of Baisso by 1993 was only 500 (Shultz, 1993: 10). The population of Bu is estimated to reach 17,000 inhabitants by the year 2025 (Strategic Plan, 2009-2014). Mbengkas is a sandwiched settlement between Bu and Baisso and second to Bu in terms of population (NW/Ac. 1960/1/Bk; NW/Qc/b. 1979/4/Bk). This polity is neither accessible by a motorable road network from Baisso nor Bu because of a difficult and undulating topography. Since the late 1970s, the Mbengkas people have made several attempts to dis-enclave the area but with little success due to financial difficulties and deceit from some of their elite. Their efforts over the years have not produced the required results (NW/Qc/b. 1979/4/Bk; NW/Qb/a. 1985/6/Bk) although the government is making efforts to dis-enclave the area by providing an access road from Bu.

The Laimbwe polities are bordered to the North and North East by Mentang, Teitengem, Ehwi-njong, Endeng and Mughom. The former is Kom speaking and shares boundary with Baisso while Mughom, formerly a chieflet under the control of Mbengkas now wants Kom protection against Mbengkas aggression (Lah, 1989, p. 2; Minutes 1991; Misunderstanding 1994). The Aghem ethnic group borders the territory to the South and to the East. To the South East are Mbakong (Mile 28), Obang (Mile 30), Ndung (Mile 34), Aguli (Kekuli) and Befang, an economically viable road junction village and the gate way into the Menchum Valley subdivision and Wum the divisional headquarters of Menchum from Bamenda, capital of the North West Region of Cameroon. The first three settlements are southern border villages of Bafut sub division of Mezam. To the West of Laimbwe are Kuk, Bafmeng and Mbongkesso.

Baisso is located near the western boundary of Kom and near the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve established in 1951. Bu is separated from the other two Laimbwe polities by the River Meteh. Shultz erroneously asserts that Bu was once a Kom village which is now under Wum but he is correct when he argues that few of the Bu people speak and understand Kom (Shultz, 1993, p. 10). Mbengkas on the other hand is located to the South West of the Kom border and within the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve. On the whole, Laimbwe territory falls within latitudes 60 degrees 50 minutes north of the equator and longitudes 10 degrees 10 minutes east of the Prime Meridian (Lah, 1989, p. 2; Kah 1998, p. 29).

The Laimbwe polities are endowed with lots of exploitable forest and its numerous resources including firewood, fruits of different kinds and barks of trees used for several purposes including medication. The territory also has extensive attractive grassland scenery where cattle and sheep rearing takes place, raffia palm bushes in valley groves, natural palm trees, fertile alluvial valleys, numerous rivers and streams rich in fish, tadpoles, sand and stones. The extensive undulating terrain is backed by a moderate climate congenial for cattle herding and market gardening (Lah, 1989, p. 3-7; Kah 2011a, pp. 9-22; Kah 2011b, pp. 31-55).

### **THE LAIMBWE ECONOMY TO THE MID 1980s**

The livestock sector and other economic activities in the Laimbwe country before the mid 1980s when the world economic quagmire hit Cameroon was essentially a male dominated activity with women as assistants. One area where women excelled at the time was in clay pot making and exchange with neighbouring villages. They were however assisted in the digging of clay for pot making by the men (Ngende, 1966, p. 55; Geary, 1983, p. 6; Geary, 1984, p. 7). The pre-colonial and colonial

economies created opportunities for more Laimbwe men than women. When the Germans traced the Bamenda-Wum road through Laimbwe country, many of their men gained more opportunities in trading articles like mats with Bafut, Bamenda and Bali (Geary, 1983, p. 6; Kah 2011b, p. 35). They also traded in livestock with people of Menchum valley including Befang, Modelle, Mukuru and Esimbi. They exchanged the livestock with palm oil. Besides, men from the Laimbwe polities monopolised the cultivation of commercial crops like rice and coffee during the colonial period. The proceeds they used to buy and rear more goats and pigs. It made them more influential in society. Rice was introduced into Laimbwe land precisely Bu from Abakaliki in 1953 (File No Ci (1957)3; Lah, 1996; Kah, 2006; Kah Forthcoming). In the early years, women only took part in the cultivation of rice, threshing and winnowing of the harvested crop.

Besides, while women cultivated and harvested maize and groundnuts, which coincided with the rice farming season, men tended the crops from destruction by birds and animals. They erected temporal resting huts in the farm with either thatched grass or a few sheets of zinc. After harvest, the men also controlled the money from its sale. It was a herculean task for women to procure a small quantity of rice for household consumption. This is because men always wanted to sell everything and solve problems with them. Even though, the women pounded, hauled and sold the rice to the Fulani and other *buyam sellams*, they had no authority over the money which was handed to their husbands. They were however occasionally permitted to make purchases. Ownership of cultivable land was considered a male thing. In the early years, it was unacceptable for women to own their own rice farms. It was also a common thinking among the people that men should not idle while women toil alone in the farm. The cutlass and money were for men while the women used the hoe and did not keep money. The table below shows the disparity in activities between Laimbwe men and women. More men controlled economic activities and some of them were carried out by both sexes (**Table 1**).

Another domain of male dominance was in the palm oil economy. As was generally the practice in Widikum, Ngie, Bafut and the Menchum Valley areas of Befang, Mukuru and Modelle (Nwati, 1998; Mendi, 2005; Neba, 1982, p. 14), men harvested the cones and transported them from the palm groves. The nuts were eventually removed, boiled and palm oil extracted for home consumption or sale. Men controlled the proceeds from the oil, and some of them used the money for zinc to roof their houses. While some men used oil money wisely, others did so foolishly by drinking beer with it. The consequence was friction in the home which led some women to steer a clear path of their own empowerment and development.

There was yet another economic activity in which men provided unquestionable domination. This was in the domain of cultivation and processing of coffee. The crop was introduced into Laimbwe land in the 1950s (Njuh, 2005; Mbei Walu, 2005; Fonjong, 2005). It was boosted in the 1960s when the government of Cameroon boosted agricultural production the government's establishment of regular Five Year Development Plans. The aim was to promote agricultural activities (Kah, 1998, p. 122). This income earner contributed to the development of other areas like Kom, Nso and Santa (Nyinchiah, 2003). Unfortunately the expected results made many to become disinterested in this venture (Kom, 2005; Nguui, 2005; Wakem, 2005; Afuh, 2005). Commercial coffee cultivation soon phased out and in its place swamp rice production was introduced. Although during the era of coffee cultivation women assisted men in harvesting and processing it, men were central to decision making and the use of proceeds from its sale.

Some other Laimbwe men were involved in timber processing in the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve for economic reasons. This was made possible by the British colonial administration that needed timber for construction work. Men did this to make up for their bride-wealth and provide the basic household needs. The exercise was labour intensive. Firstly, a hole was dug and the tree was fallen over it to facilitate the use of the hand saw for the sawing of the timber. Economic operators based in Wum or Kom often hired the services of a group of men (File No. 106, Ci (1950)1; Kah 1998, pp. 122-3). With the eventual introduction of the engine saw in the 1970s, many more planks were produced on a single day. They were tied together and floated along the lower reaches of the Muteh River into the Menchum River and sold to waiting customers at the Mile 37 settlement along the Bamenda-Wum highway for building and furniture production in Bamenda and beyond. The financial benefits of these developments went to men and not women.

The Laimbwe men also did fishing, trapping, hunting and mat weaving. Fishing was carried out in the Muteh, Mughom and Menchum Rivers with the hook, and fishing nets. Trapping with wire in the Kom/Wum Forest Reserve was a regular activity. Animals hunted included cane rats (cutting grass), gorillas, elephants, monkeys and the deer. Men also harvested material, dried it and made mats. Mat weaving was a full time occupation and during the colonial epoch, men head loaded and sold mats as far as Nkongsamba in French Cameroon (a distance of over 300 Kilometres). After sales some Laimbwe boys bought salt as part of bride wealth (File No. 106, Ci (1950)1; Annual Report 1951; Kom, 2005; Wakem, 2007). Many young boys sold their mats in Bafut and Abakwa (Old Town) markets. This notwithstanding, the scenario from the 1980s changed and women are today the locomotive of economic development (Kah 2011: 9-22) in Laimbweland.

### **CHANGES IN LIVESTOCK FARMING SINCE THE 80s**

Today Laimbwe women are effectively playing the role of “bread-winners” in the homes and society. The question is why the sudden change in the fortunes of these women for the better. To answer this question, there is need to examine the events of history since the reunification of Cameroon in 1961. The economic situation of the 1980s in Cameroon like elsewhere is captured in a document titled “Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Cameroon” which states *inter alia*:

In 1986, a serious economic crisis struck the country as a result of changes in the world commodity market. The value of the export products such as cacao and coffee fell drastically and remained low. The consequences were felt throughout the countryside. Subsidies were completely removed and most agricultural development projects collapsed. Poverty increased in the rural areas and thousands of people had to receive food aid (<http://waltersmunde.tripod.com>).

This quotation captured the prevailing situation in the rural countryside in the 1980s to which Laimbwe was an integral part. Considering the challenges that came with the economic crisis of the 1980s, the Laimbwe traditional economy which was strictly patterned in gender terms accommodated changes. Unlike before where women were prevented from keeping goats and pigs by elders of the *Kuifuai* regulatory society, other challenges of the economy and the eventual devaluation of the franc CFA in the 1990s forced Laimbwe men to accommodate women contribution and ownership of livestock. Although, this invasion of the male space was not taken kindly especially by elders of the *Kuifuai* regulatory society, they pressed on and began to buy and keep livestock or kept this with their male relations.

Another change in the livestock sector is the growing population of Laimbwe. The increase in population is a result of early marriages, sexual promiscuity and improvement in health. Children born into unmarried homes are abandoned to their mothers to provide for their needs including education. To do so, they have used money from the sale of maize to keep goats, pigs and fowls as a store of value for the future. These goats and pigs are regularly bought by commercial dealers from Pinyin and neighbouring villages like Obang. Many of the crops the women cultivate like include maize, beans, groundnuts, plantains, potatoes, cocoyams, soyabeans and okro. From the proceeds some have bought goats, pigs and fowls which are often in high demand during death celebrations in the dry season (Wei, 2009; Si, 2009; Ndong, 2009; Wabi, 2009; Ewi, 2009; Buh, 2009; Zoh, 2009; Tschang, 2009; Ebou, 2009; Zonghefu, 2009; Ngei, 2009; Mukoi, 2009; Njuh, 2009; Ekai, 2009).

The recklessness and increased mobility of some Laimbwe men to the cities have compelled their wives to save their family from collapse. Many of them have often found life difficult in these cities notably Douala and Yaounde and their wives and relations have had to engage in livestock farming as a way of providing for the needs of their children and other members of the family. Other women rent or purchase rice farms and after selling rice they buy goats to save the money and to sell them and pay for labour during the next rice season. Others have transformed maize farms into rice fields. In the early years, many women paid men to clear the farms but soon thereafter, they took over the clearing themselves and they were assisted in this by their children. The cultivation, harvesting, transportation and sales today are overwhelmingly female dominated activities (Kah 2006). This explain why many of them can afford to keep livestock and sell them when the need arise.

Furthermore, women have literally turned to the “cutlass” and “hoe” because some of their husbands have abandoned the community for city life or in search of better opportunities elsewhere. Some young men soon after marriage or after impregnating girls disappear to the cities like Douala, Yaounde, Bamenda, Kumba and Limbe for fear of reprisal from the girls’ parent or their relatives. The consequence has been that the girls have had to fend for themselves. Faced with this sad reality, they have taken to various forms of economic activities including livestock rearing which before the last twenty years was the preserve of men. This is also because the responsibility for the upbringing of many children is left to their mothers alone.

Furthermore, some aged Laimbwe men who were faced with the challenge of providing the needs of family members opted to share part of their wealth like goats and pigs with their sister’s daughters and their grown up children including girls. In this way, they encouraged them to keep livestock for the purpose of solving their problems. Some of the girls who continued their formal education in Wum and Bamenda decided to buy more goats and pigs so that at the start of the school year they would sell some of them and buy basic school needs. Others saw in the keeping of livestock, an opportunity to raise money and buy basic household needs like utensils and to invest in local spent thrift societies commonly known as *njangis* and use the money at the end of the year to invest in other activities like purchasing farms for rice and maize cultivation.

In addition, the prevailing chieftaincy row in Bu, the largest of the Laimbwe villages has contributed to the present order of things directly and/ or indirectly (Ndo, 1999; Kah, 2008). The row, which deepened after the death of Fon Chu Mbonghekan in 1981, has resulted in serious family cleavages, which has also affected the marriage institution. There is an emerging phenomenon of free girls who are forced to take to farming and livestock keeping to solve their own problems and those of their children and mothers, some of whom have lost their husbands. Some of these single women are organised into



economic groups to raise money and help one another. Although they do not have joint livestock farms, they raise money from the joint economic activities to buy and keep livestock as a form of investment. From this, some have boasted that they have more wealth than married women.

The church in Laimbwe land has contributed to economic development among women. By asking for annual contribution and organising fund-raising activities, these churches have encouraged hard work among Laimbwe women. The Christian Women Fellowship (CWF) group of Bu Parish of the Presbyterian Church regularly organise seminars and courses to empower women economically. It is interesting to note that some of the successful women livestock owners are CWF women. The activities of the church groups like the Halleluya Choir have made many of the Laimbwe women to understand that for a family to address its needs, members must all contribute towards this. The appeal has gone down well with Laimbwe women who through a matrilineal system have been playing other important roles in the economic and political activities.

### **BENEFITS OF THESE CHANGES**

The greater involvement of women in livestock farming in the Laimbwe polities since the 1980s has brought benefits to both women and the entire ethnic group. These benefits are socio-cultural and economic. In the socio-cultural domain, the keeping of goats, fowls and pigs have often assured their availability during family events like death celebrations and ritual cleansing activities in family compounds. Besides, it has also eased the entertainment of regulatory societies for those members of the family who were initiated into them. Membership of female and male elders in cultural institutions of the ethnic group like *Kuiifuai* (male) and *Kefa'a* (female) cannot be complete without sacrifices of fowls, goats and pigs. It also places the family at the centre of the decision making circles of the village and to defend its interests.

Many women are able to sponsor their children in Government Secondary School (GSS) Bu. This was hardly the case before the 1980s and the education of children is the education of a country. Since education is also considered the most permanent asset, those who have been educated will in turn educate other Laimbwe children and will serve Cameroon and contribute to its development and self reliance in the near future. There are many girl children attending the GSS Bu today than was the case some twenty years ago. Many of them are sponsored by their mothers and sisters who are engaged in different economic activities including livestock farming which happens to be an all time income earner while other activities like rice only provide income to women on a seasonal basis.

The involvement of Laimbwe women in livestock farming has also contributed to the improvement of the health of Laimbwe people. Infant mortality is on the decrease today because these women, their husbands and other family relations are able to contribute money to treat themselves and children in the Bu Health Centre and the General Hospital in Wum. The responsibility of treating sick members of the family some thirty years ago was left in the hands of men who were more or less the major income earners but today, women assist and in some cases take the full responsibility when their male relations and husbands become reckless and abandon the village for city life in Douala, Bamenda, Kumba and Yaounde.

Economically, women have contributed to greater output of goods and services by keeping and selling livestock. The money they have kept in *njangi* societies has been lent out to some people and this has increased the circulation of money in the economy of Laimbwe and also provided employment to some people. Some people have used the money borrowed from the *njangi* houses to open up new farms and in the process they have employed boys to clear the farms and girls to cultivate the crops. Others have borrowed the money, bought and retailed basic household needs. Through this, people have been saved the time of trekking twelve kilometres to buy the same needs in Wum, the divisional capital of Menchum Division.

## CONCLUSION

In this study we have tried to show from a historical point of view that prior to the 1980s, livestock farming was principally a male dominated activity. This was due to a variety of factors among which were the gender stereotype views about certain activities and the nature of the colonial economy under the Germans and British administrations. Women merely assisted their husbands and male relations in livestock farming without the right of ownership or decision making. They largely relied on what the men gave them as proceeds from the sale of goats, pigs and fowls. Some of these domestic animals were simply kept and used during initiation into regulatory societies and not even for consumption. In the case of eggs, women were restricted from eating them.

Following the world economic quagmire of the 1980s, the traditional economy was strained and some commercial crops like coffee cultivation suffered considerably. Besides, some energetic young men who would have supported their families through farming at home were forced to migrate to the towns and cities for city life. This further compounded the problems of women including those who have children out of wedlock. In order to keep life moving and provide for the health and school needs of the children and other older members of the family, women were forced to invade male space but not without resistance from some elderly members of the *Kuiifuai* regulatory society. Some of them bought goats and pigs from selling groundnuts and maize. At the beginning, some of them kept these animals with their male relatives or husbands but with time, they kept these animals themselves. Today, the number of these women has increased and they are effectively contributing to poverty alleviation and boosting the traditional economy and social life in different ways.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the mother tongue of the people of Kom. Kom is the largest matrilineal ethnic group in the North West Region of Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup> The North West Region is one of the two English speaking regions of the ten regions of Cameroon. Eight of these regions are French speaking, a product of the British and French partition of the territory in 1916 after the defeat of Germany in the First World War of 1914-1916.

<sup>3</sup> The appellation Laimbwe means “ I say” and does not only refer to the ethnic group but also the language spoken by the people of the three villages of Baisso, Bu, Mbengkas and satellite ethnic groups such as Mughom, Teitengem, Endeng, Mbongkesso and Aguli.

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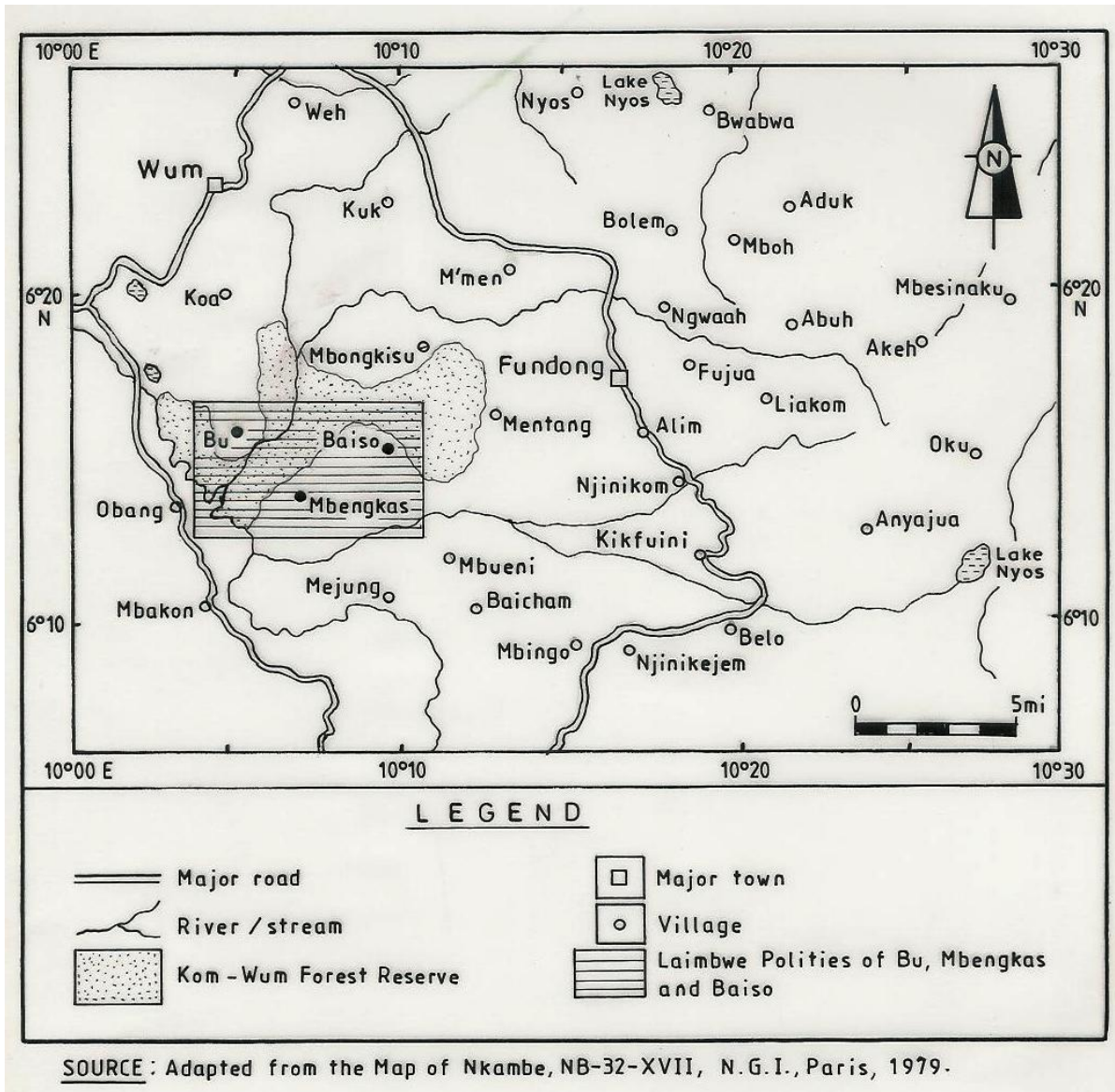
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Dr. Henry Kam Kah is a lecturer history at the University of Buea in the South West Region of Cameroon and researches on globalization, conflict, culture, governance, popular culture, civil society, gender and security. He has published several scholarly papers in peer reviewed journals in Cameroon and abroad, book chapters and attended several international symposia, workshops, seminars and conferences where he has presented papers on a wide range of issues. He is a member of scholarly groupings which include the American Political Science Association (APSA), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the West African Research Association (WARA), the Pan African Anthropologists Association (PAAA), the African Politics Contact Group (APCG) and the Association of Friends of the Archives and Antiquities Cameroon (AFAAC). Dr Kah is also an associate research fellow of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria.

**FIGURE 1: A CROSS SECTION OF MENCHUM/BOYO DIVISIONS SHOWING THE LAIMBWE POLITIES**





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**TABLE 1**

**GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR**

<b>Men's Activities</b>	<b>Women's Activities</b>	<b>Joint Activities</b>
Trapping and hunting	Pottery	Farming
Mat and bag weaving	Basketry	Palm oil production
Lumbering	Palm kernel collection	Upland rice cultivation
Pig and goat rearing	Charcoal burning	Swamp rice cultivation
Blacksmithing		
Bricklaying		
Fishing		
Coffee cultivation		

**Source:** Henry Kam Kah, "Feminist Activism, Economic Carte Blanche, Political Control, Symbol and Symbolism: An Historical Interpretation of the Kelu Women Revolution in Bu-Cameroon, 1957-59," *Afrika Zamani*, Vol. 17, 2009: 88.