

The Evolution of Conflicts Related to Natural Resource Management in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT Since independence, African countries have been searching for appropriate conflict management approaches to deal with the numerous and apparently intractable conflicts between states and among ethnic groups over the ownership and exploitation of natural resources. In Cameroon, conflicting claims regarding rights to the management of natural resources have, over the years led to inter-ethnic conflicts and disputes between communities, especially on food crop and livestock farmers, aggravating the poverty situation in rural areas. In attempts to resolve resource management conflicts between rival groups, the approach adopted by the modern state is highly centralised and mostly top-top without due consideration to the historical and cultural systems and values of the indigenous communities that constitute the country. The objective of this paper is to discuss the anthropological context within which the natural resource management system in Cameroon operates, identify the causes of land degradation and conflicts over resource exploitation and assess the relevance of indigenous conflict-resolution principles in the present context. This paper explores natural resources management in the pre-colonial, the colonial and post-colonial periods and argues through out that there is a structural disconnect between the conflict management systems adopted by the modern state institutions and those of the indigenous communities over which the latter has gained jurisdiction. This paper advocates for community participation in designing natural resources management strategies and harmonisation of the conflict management systems of indigenous communities with those of the modern state to provide a lasting solution to the incessant conflicts over resource exploitation to ensure peaceful co-existence. Such measures would contribute to improving the managerial, organisational and income-generating skills of community members to tackle the rising incidence of rural poverty and human depravation.