



Agricultural Rituals and Resilience of Smallholder Farmers towards Food Security in Africa: The case of the four socio-cultural and ecological zones of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Cameroon is known as Africa in miniature, which means that one can find in Cameroon all the atmospheric, environmental and cultural conditions represented in the different parts of Africa. There are four ecological and cultural zones in Cameroon notably; the Sudano Sahelian, Forest, Grass field and Coastal Zones. Each of these zones has atmospheric, environmental and cultural conditions that are unique to the zones. If these conditions are not the same in its totality, they are at least similar to an extent. In the villages of Ndop, there are many types of rituals performed in favour of crops cultivation. Some of which are; Ritual to the gods of rain //Mbaagh//Fungbesie//ChiefunNgunou, Rituals to the gods of good harvest //Fungnkoh//chiefungunous//Tunjia, The ritual for the protection of food crops Mbeau //MoupetNikang//Mbaah present in Ndop sub division of the Northwest region of Cameroon represents the grass field ecological and cultural zones of Cameroon. The cock festival //FeoKague//, among the Toupouri people in Mayo Danay and Mayo Kani divisions of the Far North region of Cameroon represents the Sudano Sahelian ecological and cultural zones in Cameroon. The *DerneNyabe* or better still *kemoyiu*, ritual of the cleaning of the graveyard among the four Baboute villages (Mbandjock, Ndjore, Neo Baboute and Doua) present in Mbandjock sub division of the central region of Cameroon represents the forest ecological and cultural zones of Cameroon. According to Awah (2017) though Yaounde in the forest region (Southern low plateau), it has harbour's an elevation of about 1500m in this region The Oroko people of Bamusso in Ndiang division of the south west region of Cameroon represent the coastal ecological and Sawa cultural zone of Cameroon. These people are around the water areas and practice agriculture as well as fishing.

Keywords: *Agricultural Rituals, Smallholder Farmers, Food Security, Ecological, Cultural Zones*

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BACKGROUND OF CAMEROON

Cameroon is one of the Sub Saharan African countries that practise smallholder agriculture with a population of over 25 million inhabitants ranked 144th out of 177 countries in the 2020 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report. Almost half of its population (Over 48 percent) lives in rural zones. About 60 percent of the population practises agriculture in general and smallholder agriculture in particular.

The ideas, customs, local foods, musical rhythms and behaviours in Cameroon are divided into four cultural groups which are the fang-Beti, the Sudano-sahelian, the coastal people and the grassland people. The latter are found in the west and northwest regions of Cameroon. The grassland people constitute the people of the Northwest origin and the Bamileke. This category incorporates the people of Ndop central sub division of Ngoketunjia division, northwest region of Cameroon. Their arts, the aesthetic of their customs, their attractive festivals, the spectacular relief and their climate make this cultural group popular. According to Awah P.K. [1], this socio cultural-ecological zone is the Western High Plateau otherwise called Grass fields. It is made up of the Bamenda and Bamileke Grass fields and physically located in the Savana though overlapping into the Forest, Coastal and Sahel ecologies. Farming is the main occupation of these people. They live in mountainous areas and are commonly classified as the Semi-Bantus of Cameroon. This goes in line with Michael Kpughe Lang [2], who posits that, the Bamenda Grass fields in Northwest Cameroon has a diversity of ecosystems, ranging from extensive mountain areas, savannah and dry land areas, to low lands, coastal plains and tropical forests. The area is littered with numerous ethnic communities that are broadly categorized under Tikar, Ngemba, Chamba, Munchi and Wimbun. The highly religious nature of these people resulted in an unending entanglement between religion and agriculture throughout the Bamenda Grass fields. Ethnic affiliation also plays a very

important role in the types of food crops cultivated per region, as well as land tenure decisions, or decisions that determine where and how specific crops should be cultivated Abouna [3]. For instance, the northern regions cultivate more cereals while in down south, more tubers are cultivated.

Located in the southern rain forest of Cameroon, the origins of the Fang Beti still remains untraced. In this category there are the Baboute people of Mbandjock sub division of the upper Sanaga division of the Central Region of Cameroon. The most plausible source of their origins gotten through oral tradition. They constitute more than 20 individual clans of which each is governed by a traditional ruler under a consensus decision making system. Affirmed by Awah.P.K [1], the next overarching ethnic category in Cameroon are the various people living in the southern part of Cameroon, in the tropical forests. The densely forested sociocultural-ecological zone covers the South, Centre and East Regions.

Mainly found in north Cameroon, the Sudano-Sahelians are particular because of their traditional societies of which Lamidats, Sultanates and chiefdoms are the most common. The people here are generally Christians and Muslims. Their arts, festivals, cultural ceremonies and music are expressive tools which all attract tourists. According to Paschal KumAwah [1], the Sudano-Sahelian socio cultural ecological zone is located in the three northern regions of Cameroon (Adamawa, North and Far North Regions). The Far North on its own is the most populous region in the country with a population of over 3.4 million inhabitants. The region is suitable for livestock farming and the cultivation of cotton, onion, millet, Irish potatoes, groundnuts and white yam. The rivers and lakes are rich in fish stocks and fishing representing a very lucrative activity in the Logone and Chari localities of the region.

Located in the Atlantic coast of Cameroon, the Sawa belongs to the Bantou people. The Oroko people of Bamusso of N'dian division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon are of this category. Their traditional festivals are organised and spectacular. These festivals are tools to promote not only unity among the Sawa communities, but they also aim for the protection of their ancestors. Paschal KumAwah [1], the coastal socio-cultural ecological zone of Cameroon corresponds largely to the Littoral and south west regions. This region has been the destination for a large number of migrants from different parts of the country.

INTRODUCTION

Africa is dominated by family farming, which relies mainly on family labour. This is one of the best agricultural approaches Richards [4]. He posits that to tackle global food insecurity, a participatory form of agriculture should be adopted. That is, both agronomists should work in synergy with local or peasant science. Africa has 33 million farms of less than 2 hectares, accounting for 80% of all farms. While the agricultural labour force comprises mostly of women. Rules governing ownership and transfer of land rights are less favourable to women than in Asia and Latin America [5]. Pre-colonial farming societies have dominated Southern Africa for the last 1800 years. Since this time, people have lived in settled communities, cultivating such crops as sorghum, millets, cowpeas and ground beans, and they have herded cattle as well as sheep and goats [6]. This smallholder farmers identify and interpret ritual spaces to encourage agriculture. So the human societies divide their physical environment into discrete locations where only limited ranges of activities take place like ritual and spatial locations that is physical backdrops for farming. Colonial powers organised the rural world so they could control it therefore selected the production of export crops such as groundnut, coffee, cocoa and sugar. According to NEPAD [5], in the post-independence period, states took over and began to structure the rural world, often adopting interventionist approaches. This period saw the rise of cooperatives overseen by the state in countries as varied as Tanzania, Egypt, Benin, Niger and Cameroon, but also in most other countries led by governments with authoritarian leanings, Marxist-Leninist regimes or governments fighting colonial aggressions. Contrary to popular belief, agricultural production in Africa has increased steadily: its value has almost tripled (+160%), and is almost identical to that of South America, and below but comparable to growth in Asia [5].

In Cameroon, smallholder farming is distributed over the four sociocultural-ecological zone where farming rituals are all practiced. The grass land people constitute the Bamenda and the Bamileke inclusively have farming as their main occupation. Agricultural rituals have a great role in the resilience and promotion of food security in this area. It goes with Michael Kpughe Lang [2], who posits that, religion and agriculture have functioned as natural bedfellows throughout recorded history. This is more evident in the manner in which religious traditions across the world have habitually shaped agricultural practice and development. Religions affect agriculture as human knowledge is constrained in spiritual wisdom. People living in the southern part of Cameroon that is in the tropical forests cover the South, Centre and East Regions of Cameroon also practice agricultural rituals. These ritual activities are also extended to the Sudano-Sahelian socio-cultural ecological zone of Adamawa, North and Far North Regions. These regions are fertile grounds for livestock farming and the cultivation of cotton, onion, millet, Irish potatoes, groundnuts, white yam and fish reasons why they keep to their rituals which help protect and give them abundance. The coastal sociocultural ecological zone which is principally the Littoral and south west regions have many rituals to satisfy their totem gods and ancestors for agriculture.

This paper sets to present the agricultural rituals from each of these cultural zones that help in the resilience of smallholder farmers and food security in Cameroon.

Methodological approach and Theoretical framework

This study is an anthropological type which employs the descriptive qualitative approach. This work aims to describe, explore, interpret and analyse the perceptions, attitudes, views, and behaviours when faced with circumstances or significant events. Data were collected with the use of techniques such as in-depth interview, focus group discussion, observation and life history. This study's timeframe was from 2018 to 2022. In the present research, 131 informants were sampled and saturation point reached. They were drawn from different indigenous sociocultural ethnic groups in Ndop grass field, Baboute in Mbandjock sub division, the Toupouri people in Mayo Danay and Mayo Kani divisions of the Far North region and the Oroko people of Bamusso in Ndian division of the south west region of Cameroon. The research made use of both males and females.

The theory of *Social representations* of Moscovici [7] and the theory of cultural dynamism of Georges Balandier [8] are employed in this research work. The theory of social Representation explores social anchoring which implies that, members of a given society agree upon, and work together to achieve, what is best for society as a whole. That is why these people of the different cultural zones practice the ritual for them to achieve protection, abundance, production as well as reproduction. In the theory of cultural dynamics we made use of invention which is another concept of cultural dynamics which means modification of cultural formation and or creation of cultural elements that have not existed in another form in the culture of a group is added to the culture without importation like the introduction of new methods of farming in this locality.

The highlands ecological and cultural zones grass field (Ndop) in Cameroon:

This zone comprises of the West and Northwest regions of Cameroon. In this paper we talk of Ndop sub division of the Northwest region of Cameroon which represents the grass field ecological zone. According to Michael Kpughe Lang [2], the Bamenda Grass fields in Northwest Cameroon has a diversity of ecosystems, ranging from extensive mountain areas, savannah and dry land areas, to low lands, coastal plains and tropical forests. The area is littered with numerous ethnic groups that are broadly categorized under Tikar, Ngemba, Chamba, Munchi and Wimbang. The highly religious nature of these people resulted in an unending entanglement between religion and agriculture throughout the Bamenda Grass fields. However, the strength of the agriculture of smallholder farmers in food security in Africa and Ndop Cameroon in particular is the performance of rituals. In the different villages of Ndop sub division, there exist many types of rituals that are performed in order to cultivate crops. These rituals favour smallholders' rice and other food crops cultivation.

Ritual to the gods of the rain //Mbaagh//Fungbesie//ChiefunNgunou

In Ndop sub division, rain is very important in crop cultivation most especially rice which needs water for its growth. Therefore, when the rainy season is approaching, the people organize and give sacrifices to the gods of the rain so as to evoke rain speedily since they need it for the cultivation of their crops especially rice. It goes in the same view as Michael Kpughe Lang [2], stipulates that, among the Aghem, supernatural spirits were consulted and appeased by ritual specialists in the hope of enhancing agriculture. The Aghem like other Bamenda Grass fields people believe that drought, poor harvest and famine are evidences that the gods are inattentive to their needs because of man's disobedience to the norms, customs and traditions towards the supernatural entity. Their worldview holds that drought, famine and strong winds which negatively affect agriculture result from supernatural forces. Thus, the Aghem people design rituals for the fertility of crops as well as planting and harvesting.

In Bamessing village, these gods are called *Fungbesie* whereas the Bamunka people call them *Mbaagh* referring generally to the gods of the rain. They do this ritual in common with Bamessing people with whom they share a common boundary. In Bambalang, the gods of rain is known as *Chiefun Ngunou*. In Bamessing, the gods of the rain are referred to as *Fungbesie*. When the Nsei (Bamessing) people get close to the rainy season and seem to see no signs of the rain, they turn immediately to *Fungbesie* where sacrifices are made to please them. Many a time, on the very day the sacrifice is made, there are always heavy rains. But in other instances, the rain comes within the week after the sacrifice. Therefore, since rice is a crop that needs a lot of water to grow, it is cultivated in the rainy season. For this reason, the sacrifices made to appease the gods of the rain favour rice production in Ndop [9]. Rituals are not only made for the production of rice. They are also made for all the crops that are grown in Ndop that need rain. Note should be taken that, when the gods are not happy, they do not give rain and this causes a lot of draught in the area. The Fons of the different villages organize sacrifices to the various gods of the rains. This goes in line with Michael Kpughe Lang [2], who posits that, the land that is used for agricultural purposes is therefore sanctified by its possession by God and ancestral spirits. In all societies in the area, land has primarily a value linked to a tribe, its *fon* and the spirits of their ancestors. That is why the fon of every grass field fendom is called "owner of the land". This ownership of the land by the *fon* is a result of his

supposed connections with mythological founding-ancestors of his fendom. It is the ancestors who are believed to have chosen him and given him power and authority over his subjects. Bamunka and Bamessing in the past used to do theirs together. So this ritual plays a great role in agriculture as well as help in food security.

Rituals to the gods of good harvest //Fungnkoh//chiefungunous//Tunjia

Ritual of good harvest is another strength of the agriculture of smallholder farmers in food security in Africa and Ndop Cameroon when performed in the different villages of Ndop. In fact, every year, these villages give sacrifices to their gods especially that of good harvest so that their crops can produce well and eventually give them good harvest. In Bamessing, the gods of good harvest is called *Fungnkoh*. Here all the crops that are cultivated in the village, samples are collected by the palace and quarter messengers who then take them to the site where the gods are found which is in Ntukwe quarter. The ritual of good harvest is performed by spiritualists or group of notables called "*Becheu*". This is done so that all the varieties of crops cultivated here should be blessed and multiplied by the gods so that farmers can have a good harvest. To show the intensity of this ritual, another informant affirmed to the research that,

It is believed that a farmer who does not give his own sample of crop or seed will not have a good harvest. Therefore, rice farmers always give samples of their rice so that the gods of good harvest can bless and multiply their fruits. (Interview conducted in Bamessing, 15/04/2016).

This implies that, the farmer who does not give their own sample of crop or seed will not have a good harvest that year. Therefore, the ritual plays a big role in the agriculture of this region. In Bamunka, unlike Bamessing, their own gods of good harvest is called *Tunjia*. Through his blessings his high priest coupled with a visiting high priest from Bamessing believed to be very powerful, prepare a concoction called "*Mbaah*". This concoction is prepared from the collection of all sample crops in the different quarters of Bamunka and it is prepared in the Bamunka palace. The concoction is applied on farms, rice farms, and in all places where crops are grown. In this light, the crops would grow well and eventually lead to a good harvest. It should be noted that, this ritual used to be performed in Bamunka with visiting chief priests from Bamessing, but recently, these chief priest have stopped coming because the people of Bamunka believe that they are now endowed with local chief priests who can perform this ritual. Michael Kpughe Lang [2], states that, as the people interacted with each other over time and circumstances, their indigenous religions intertwined, spread and absorbed new ingredients. Consequently, these traditional religions that have survived until today, though differing from each other, have always contained similar insights, such as being expressed in belief in the Supreme Being, ritual practices and sacrifices. They are not limited to these practices, but affect all aspects of life, from farming to hunting, from travel to courtship.

The impact of rituals on crop production in the Ndop plains has diverse impacts on the lives of some individuals. The negative dimension of these impacts includemental illness, swollen tommy, poverty, blindness, etc. This is affirmed by Bonuh C. C *et al* [10]. That, rice stealing cause's madness, swollen stomach and or swollen legs. If someone steals rice from another person's farm, it can cause madness and to some extent swollen stomach and or swollen legs. A case of madness in Bamessing has been linked to rice theft. The mad man is alleged to have stolen rice from another person's farm. However, further research is needed to investigate how madness is caused by rituals. Nevertheless, there are some cultural practices that favour rice production in Ndop. These are rituals that are performed in the different villages of Ndop. We have rituals performed at the end of the traditional year done to protect all the villagers and their activities. In Bamessing, this ritual is called „Nsinteh“. The ritual to the gods of rain is carried out by most villages since rice is a crop that needs a lot of water to grow. The people of Ndop perform sacrifices to the gods so as to have abundant rain for the growth of their rice. There is also the ritual of good harvest given to their gods of good harvest who bless them with good harvest. In Bamali, it is called „MoupetNikang“, in Bamessing, it is called "fungnkoh". These are the gods of good harvest. In Bamunka, they are called "tunjia". The sacrifices performed to these gods help to increase rice production.

Additionally, in Bamali, the ritual made to the gods of good harvest is called Moupet Nikang. The Moupet Nikang" is prepared for the good harvest of all crops cultivated in Bamali village with rice inclusive. When this product is prepared, it is given to farmers to mix in their seeds before planting believed to make the gods bless the seeds so that it can produce good quantity and quality. The Bambalang people also have the *chiefungunous*, which is a god that brings rain and also good harvest. For them, when these sacrifices are made to these gods, the farmers experience a very good harvest in all their crops such as maize, groundnuts, beans, as well as rice. It should be noted that these gods at times influence the type of catch made out of fishing. It is believed in all the four villages of Ndop that, when rice starts producing the rice grain, witches and wizards transform into birds to eat up the rice grain either to take it to their own farms or just out of wickedness. And that it is only with the help of these sacrifices offered to the gods of good harvest that stop the "witch birds" from eating up their rice grains. Hence, sacrifices to the gods of good harvest equally help to improve and increase rice production in Ndop.

Photo 1: Site of the gods of good harvest for Bamunka and Bamessing



Source: Fieldwork, June 2016

This shows that culture has a great role to play in the production of crops. At times it plays a positive function and in another way plays a negative influence. Melengfeh [11] outlines that, in Bamessing, there are some sacrifices offered to the gods and goddesses of the land that favour high yields of crops including rice. Some of these sacrifices include ritual of the end of the traditional year, ritual to gods of the rain, the ritual of protection of crops, the ritual of cleansing, royalty to the Fon. For the hindrance to crop production, we have witchcraft, killing of some organisms.

The ritual of protection of crops *Mbeau //MoupetNikang//Mbaah*

Generally, the Ndop people believe in the existence of witchcraft. They believe that when crops are grown, these people pass through heavy winds, rains, birds and other animals to destroy crops hence causing low productivity. In order to fight against this, the people turn to their gods for protection to whom they offer sacrifices and arrange concoctions to apply on their farms to protect their crops. Since the introduction of intensive rice cultivation in Ndop in 1972 by the government through the U.N.V.D.A, the people of Ndop have preserved their attention in the protection of the rice crop with the help of their existing gods of protection. These rituals are mostly common with the people of Bamunka and Bamessing. However, the people of Bamali also apply *MoupetNikang* for the protection of their crops from witchcraft. For them, the product is spread in the farms, applied on the forehead of the farmer before they go to their rice farms and equally some mix it in their seeds before planting. This protects them and their crops from any eventual attack from witchcraft.

The Bamunka people also use their *Mbaah* done in small calabashes produced from all spiritual leaves and crops produced or cultivated in the village. Once prepared, it is given to farmers to apply on their hands, houses, road junctions and even on their chests. This helps to stop heavy rains or storms and any other thing that can destroy their crops or affect the crops negatively. However, since rice is one of the crops cultivated in great quantities in Bamunka, the concoction is as well applied on rice farms to avoid or protect the winds from pushing down their rice plants and even the attacks on rice grains by birds, especially birds sent by witches and wizards. Historically traced, one of our key informants in Bamunka told us that this ritual of protection of crops was equally borrowed from Bamessing and it was very effective but as of recent it has gradually reduced with the introduction of Christianity in the area.

In Bamessing, the ritual is called *mbeau* that was brought by one powerful spiritualist called *TihMbouh*. It is believed that he descended from the sky and not born like a normal person. His concoction was really strong so much so that the then Fon of Bamessing ceased it from him for the benefit of the entire village. This concoction was produced in calabashes and given to the whole village to apply in their houses, farms, road junctions and their chests and on all the boundaries of Bamessing. To further describe the strength of *mbeua*, one of our research participants confirms it by saying that,

The one applied on boundaries is to protect the villagers and their crops from any attack from outsiders. If any outsider crosses the boundary with a bad intension, the “Mbeau” will neutralize the powers of his witchcraft. The one applied on the rice farms, is to protect their crops from heavy rain, witches and wizards. It equally protects their crops especially rice from what is called in Bamessing “Mesae and Beuzey” whose member could bring either ill luck or good luck but most often it is ill luck. (Interview conducted in Bamessing, 15/04/2016)

Therefore, the crops grown in Bamessing and all the villages of Ndop necessitate the ritual of crop protection which has tremendously helped in the cultivation of rice as it protects the rice crop, leading to increase in rice production.

The forest ecological and cultural zones in Cameroon:

The *DerneNyabe* or better still *kemoyiu*, ritual of the cleaning of the graveyard among the four Baboute villages (Mbandjock, Ndjore, Neo Baboute and Doua) present in Mbandjock sub division of the central region of Cameroon represents the forest ecological and cultural zones in Cameroon. The chiefs and their populations have a lot of spiritual powers and contribution in smallholder plantation and food security system in their respective villages. It ranges from the provision of land for farming, the protection and guaranteeing of production and reproduction through their different

rituals. In fact, they do these through their belief systems. One of the cultural activities involved in smallholders' plantations is the performance of rituals. These are cultural heritage that the people of this region took over from their forefathers and transmit from one generation to another. However, Mbonji[12] illustrated that culture is the ways of life of a given population of which they use in solving their daily problems of how to eat, drink, sleep, and make love, shelter... Moussima[13] equally outlines the essence of cultural perspectives and aesthetics in African societies. Therefore, culture refers to the actions, reactions, productions and all other elements that accompany a society in their daily life found in all age groups taught by the oldest to the youngest. Crop cultivation was intensified in Mbandjock when SOSUCAM and the people integrated in their culture. Hence, the older generations have been teaching the younger ones in these zones with crops cultivation. This is affirmed by Parson, T [14] who said culture...consists in those patterns relative to behaviour and the products of human action which may be inherited, that is, passed on from generation to generation independent of the biological genes. The rituals practice in Mbandjock has been from generation to generation and has significant consequences on smallholders' plantations. A majority of smallholder farmers in Mbandjock sub division offer rituals to their ancestor in relation to crops cultivation.

//Derne Nyabe// Kemoyiu//Voute festival // Ritual of the end of the traditional year in Mbandjock village

The four Baboute villages present in Mbandjock have as main ritual the cleaning of the grave yards. Like the ritual of the cleaning of the graveyard *kemoyiu* or the end of the traditional year ritual to the Baboute people of Mbandjock village, the Baboute of Ndjore village called the event *Derne Nyabe*. Mbandjock village has their gods to whom they offer sacrifices, believe in and know that they protect them and their different activities. They believe that these gods even bless their families with children, agricultural activities especially good harvest and even jobs. They get to their gods through their ancestors and usually in December during the *Voute festival* where there is the general *cleaning of grave yards* called *kemoyiu*. This is also a god that protects the village during war and tribal conflicts. In addition, it equally helps to control evil spirits in the village. When this happens, it guarantees food security.

Photo 02: Arrival of the chief to the ritual ground (Main graveyard)



Source: Fieldwork, December 30/12/ 2020

The four Baboute villages present in Mbandjock sub division have as main ritual the cleaning of the grave yards. Like the ritual of the cleaning of the graveyard *kemoyiu* or the end of the traditional year ritual to the Baboute people of Mbandjock village. This is usually done in December during the end of year festival known as the *Voute festival*. Through this festival, the people of Mbandjock strive for the face of their god for numerous wishes of the village. The festival and rituals are presided over by the chief. The main reasons for this practice is that, blessings are received from the ancestors of the land, to be in union, remain and always remembering them, it brings together the children of the land time to time and as well brings protections both to the people, activities and most especially agricultural activities. In Mbandjock village, one of the sources of spiritual powers by the chiefs and their indigenes that play a role in smallholder plantation and food security system is the *Kemoyui* ritual. There are three graveyards in Mbandjock village which happen to be the city Centre of the sub division. Two of these graveyards are used to bury the origins of Mbandjock while one is used to bury settlers in Mbandjock. It is through this sacrifices that, the indigenous people of Mbandjock retain and control spiritual power. When they do it, it gives blessing and protection. One of our informants testifies,

The sacrifices and rituals we do or practice in our graveyards is to obtain blessings and protection from our ancestors, production and reproduction. The protection ranges from the protection of individuals, properties and even crops cultivation. By this ritual, all the notables, quarter heads and the villagers represent their respective quarters with a calabash of raffia-wine, at the main graveyard arena before the Chief, the king's makers and the villagers. When the items for the rituals are all checked, the ceremony begins in the early morning where all villagers are expected to be present with machete, hoes and other working tools for the cleaning of the graves of all those who have been buried in Mbandjock. (Interview conducted in Mbandjock, 05/04/2019).

This means that, the indigenous people of Mbandjock have spiritual powers to control the growth of crops in Mbandjock grown by smallholder plantations. Through the sacrifices and rituals they practice in the graveyards, they obtain powers of blessings and protection from their ancestors for production and reproduction. The protection ranges from the protection of individuals, properties and even crops cultivation. So, smallholder plantations owners always turn to these people for the blessing of their farms and very thing that goes with it. However, the photo below demonstrates this practice.

Photo 03: villagers cleaning the main graveyard coordinated by notables and chief



Source: Fieldwork, (Mbandjock 30/12/ 2020)

It is worthy to note that among the three graveyards in Mbandjock village, the main graveyard is one where the very first chief of Mbandjock was buried. The ritual officially begins upon the arrival of the chief at the arena. The chief is accompanied by a traditional dance group animated by young boys. They animate with instruments called *tembé* and it is a dance group which comes out during traditional ceremonies presided over by the chief. Another dance group called *Mekoumbou* also follows the ritual ceremony.

Photo 04: The chief accompanied by a traditional dance group



Source: Fieldwork, (Mbandjock 30/12/ 2020)

This dance group also comes out in occasion at the family level. This ritual performance is led by the Chief, followed by the first king maker or notable and the other 15 notables with a calabash of raffia wine. Attendance is compulsory for all the local populations especially girls of reproductive age, farmers who want favour from their ancestors, businessmen, in fact all those who may want favour from the ancestors. The wine and the food signify the unification of the villagers.

Photo 05: Common meal at the ritual of cleaning of the graveyard in Mbandjock



Source: Fieldwork, (Mbandjock December 2019)

This is followed by a tune and singing of a song by all presents which is only stopped at the request of the Chief. After a while, for the Chief to show the success of the ritual and end of ceremony, he passes his incantation to the ancestors and gods of Mbandjock as well as to the population. This is approved by a key informant during our research. He said,

I will ask for silence and transmit my message to the villagers followed by the announcement of the rest of the activities of the village. I talk of unity, fertility, good harvest of all the agricultural products... Nobody should lie to you about the death, the death is very strong, if you obey, remember, give them food and wine, everything you want they will give it to you. Interview conducted in Mbandjock, 05/04/2019).

This means that, if one performs and participates in the ritual, the ancestors will protect their properties and activities. For those who practice agriculture in general and crop production in particular, when they take part and contribute toward these rituals, their crops are protected from the evil people. They are blessed with abundant harvest that can sustain their families and if for business purposes, will generate enough income for them. Hence, smallholder farming in this area are not left out, and hence, this ritual has a good and very important role in smallholder farming as the ritual brings about unity among farmers, good harvest and fertility for more children to be born to work in the smallholder farmers' farms. Maclean U [15] eminent that, agricultural festivals were where people gathered to plan and chat on the calendar future rituals. Sumptuous rituals are performed with the first harvest, the Greeks celebration was known as "festival of flowers" and was celebrated in March, coinciding with the spring equinox. The First Fruits festivals are celebrated in January by Saharan African tribes. Thesmophoria the Greek festival revolved around the goddess of agriculture Demeter, to celebrate the reunion between Demeter and her daughter Persephone, this celebrated the revival of the growing season. Usually shamans or priests oversaw the complex process of rituals, the hierarchies were quite rigid. Among the Kayan people of Borneo only the priests guide the elaborate rituals, information is passed on orally. Within any ritual shamans and priests are given a profound status, they have an abundance of knowledge and can perform similar miracles. Daoist priests underwent gruelling training, giving them the unique ability to understand meteorological conditions and to know when weather conditions were favourable for rain rituals. Most rituals have at their core a feminine bent as female deities are associated with birth, fertility and nurturing.

Nevertheless, Maclean U [15] posits that, rituals in agriculture are one of the oldest forms of religious rituals. Agricultural rituals are used precisely to increase crops and livestock production. Over time, areas were set aside and temples built for these rituals. Among the communities of Botswana, Africa kraals (villages) were built by the chiefs or kings particularly to house those who journeyed to the site to take part or witness the annual rain harvest festivals. During rituals, the Aborigines used these as a platform for marriages and initiation rites. Agricultural rituals bring together tribes and populations. Agricultural rituals provide an opportunity for people to gather in order to celebrate the harvest or to prepare for the planting season. The aim of rituals is to obtain favour with deities and spirits, this is done by the forming of a bond between the person performing the ritual and the deity or spirit, communication with deities and other spirits is an important part of rituals. Animal sacrifice based on ancient myths is usually an integral part of most rituals.

The Baboute of Ndjore village call the event *Derne Nyabe*. This is usually done in December during end of year festival known as the *Voute festival*. Through this festival, the people of Ndjore strive for the face of their god for various wishes of the village. The festival and rituals are presided over by the chief. The main reasons for this practice is that, blessings are received from the ancestors of the land, to be in union, remain and always remembering them, it brings together the children of the land from time to time. The sacrifices and rituals are usually done to obtain blessings and protection from their ancestors, production and reproduction. The protection ranges from the protection of individuals, properties and even crop cultivation. It is also aimed at cleansing the whole village from all the bad things that might have taken place within the past year and to prepare the village for a new and prosperous year for production and reproduction. These rituals are done annually, that is, in December. It is through this ritual that the people of Ndjore communicate with their ancestors who in return intercede for them to their gods. Everyone can take part in the festival of cleaning the grave yard since it unites the people of the land with their ancestors and for assembling them together. According to one of our informant,

When we practice this ritual; blessings are received from the ancestors of the land, we the inhabitants of Ndjore remain in good union and always remembering them, it brings together the children of the land from time to time. We equally believe that human lives and properties are vulnerable to witches and wizards which can even transfer people crops to their farms. Our developed strategy to help combat these phenomena is the belief in the power of our tradition and ancestral intervention. In order to fight against this, we turn to our ancestors for protection to whom we offer sacrifices during the DerneNyabe ceremony. This is done to obtain protection from our ancestors for ourselves and all our activities with crop cultivation inclusive. (Interview conducted in Ndjore 17/07/2020).

This means that, if one performs and participate in the ritual, the ancestors protect their properties and activities. For those who practice agriculture in general and crop production in particular, when they take part and contribute toward these rituals, their crops are protected from the evil people. They are blessed with abundant harvest that can sustain their families and if for business purpose, it will generate enough income for them. Therefore, this ritual has a good and very important role in smallholder farming as the ritual brings about unity among farmers, good harvest and fertility for more

children to be born to work on the smallholder farmers' farms. For the NioBabouté and Doua people, this is also the god that protects the village during war and tribal conflicts. In addition, it equally helps to control evil spirit in the village.

The Sudano Sahelianecological and cultural zones in Cameroon:

This region is one of the regions in Cameroon that have always been struck by food insecurity. In northern Cameroon, this condition has been attributed to diverse factors notably natural and cultural factors Abéh [16]. This has led to the performance of various rituals in order to address the problem of food insecurity in this region.

The cock festival //Feo Kague//, among the Toupouri people in Mayo Danay and Mayo Kani divisions of the Far North region of Cameroon representing the Sahel Sandino ecological and cultural zones in Cameroon.

The cock festival //FeoKague//, among the Toupouri people in Mbandjock

The Toupouri people are people with origins from the Mayo Danay and Mayo Kani divisions of the Far North region of Cameroon. With ramifications as far as Chad. They consider themselves as true warriors, and great farmers recognized throughout the northern area of Cameroon and beyond. These people have a rich cultural heritage which they are so proud of and take it along to whatever destination they find themselves. This is because as warriors and great farmers, they need the intervention of their gods to be strong both physically and spiritually to carry out their daily activities. These people being one of the settlers in Mbandjock that came in the first place to work in SOSUCAM and CAMSUCO sugar cane plantations have come in with their culture in the various domains. The Toupouri people in Mbandjock and Nkoteng each year with respect to their culture and tradition organize in a rotational way the Cock festival just the way it is done in their homeland. In 2017 it was organized in Mbandjock while it was done in Nkoteng in 2018, Mbandjock in 2019 and has not been organized since then because of the Covid -19 pandemic.

However, the Cock Festival known in Toupouri as //FeoKague//, like most cultural festivals held in Cameroon, is one of the most important events for the Toupouri people. For generations, the sons and daughters of this tribe have come together to promote their culture. At each event, there are many followers and visitors both when it is organized in Mbandjock by Toupouri settlers and when it is organized at home and even elsewhere. The origin of this festival that has been celebrated for nearly 15 generations, which has become a tradition for the Toupouri people was initiated by Wandoré, the spiritual leader who is considered the symbol, the incarnation and the guarantor of the Toupouri tradition. They are the only secular people who live in a very Islamized area. The celebration of the Cock festival crowns the end of the year and the start of the New Year on the Toupouri calendar. Originally, the cock was chosen as a totem by Wandore, the spiritual leader to summon the spirits: *Mo'ope* and *So'oba*. Which respectively represent the spirits of the ancestors and the gods. The cock because it seems it can follow the directions of the spirits. He used the fowl so that the latter intercedes with the spirits, so that they intervene in the protection of all families. The cock festival is also done in order to have abundant rain to make the soil more fertile; and the harvests better. A Toupouri man who is a great warrior and farmer by trade. When the latter went or sent his troops to the front or farming and hunting, he always submitted to the sacred ritual of immolation of a cock to ensure their protection. The same obtains in the Nsofodom in the Bamenda grassfield as stipulated by Michael Kpughe Lang [2], who posits that, in the Tikarfondom of Nso, planting and harvest were preceded by special rituals, because agriculture is considered as a real religious experience. Indeed the religious tradition of blessing crops in the farmlands before harvest offers a glimpse into the longstanding relationship between agriculture and faith in Nso land

The ritual consists of slaughtering a cock and rotating it twice around the **health** setup for the occasion before releasing it. The side which the slaughtered cock lies after struggling is very important. If it lies on the left, it announces misfortune whereas, if it is on the right, it marks a happy event. This ritual is always accompanied by different incantations and a message of peace, dialogue, reconciliation, and happiness. This is why each generation carries on this tradition left as a legacy by previous generations. And each year, it is repeated during the great gathering of the Toupouri people. Each family head is required to participate in the festival with all his family. According to Thomas N. Huffman [6], ancestral roles depended on the position of the ancestors when they were alive: family heads, for example, looked after their families while chiefs looked after their former chiefdoms. Because of this principle, only people with a family could become ancestors. Male ancestors were propitiated at various times of fortune and misfortune, such as good crops and sickness as well as rites-of-passage.

According to one of our informant,

The day before the day planned for the feast, Wandoré, the spiritual leader, or his representative, spends 30 days in his room to avoid seeing either the sun or the moon. Nowadays that responsibility rests with one of his descendants. During this period all the Toupouri people observe Lent. It is also a moment of awareness and change of behaviour towards one's neighbour: for fathers who like to test their fighting technique and sex, those who always like to tell people your mother even for nothing. Failure to comply with his instructions is conditioned by a fine to be paid, which is represented by a sheep which is given to

the chief. In the middle of a large courtyard, men mostly dressed in traditional clothes and others shirtless, play the tom-tom. To the rhythm of Gourna and Waiwa, one being a long poem of songs to denounce the evils of the community and the other a special dance that is performed after the harvest, the dancers demonstrate to the audience their mastery of stage performance. (Mbandjock 29/12/2019)

While the body is agitated to the rhythm of the songs, it is also watered by the consumption of *billi-billi* (millet wine) without which the party loses all its meaning. This feast day also represents the end of initiation for some young people. Before the festival itself, young people old enough to take care of cattle are taken outside the village to check the animals, if it went very well, they are considered to have reached the age of majority. But today, it has been replaced by traditional struggles or the mastery of *waiwa* dance. After the big gathering, families can go and continue the festivities at their homes while making an appointment for subsequent years.

Monomodal rainfall forest zone ecological zone and sawa cultural zone:

The Oroko people of Bamusso are found in the Ndian division of the south west region of Cameroon. They represent the coastal ecological and cultural zone of Cameroon. These people are around the water areas and practice agriculture as well as fishing.

//Etamouamboka// ritual of village cleansing in Bamusso

The *etamboua Mboka* ritual is always performed every end of year and beginning of New Year for the cleansing of the village. It is done to help protect the Oroko people. It helps in crop production and reproductive health. The ritual takes virtually two days. According to Nakinti Nofuru [17], the aims of this ritual is to bring together the Oroko people of Bamusso community scattered across the village so that they can culturally interact, exchange values and understand each other in order to nurture a peaceful coexistence and productive development. It is all about celebrating a people in diversity. Bringing together the unique cultural heritage and the diversity of the Oroko people is worth celebrating. It also, aims to expose the international community to the rich cultural practices of the Oroko people. On the first day, only the chief, the chief priest of the village, family heads and elderly people of each family follow the chief to the sacred places. This situation also obtains in the Bamenda grass field. According to Michael Kpughe Lang [2], this explains why the *fons* are sacred and have divine authority linked to the farming land and the supernatural spirits that own it. Consequently, decisions on the communal farmlands to be cultivated were taken by the *fonof* each fendom in consultation with chief priests, usually in the forest. It is known as *//Mowokomoyime//* which is closer to river Meme. They take alongside items like a he goat, fowl (hen and cock), locally made whisky called Afofo, palm oil, plantain, cocoyam and herbs probably harvested from the forest. These are taken to the forest near the river where their totems are found. This is to help appease them, thank them for what they have been doing to them all round the year. As well as make them to continue to protect them to guarantee production and reproduction in their community. These totems that they appease through this ritual are in the forest and river Meme. In affirmation, Michael Kpughe Lang [2], said, annual ritual ceremony intended to attract blessings on land and crops from the Supreme Being was conducted in the palaces. The Chamba of Bali Nyonga observe a *vomah* farming ceremony called *vomahnaba*. The latter is an apotropaic rite in which the *vomah* trumpets are blown and influences that are hostile to farming are displayed by the waving of red and white striped throwing knives. Some of these totems include;

Elephant *//Ndjoku//* is the animal and totem that give power and strength to them to work in their farms to produce plantain and cocoyams. The ritual also helps them to appease the elephant not to come out and destroy their crops. The Tiger called in Orocko *//Yanta//* is a totem that helps the Orocko people for protection- Human protection as well as crops protection. With the tiger in the farm, no other animal can come to destroy crops. Hence, helping towards guaranteeing abundant food which will eventually help in food security in the village. Since there will be food availability, accessibility and sustainability. The Lion known in Orocko as *//Ngoh//* which has characters similar to that of the tiger. Python known in Orocko as *//Komma//* which is a totem that help to pull crops from people's farms to other people's farms. It was confirmed by one of our informants who said,

My neighbour in the farm has the python totem and each year she always swallows my crops to her farm. My farm will have dry crops, very small whereas her farm will have very healthy crops in abundance. It is thanks to the Etamboua Mboka ritual which I participated that stopped her from swallowing my crops to her farm this year.

This means that *Etamboua Mboka* helps for crop production hence helping towards agricultural resilience in the country.

Crocodile also known as *//Ngando//*. This totem helps for protection. Since it is a coastal zone, there is a lot of water to cross to either go to the farm or for fishing or to go to sell farm produce. Since they pass through waters, they equally need water protection. Here many people live on earth and in water locally said *//Mokondo* and *Mandiba//* meaning land and water life respectively. 'Through the ritual, our totem will protect us, save us and take us offshore' The Deer also known as *//Iseri//*, with this totem, it helps them in transportation, travelling and trading. This is because, the deer runs very fast to far away locations. Therefore, with the help of the deer, they travel long distances with their crops for trading

with other communities. Other totems here are the pig //Ngoa// and the chimpanzee which are all animals that can destroy crops. As such, the *etambouamboka* ritual helps to appease them for that year not to destroy crops in the village.

Nganya dance

The nganya dance is a secret society dance that comes out on the night of the *etambouamboko* ritual and any time a strong notable or chief passes on to glory. The dance is very dangerous and not everybody in the village can see the dance especially the women folk. This is the reasons it comes out only at night, hence, only members of that secret society sees it. It goes in line with Thomas N. Huffman [6], who said, ancestors are characterized by a male domain in the centre, encompassing cattle kraals where men and other high status people were buried, sunken grain pits and raised grain bins for long-term storage. Usually, when the dance comes out, it is to give respect, honour and acknowledgement to their gods, ancestors and/or a great man who died in the village. It is a sign of appeasement and a way to remember them for the invisible great work of protection, blessing of crop production, fishing and reproduction with children. This dance opens the way for great celebrations the next day.

Celebration of the *etambouamboka* ritual

On the second day of the *etambouamboka* ritual, the family head or elderly people of each family that participated in the ritual proper in the secret forest will fetch water in calabashes very early in the morning. The family heads in their respective family compounds group their family members to cleanse, bless and protect them, as well as for production and reproduction in their families. It is with this water that the family heads washes the hands and feet of all family members. This washing signifies cleansing which goes along with blessing, protection of both crops and humans of the family. It also signifies a demand from their gods and ancestors for good harvest and abundance.

Family members who are out of the village, or are not present during this cleansing are also involved as their names are called during the cleansing. And the water poured on the ground signifies their own cleansing, blessing, protection of their crops as well as from enemies and abundance in any activity they are involved in. The ritual equally helps them for reproduction in the family. That is many women in the family will be pregnant and eventually give birth to many children. In the afternoon of this celebration day of the *etambouamboka*, all village members go to the village square which is another very important secret place in the village called in Bamusso of the Oroko people //etana//. Thomas N. Huffman [6], affirmed that, a public smithy, and an assembly area where men resolved disputes and made political decisions is what is known as a secret place which is what prevails in Bamusso. On this secret ground, issues of the village are fixed or spoiled. Where festivals, rituals, important secret meetings and achievements are celebrated. So for a successful ritual, celebration is done at the village square with so many dances such as the *malie* dance in other words the elephant dance, the *molimi* dance. However, according to Thomas N. Huffman [6], this front back dimension is particularly important for sacred spaces: back areas were reserved for ancestral activities. This means that the village squares are secret places reserved for ancestral activities in Bamusso. With the elephant dance, a masquerade with the elephant structure comes out to demonstrate and perform how elephants can destroy crops like cocoyam's, plantains and others crops if the ritual is not performed. They as well demonstrate how he elephant can protect their crops if they are appeased.

The *molimi* dance is that which really demonstrates the celebration. With this dance, a tall cage is built about 10 meters tall with a masquerade at the top. This masquerade dances with a lot of styles, prestige and beauty. The aim of the dance is to showcase the spiritual, prestigious culture and wealth of the Oroko people to their younger generations and visitors. It also helps to bring sons and daughters of the village as a symbol of unity and peace. In recent times, this particular dance has been shifted from every year to every five years. NakintiNofuru[17], said, community members also showcase various arts and crafts, such as basket weaving and mortars making which are used to prepare traditional Oroko foods. With all of these cultural activities, the festival is a special day for the Oroko people. Many say it is one of the happiest days of their lives because it creates a sense of communalism. This ritual of *etambouamboka* is a big strength to food production and fishing to the lives of Oroko people especially around the Bamusso, Ekondotiti and Bakassi areas which are all coastal zones. It helps to guarantee food security in their community as with the ritual, there is food availability, accessibility, stability and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Culture influences smallholder production in Cameroon both positively and negatively, for the negative effects of culture on food production, we have a taboo of working on a traditional day, deaths and death celebrations which reduce working hours. Taboo of killing soil organisms is another cultural practice that acts as a setback to farming and efficiency. The practice of witchcraft also affects crop production. Nevertheless, there are some cultural practices that favour farming in Cameroon. These are rituals that are performed in the different sociocultural and ecological zones of Cameroon. We have rituals such as that of the end of the traditional year which is done to protect all the villagers and their activities. In Bamessing, it is called 'Nsinteh'. The ritual to the gods of rain, the people of Ndop give sacrifices to

them so as to have abundant rain for the growth of their crops. There is also the ritual of good harvest given to their gods of good harvest which bless them with good harvest. There is also the ritual of cleansing which is performed to clean all trouble and unhealthy situations in the villages practiced by the Baboute, Toupouri and Bamusso in forest, sudano-Sahelian and coastal sociocultural ecological zones in favour of smallholder farming.

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