



## Securing Tenure for Sustainable Livelihoods: A Case of Women Land Ownership in Anglophone Cameroon

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### **ABSTRACT**

The majority of women in Third World countries depend on land for their livelihood. Security of tenure is important for them to ensure sustainable development, especially in rural areas. In most parts of Africa, land ownership is affected by traditional values, inheritance rights, and government influence. These forces have provided varying types of tenure which are detrimental to the women in rural and urban areas. Land acquisition and its development has been an emotive issue due to traditional pressures and the law as regards the process of land certification. The government and traditional administrations are highly involved in the way women own land and subsequently develop it in Anglophone Cameroon.

State authority over land acquisition is important, but the process for obtaining land title is herculean especially for the rural woman. This study illustrates that land acquisition and development by women constitute a problem because of traditional pressures and the law guiding the process of land certification. There is need to exhume the barriers of government's legal instrument (The Land Consultative Board) that regulates the ownership of land and to revisit some traditional practices as regards land ownership that impact negatively on women in a changing and globalizing world. A compromise approach is advocated for land acquisition that can transcend traditional barriers as well as render the process of land registration more realistic especially for women.

**Keywords:** Securing tenure, Land Consultative Board, land registration, tenure, inheritance.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

La majorité des femmes dans les pays du tiers monde dépendent de la terre pour leur subsistance. La sécurité d'occupation est importante pour elles afin d'assurer un développement durable, en particulier dans les zones rurales. Dans la plupart des régions d'Afrique, la propriété foncière est affectée par les valeurs traditionnelles, les droits de succession, et l'influence du gouvernement. Ces éléments ont fourni des types de tenure qui sont préjudiciables aux femmes dans les zones rurales et urbaines. L'acquisition de terres et leur développement ont été une question sensible en raison des pressions traditionnelles et de la loi relative au processus de certification des terres. Le gouvernement et les administrations traditionnelles sont très impliqués dans la façon dont les femmes possèdent la terre et la développent au Cameroun anglophone. L'autorité de l'Etat sur l'acquisition des terres est importante, mais le processus d'obtention des titres fonciers est herculéen, surtout pour les femmes rurales. Cette étude montre qu'il est nécessaire d'exhumer les barrières de l'instrument juridique du gouvernement (Le Conseil consultatif des terres) qui régleme la propriété des terres et de revoir certaines pratiques traditionnelles en matière de propriété des terres qui ont un impact négatif sur les femmes dans un monde changeant et globalisé. Une solution de compromis est préconisée pour l'acquisition de terrains qui peut transcender les barrières traditionnelles ainsi que rendre le processus d'enregistrement des terres plus réaliste surtout pour les femmes.

**Mots clés :** Sécurisation foncière, Conseil consultatif des terres, enregistrement des terres, l'ancienneté, héritage.

JEL Classification : 055, Q01

## **INTRODUCTION**

Women own only 1% of the world's resources, whereas they constitute 50% of the world's population. According to Razavi (2005) there exists a problem in the deliverance of land to women due to local level customary rights. Where decision making regarding land has devolved to informal community-based institutions, as in Uganda, women are finding "justice" by local courts discriminatory. In the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon, such power devolves in the hands of local government administrators who sometimes use them capriciously to deprive women of land.

Land as a resource is very vital in Cameroon, especially as over 80% of the population and more particularly 80-85% of women depend on it for their livelihood. It is equally the only resource that can offer direct returns for peasants both in urban and rural areas. Land as a resource is limited in terms of supply, quality and access due to the nature of its acquisition/exploitation and ownership in Anglophone Cameroon. Institutional (government legal policy/implementation) and traditional policies render its access and ownership by women difficult. The situation is more precarious in some divisions like in Fako, where, according to Molua (1985), concessions were obtained by plantation companies over the

greater part of the southeastern, southern and southwestern slopes of the Cameroon Mountain, leaving very limited land for the indigenous population. Currently, some of the land is being conceded to the indigenous population, but statistics reveal that over 90% of the land is held by the males (Chief Molinge-Muea, 2010), leaving the females with no such resource from which direct benefits can be reaped.

Razavi (2005) further highlights the predicament of women in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the introduction of modern forms of property titling has in itself undermined women's land claims. Here land reform has been accompanied by individually registered title, and women have often lost their customary claims to land while men's claims have been strengthened. This situation caused landless labouring women in Tamil Nadu (India) to invest in the education of their children, or in social networks rather than land, as this could in fact restrict their mobility in search of work, as noted by Heyer (1989) in Rao (2006). Razavi (2005), however, notes that women's ignorance has sometimes prevented them from enforcing their rights.

The dominant literature on women and land in sub-Saharan Africa merely dismisses any possibilities of women owning land through inheritance. Aluko and Amidu (2006) argue that the complexity of land tenure in Nigeria is the result of the co-existence of several systems, none of which is completely dominant. This legal pluralism causes a degree of uncertainty about land rights, particularly for vulnerable groups, like women. In most of Anglophone Cameroon, there are basically two ways in which women can acquire land: either through family bond (users' rights) or through transactions (purchase, lease, rent). In the current context of land scarcity, population mobility, urbanization and land reforms, the competitive demand for land has not only generated a diversity of struggles over land but has further complicated the prospects of women accessing land in a predominantly patriarchal setting (Lotsmart et al, 2010). In Anglophone Cameroon, the majority of women do not own land or have the right to inherit land and other property where statutory laws and customary practices co-exist. Ngwafor (1993) reckons that a customary wife is regarded as property of her husband once bride-price has been paid. As such, women cannot lay claims to property upon divorce or death of their husband no matter what their financial contributions have been towards the acquisition of such immovable property, as customary law does not countenance the sharing of matrimonial property.

This study seeks to uncover the extent to which traditional practices and government's legal instrument inhibit women's access and ownership to land. In addressing this question, the study aims to examine how women's land rights are undermined by both traditional and government institutions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To ascertain the effectiveness of government's legal instrument (The Land Consultative Board) that regulates the purchase and ownership of land, random interviews were conducted with traditional and local administrative authorities as well as men and women land owners in five of six divisions in the North West and four of five in the South West Region. These two English-speaking regions are considered as Anglophone Cameroon because they were administered by British Cameroon during the colonial period. Both regions together cover

9.1% of Cameroon's surface area and hold a population of approximately 3.2 million in 2010 (NCB, 2010).

An examination of the Laws of 1974, 1976 and 2005 with respect to the procedure for land registration is invaluable in revealing the flaws therein and certain lapses which have impacted negatively on women. Specialists in various domains relating to implementation of the law and economic development (lawyers, administrators, economists and gender actors) were interviewed and provided vital information during focus group discussions with selected women's groups. Data was collected from the two Anglophone regions (North West and South West) of Cameroon, which portrays a lot of diversity in the land issue. Questionnaires were administered to some 5,000 respondents using research assistants. A random but stratified survey method was adopted with 20% of the sampled population comprised of males based on their traditional and societal roles, while 80% was addressed to rural and urban women in eight Divisions. A symposium was organised for traditional rulers to investigate how tradition impinges land ownership and inheritance by women.

### **SECURITY OF TENURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS**

Land is a vital resource for livelihood, though the rights of women and girls are greatly undermined, especially when traditions and customs triumph over formal laws. Women's land rights can contribute to their empowerment and constitute a key to reducing poverty and developing a community. With secured land rights, crop production will increase; women will have better access to credit, develop self-esteem, and will be able to develop their own skills (Mantobang, 2011). According to Sengupta (2000), empowerment is inextricably linked to rights language, whereby it constitutes the ability or opportunity of the poor to claim and exercise their rights. The state and other institutional machinery must be geared towards the provision of these rights. He further says that these legal rights are human rights in the sense of the right to some basic freedoms or capabilities.

Sustainable development should be inextricably linked to tenure rights. This concept is not mentioned in the Declaration of the Right to Development adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1986 (Marks, 2008). In as much as women have a right to development, so do they have a right to sustainable development, though this latter concept hinges more on rights and obligations of humans towards nature. Taking an ethical perspective on the concept of sustainable development, Marks (2008) looks at it as fairness at three levels; "intra-generational", "inter-generational" and "between humans and the environment", by enhancing people's moral consciousness and environmental protection, altering traditional ideologies and behaviors, and promoting sustainable survival. He emphasizes the need for a rights-based approach to sustainable development as a human right since sustainable development cannot be considered only as an obligation of humans.

Sustainable development is considered as an obligation which must be applied to land ownership to ensure survival for both men and women. Enforceable laws on sustainable development can be enacted if it is considered as a right and not only as an obligation. Women's lack of ownership and access to land results from some traditional practices that violate sustainable development. This is exemplified by those who uphold the values on the one hand and the environment on the other, with the victims (women) being at the centre.

Protection of the natural world can be feasible if both subjects are placed within a mutual legal relationship (Marks, 2008).

According to UN Habitat (2010), tenure security can be defined in various ways. It is the degree of confidence that land users will not be arbitrarily deprived of the rights they enjoy over land and the economic benefits that flow from it. It can also be the certainty that an individual's rights to land will be recognized by others and protected in case of specific challenges. Tenure security, on the other hand, gives women the peace of mind they need to invest and use their own land, grow crops, and rent the land or property out to others. Tenure security encourages people to preserve their land and resources, since they believe that future generations will benefit; an important element for sustainable development and livelihood. A study by Lotsmart et al (2011) in Anglophone Cameroon reveals how women elites have been able to achieve sustainability in developing the land they bought by creating large farm projects or renting it out.

The concept of secured land tenure could be deemed as ownership, which is an inalienable human right preserved by Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It is a human right which must be understood within the context of land ownership in African customary jurisprudence. Seen as a source of economic power, cultural identity and a deity by such communities, this collective resource is divided to the family or community members as per their need to hold and use in perpetuity, with the dominant right residing in the family or community. This gives the possessors of such lands high tenure security even though they did not have title or any form of registration. From this premise, security of tenure to a large extent is a social contract which the family or community bestows on a man or woman, subject to revision when the need arises. In the midst of growing population, there is bound to be pressure on the land, which affects the security of tenure of these customary users. This prompts a shift in paradigm with the effect that tenure can no longer be automatically secured. In this customary milieu, women's land tenure security is derivative, in the main, unregistered and defined by her status as wife, daughter, widow or divorced. Often, considered as a chattel, she is denied the right to inherit.

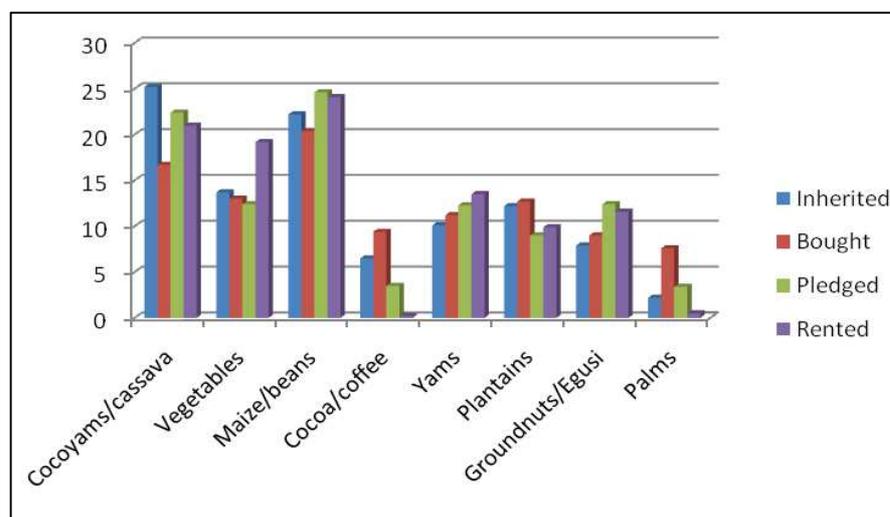
Cameroon is basically an agrarian economy, and so land owners command wealth and power. It follows therefore that depriving a woman of the right to inherit land for the simple fact that she is a woman puts her in a disadvantaged socio-economic and political position vis-à-vis the men. This only accentuates the feminization of poverty. Traditional as well as administrative forces impinge on the morale of the female gender. In some localities like Wonya Mavio and Muea in the South West Region where Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) has ceded land to the villages, ownership by women through inheritance is not tenable. Traditionally, the Fons think that because land has to be preserved for several generations, only sons can guarantee such protection. The idea to highlight the issue of land ownership as disfavoring women is purely ethical especially as the Fon of Nganum explained that "*he had begun authorizing the girl child to acquire land*" or further still, the Fons declaring that "*...they had advised their population to loosen up and make sure that the girl child be given the chance to own land...*" implying that it has in the past not been a good practice. Administratively, the Cameroon Constitution remains silent on the gender issue of land ownership and so gives room for greater anti-feminist forces to exhibit their firmness on male chauvinism with regards to issues related to land ownership/inheritance.

## **FINDINGS**

### ***Security of tenure and sustainability***

The main sources of livelihood identified by respondents are food crops (73.9%); cash crops (23%); small business activities (1.6%); gathering of non-timber forest products (0.6%) and livestock grazing (0.4%). Men and women have different needs and uses for land. For example, while men control cash crop cultivation, women dominate in the growing of food crops. Given that food production is the principal source of livelihood in the region, women are therefore expected to contribute in poverty reduction.

Proceeds from the land women cultivate are used in the education of children (33%), family welfare (31.3%), improvement of their farms (24.7%), and investment in business (10.7%), among others which have the potential to uplift the standards of living and sustainable livelihood of households. Besides farming, women support their male counterparts in other forms of income-yielding ventures on land such as building and construction. Owning assets in the form of land or houses is difficult due to the patriarchal nature of the society. Farming is the main income-generating activity, and it gives direct financial benefits to 80% of the women in Anglophone Cameroon. Food and cash crops cultivated by women depend on whether the land is inherited, bought, pledged or rented as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Distribution of crops cultivated based on type of land in Anglophone Cameroon.**

Inherited, pledged or rented land is highly solicited for the various food crops. 48.3% of the respondents indicate that they plant on inherited land, followed by rented land with 33.7%. Barely 15.2% cultivate on plots bought. Mostly food crops are planted, and this yields very

little income compared to cash crops like cocoa and coffee. Women also indulge in the cultivation of short-term crops like vegetables, beans and maize for immediate family consumption. In general, men invest less for the home than do women except when it concerns family accommodation and some livelihood needs. Women are more concerned about family welfare and so deploy over 33% of the farm proceeds to feed the family. It is also important to note that the rate of saving by these women is low, which affects investment on land and food crop cultivation.

### ***Barriers to women's land ownership***

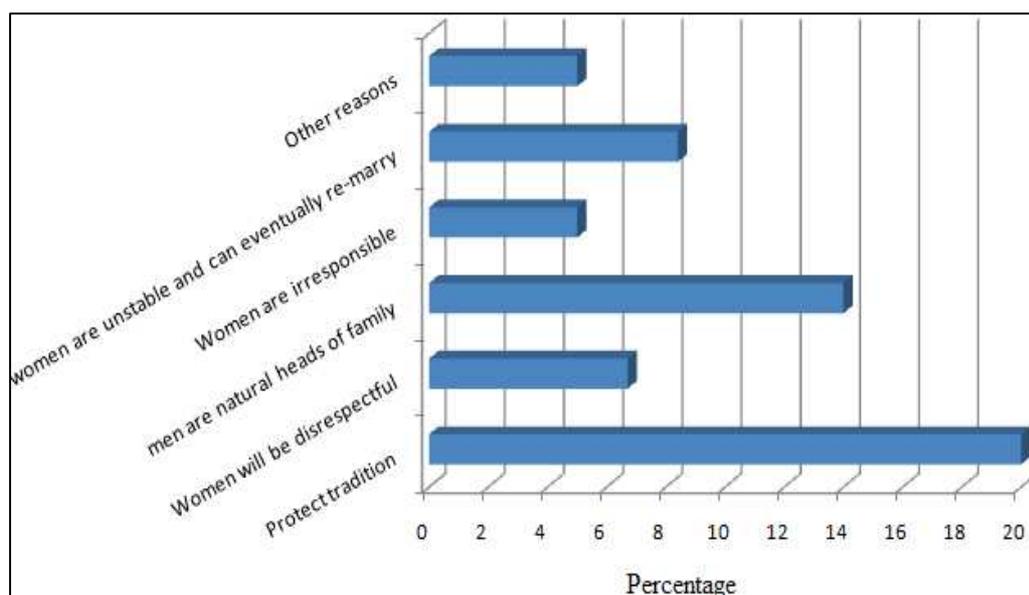
*Traditional practices:* In the eyes of custom, the Cameroonian married woman remains a legal minor. She is seen as an occupier of land, a factor of production for her husband's farm. This situation restrains women from owning land overtly without their husbands' knowledge. Besides, the purchase of land is very arduous, as it does not depend only on the women themselves but on a number of inter-related factors. In some customary societies for example, there is a general reluctance among land owners to sell land to married women for fear of their husbands' wrath. Other communities like the Kom tribe in the North West Region do not approve the sale of land to native women but may accept to sell to non-natives. As a result, 67% of non-natives are able to buy farm land as against 6% of natives in their various localities. Rather, native women are more likely to access land offered as gifts from traditional authorities. Unfortunately, such gifts are often reserved for female elites who are paradoxically more viable than the poor village women who need the land for survival.

As concerns land ownership (inheritance or purchase), a married woman buying land in her name is traditionally considered bad if the husband does not approve of it. Customary practices usually favor single daughters as they are given land by their patrikins and matrikins, a situation that most likely explains why only 20% see the need to purchase land. In the case of widows, the study reveals that women who either divorce or separate from their husbands can revert to their family. They inherit family land only as long as they remain single. Although this practice is common in Meme and Kupe Mwanenguba Divisions in the South West Region, women will lose these rights over such land whenever they decide to remarry. In the other divisions, where this does not obtain, widows either succumb to the practice of levirate or go landless because most of them marry according to native laws and custom. Women therefore do not have equal ownership rights to land as men, due to the need to uphold tradition (Fig 2).

Such customary practice explain why only 22 % of older widows have bought land in their names, and it also explains their low registration level of land bought compared to the men (Table 1). Notwithstanding the fact that traditional practice is presently an obstacle to women's right to land, 54.6% of all respondents opine that women should have equal rights to land as men. The paradigm shift from the traditional beliefs which prevent female inheritance and land rights is based on the following principal reasons:

- Female inheritance is a human rights issue (37.5%);
- Women are socio-economically responsible, thus owning land will lead to gender equality and women's empowerment (36.5%);

- Inheritance should be based on competence and ability, and not sex (13%);
- The path to inheritance should not prevent anyone from achieving personal dreams because of his/her sex (13%).



**Figure 2. Reasons why women cannot have equal ownership/inheritance rights to land as men.**

Regrettably, women are indifferent to land ownership matters, as only 56.6% think that both women and men should have equal rights, as against 40.6% who hold the contrary view. Other respondents (male and female) do not favor gender equality of land rights and want the status quo to be maintained for reasons shown in Figure 2. The desire to protect tradition is considered as the greatest inhibitor of women's right to land (20%).

In Anglophone Cameroon, married women are still denied the right to inherit, which is a fundamental means of land ownership. For example, when both men and women were asked their preference for sons, daughters, or both to inherit their land, 58% opted for sons; 34% for both sons and daughters; and just 5% preferred daughters. Even though the chiefs who attended a one day Symposium (IDRC/UB Land Rights Project, 2011) on this issue of inheritance had pro-progressive ideas, they rather resolved to foster tradition for fear of the woman's 'vulnerability' as expressed in the following excerpts;

“...most Fons prefer to provide education to their daughters and land to sons because if the woman gets married to a man from another tribe, the latter’s village can claim the land. Girl children who are married cannot be given land, while those who are single can be given land to take care over.”  
 “Justice Ngassa (2010) pointed out that no matter what judgment or Law is passed in court, it will need time to thrust into traditional practices and customs. In other words, tradition remains one of the major challenges women would face in their attempt to enjoy their human right to land.” As an example, she quoted the case of Achu Vs Achu where the court judged that “a woman is property and property cannot inherit property”.

*Administrative barriers:* Statutory land regulations in Cameroon are gender neutral and so render implementation in favour of women difficult. Besides, their implementation does not provide an enabling environment for all who have land to be able to register it. The Land Consultative Board (LCB) is an organ formed by government to manage national lands in all sub-divisions (Subsection 14 & 15 of Ordinance No. 74-1 of 6th July 1974). It is the primary organ in the process of land registration in that it attests to the ownership rights of individuals who had been exploiting national land before 5th August 1974 (the time when the ordinance came into force). The Board (Decree No.76-166 of 27th April 1976) is composed of the Divisional Officer, a representative from the Department of Lands, a representative of the Surveys Department, a representative of the Town Planning Service; a representative of the ministry concerned with the project; the traditional ruler and two village notables where the land is situated. From this composition, it is clear that statutory law recognizes the importance of the traditional ruler in endorsing Board decisions.

**Table 1. Gender disparity in Land registration for selected divisions in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon (2006 to 2010).**

Period	Number of certificates issued by Division							
	Mezam		Momo		Ngoketunjia		Fako	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
2006	411	41	40	2	17	00	211	97
2007	457	21	40	1	32	03	298	103
2008	616	45	35	2	22	02	451	90
2009	495	42	45	2	32	07	367	103
2010	496	42	36	7	47	05	142	45
Total	2475	191	196	14	150	14	1469	438
% for division	92.8	07.2	93.3	06.7	91.5	08.5	77.0	23.0

Source: Regional Delegation for State Property and Land tenure, North & South West, 2010.

State procedure for land acquisition and certification is lengthy, complicated and costly. It takes between 800 and 1000 US Dollars in 2011, ten to fifteen different stages, and several trips to administrative offices to obtain a certificate. It thus constitutes a challenge for the underprivileged groups like women who in the majority are illiterate and already constrained by tradition from owning land. The outcome of the complex procedure is illustrated by data in Table 1, showing that very few women (<10%) in three of four divisions have been able to embrace the hurdle. A slow change is also observed between 2006 and 2010 in the number of registered land by women compared to men even in the more urbanized divisions. Several reasons account for this, and according to Mr. Arrey (Divisional Delegate for Lands and State Property, Meme Division), women are frequently unable to fill their land registration forms and as a result are often misled to provide wrong information. Some use the male as the buyer to have easy access to land.

## **DISCUSSION**

In addition to economic empowerment, land ownership provides a stronger impetus for women to assume a higher social status and a larger leadership role within their households and communities. Land ownership can enable women to more easily meet their social obligations and improve their status within their families and communities (Fonjong et al, 2012). This is so because improvement in socio-economic status can enhance community development. When their effective contribution in home management is ensured, women may tend to compete for equal status with men both within their families and in the communities. The main sources of livelihood especially in rural communities are food crops, cash crops, grazing and NTFPs representing 70%, 20% 04% and 4% respectively. Field studies reveal that the majority of cash crops that yield greater income are cultivated by men because they own the land. Women (47%) work on several farms on which food crops are cultivated, destined mainly for home consumption. The low level of tenure (Table 1) means that the woman generates very little as compared to her male counterpart whose tenure is secured.

Where tenure is insecure, long-term sustainable cultivation and consequently high returns might not be achieved by women who in the majority cultivate the land. Loans from banks cannot be contracted, and economic crops which fetch higher incomes cannot be cultivated, since the land can be taken over by its owner at short notice (UN Habitat, 2010). This can have far-reaching consequences on sustainable development due to the absence of rights and obligations because the woman who does not own land may not be able to manage the land well for its sustainable use.

The study also points to the fact that while the current thinking among Anglophone communities favors gender equality for land rights, the reality for now is rather different. A change in attitude is, however, required for the new dispensation to take effect. With modernity, courts are assuming their roles as bastions of justice as exemplified in the Supreme Court case of *Zamcho Florence Lum. vs. Chibikom Peter Fru & others*. Furthermore, statistics reveal that 60.8% of respondents are not in support of tradition which holds that women/girls should not inherit land, as against 33.8% who are in favour. One can

therefore discern a strong indication that many Cameroonians want the land tenure laws to be engendered.

In Kerala, India, where matrilineal kinship and inheritance norms exists (Gough, 1961 in Rao, 2006), women's access to land has been secured because daughters inherit it, and husbands follow them rather than the other way round. A similar situation exists in Wum and some areas of Boyo Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. Given this circumstance, women now face a different kind of predicament wherein the males have abandoned household responsibilities to them and migrated to the city. Unfortunately, the men still exercise control over such lands even at a distance.

Administrative and traditional barriers are also exemplified in the composition of the LCB. Fewer women are administrators or village notables and hardly constitute part of the Land Consultative Board. In Anglophone Cameroon, no female Divisional officer exists and only less than 1% belong to the traditional council. In this respect, they are denied a say in land management because there is no legal statute to ensure gender equality. The nexus between traditional and statutory barriers is highly expressed in the composition of the LCB, and this means that the same tradition that does not favor women's land inheritance/ownership can exert pressure against decisions favoring women. This is due to the absence of female notables and traditional rulers as well as administrators to defend their interests. The LCB in Cameroon is not gender friendly, it is predominantly male and, although a public instrument, most of its members still hold tight to customary beliefs (Fonjong et al, 2012).

The non-representation of women in the LCB, which is also an administrative tribunal for land matters (SS. 14 of Decree No. 76-166 of 27th April 1976), means that women are denied the opportunity for their land dispute matters to be better heard by their female peers, most of whom might have taken gender into consideration when making decisions. In some countries like South Africa, a percentage composition of females in the Land Commission is required (Ingunn et al, 2005) as a measure to ensure their representation.

Land registration is the sole means of acquiring real property rights as evidenced by a land certificate (Article 8 of the 1974 Ordinance). The majority of women have to realize not only the benefits of owning land but also of having it registered in their names. This is exemplified in divisions like Momo and Nkoketunjia (Table 1) with a higher level of illiteracy exhibiting a very small proportion of women who have registered their land compared to divisions like Mezam and Fako. There is also the need to revise certain legal provisions to ensure clarity in procedure and ownership, because, as revealed in Table 1, growth in the number of lands registered by women is very slow. The lengthy process of land registration is a disincentive for most underprivileged groups, and women especially, who traditionally and administratively wield limited powers to influence land ownership decisions. Given the resilience of land transfer in a traditional setting, the question raised is whether titling in such regions is imperative, as was noticed with some women in Malawi who felt secure on their untitled land (Matchaya, 2009).

The implication of these findings is that in order to reduce poverty and empower women socio-economically, access to and ownership of land and the landless must be at the centre of national and international policies. Therefore improved access to land and respect for the land rights of women is a starting point in establishing human rights for them if we subscribe to the rights-based approach to sustainable development.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations can constitute a better gateway to women's land ownership if implemented by the various actors: principally the administration, the traditional societies, and the community.

Obnoxious traditions should be scrapped due to an evolving and globalizing society. Much of what used to be community land or family land is considerably reduced today in most urban and rural areas due to the influx of non-natives, increasing population and development. The major reason (Fig.2) advanced for not enhancing women's land inheritance is unacceptable.

Given the administrative changes in land ownership as opposed to the situation before the 1976 Decrees in Cameroon, joint titling can be instituted as a means to protect the women, widows, and girls as in Latin America (Razavi, 2005). Joint titling should be a mandatory policy especially on what is proven to be family land. In this case, the land should be registered in the woman's name in order to protect her in an event of death of her husband, since she can better administer such property for the benefit of the family.

A well publicized procedure for land acquisition should be instituted through policy that can transcend traditional barriers as well as render the process of land ownership feasible. The decentralization of land registration should involve municipalities which are not presently part of the LCB. This can pay off rather than depend solely on administrators (Divisional Officers for example) who are geographically mobile by virtue of their profession since the municipal authorities are in charge of land use management within their area of jurisdiction. In this light, the right decisions can be taken without gender bias nor favor.

Reforms should be accompanied by a mechanism for effective implementation that includes: strategies for the decentralization of land management and empowering the decentralized structures with human and financial resources; gender capacity building for all actors involved; education and sensitization of local communities and traditional institutions; mechanisms for enforcement of land legislations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Cameroon constitution, which does not clearly identify gender issues of land ownership and the obnoxious customary practices, has been identified as an impediment to women's land rights. There is an avowed need for the administration and traditional rulers (auxiliaries of the administration) to revisit the gender discriminatory customary practices regulating land ownership in Anglophone Cameroon, especially given the globalised trend and current socio-economic changes taking place in most societies. Engendering land reforms through legislation must be seen as a process (not an end in itself) that entails careful planning, cost and anticipated resistance. It should be designed with a view to working in a synergy that recognizes the potentials of each actor for far-reaching results. Because sustainable development is inextricably linked to tenure rights, there is need for a rights-based approach

to sustainable development or a human right. Men, women and nature bear full responsibility over the sustainable development of land for their overall survival.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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