

CONFLICT IN KUGHA WATERSHED:

A study by a group of volunteers from Ndu and Nkambe Central Sub Divisions for the year 2007.

The Kugha Watershed covers an area of about 90 ha of the Kugha hill. It is located in Ndu Sub Division, Donga Mantung Division of the North West Province of Cameroon. The Kugha hill is the highest point in Ndu which is known to be the coldest place in Cameroon due to its altitude. It is bounded by Mbandfung village to the South West, Ntumbaw village to the South, Wowo village and Kakar Quarter to the North and Sehn village to the East.

Of the numerous springs that flow from this watershed, 11 catchments have been tapped to provide portable water by villages, quarters and even individuals within the communities of Kugha. With some water catchments still left unexploited, the water shed is seen to be a potential potable water source for surrounding communities and its environs if properly managed.

While there are still some traces of natural forest on this water shed, some of the villages enjoying portable water from it are aware of the gradual disappearance of this forest and so have taken some measures to protect the water shed over their catchments. On the other hand, this Kugha hill has witnessed an increase in human activities leading to the disappearance of the natural forest and the watershed within the years. Some Fulanis who were considered Nomads have settled on this hill for their forth generation now (about 100 years) with cattle rearing as their livelihood. Other indigenous people now use the advantage of the availability of grazing land on this hill to rear their cattle, while farmers mostly women are scrambling for the fertile farmlands, due to long existence of cattle rearing in this area. Some have gone as far as putting boundaries on a land that was known since the past (as far back as 1910) to be a Sacred place and a “no mans land”. This has gone a long way to increase human activities on Kugha watershed.

During our feasibility study trips, we could identify conflict related activities between the stake holders of the Kugha watershed. From our studies, the whole watershed has been invaded with the following human activities that pose some threats to the springs (watershed):

- **FOREST EXTINCTION.** As far back as 1910 in the Wimbun tribe, of Donga Mantung Division, it was unheard of that a water catchment area was tampered with, not to talk of the Kugha watershed which was a Sacred place. The natural forest over a catchment area used to be protected even from stray animals and hunters. But with time, the respect given to such areas has faded as the forest is disappearing. The traditional council members who used to keep these laws are corrupted as some of the members are even parties in the sales of such forest.
- **FARM LAND EXPANSION.** There is a scramble over the fertile lands of Kugha hill that has been so virgin and used only for grazing by Fulani for farmland. In Ndu Sub Division, a daily concern of people is how to feed their families and the women shoulder this responsibility as the culture holds that they are the bread winners. The said women are farming the same fields that their great grand family members farmed in the past 100 years ago. The men who used to subsidize with meager wages from the Ndu Tea plantation which used to be the only employing sector, were sacked during the privatization since 2003. This has caused the women to be very aggressive and due to heavy pressure on arable land, they tend to move up hills in search for more fertile farmlands located in the watersheds. They seem to have forgotten the dangers that threaten on the exposure of the watersheds.
- **EUCALYPTUS PLANTATIONS.** Never the less, the eucalyptus tree offers some advantages to its farmers. Most of it is used chiefly as a source of wood fuel, poles for electricity as well as telephone cables and for income generation as some tree trunks are sold into timber for making furniture and roofing of houses. Eucalyptus trees in short are seemed to provide a greater fraction of the income of their owners. Farmers of Kugha watershed in ignorance even use the eucalyptus trees as boundary plants as they knew little about the adverse effects to the watershed. Unproductive farmlands are replanted with the eucalyptus trees considering its importance to the farmers.
- **TEA PLANTATION.** When privatization of the Ndu Tea Plantation which used to employ over 50% of the working population of the surrounding Kugha villages started, over 364 laborers were sacked. Some of these laborers have resolved to cultivate their own tea plantations and the Kugha watershed is invaded by two of these plantations. The tea plants are not a bad plant around watershed, but the tea farmers often use chemical fertilizers that pollute the springs.
- **HUMAN SETTLEMENT.** Apart from the Fulani who were considered Nomads, some farmers are gradually encroaching the watershed with their “farm houses”, some of which have become permanent homes. The Fulani now cry foul as the encroaching neighbours are already playing over their minority.

- **WATER CATCHMENT CONSTRUCTION.** Tapping of portable water from the Kugha hill is done without any control. This goes with digging and piping which further exposes the unconstructed spring catchments. From our studies, if the catchment constructions were controlled, just 4 of the 11 constructed could served the all the beneficiary communities. But without control and proper management, these activity leads to frequent conflicts between the communities as other water mains are destroyed in the course of constructions or search for spring's sources. The Fulani are even deprived of the springs during construction as the beneficiaries care less about their own needs of water for domestic use.

REASONS FOR CONFLICTS.

Considering the stakeholders to the Kugha water shed, it is but obvious that some conflicts do arise;

- **Farmer-grazer conflict:** This is very common (not only in Ndu, but through out the Western Highlands of Cameroon) as the Fulani do not welcome the idea of fencing farmlands that block passages for their cattle to greener pastures. So, the Fulani often destroy farmers fence for their cattle to feed on the crops.
- **Farmer-Tea farmer conflict:** The tea farmer imposes tea planting in peasant farms, so they always off root such plants ending up into conflicts that are settled in Local councils and eventually Courts.
- **Farmer –Eucalyptus farmer conflict:** The eucalyptus once grown up renders the land unproductive. This causes the farmers to abandon their farms in search for more fertile land and as such conflicts arise between the two parties.
- **Conflicts on spring catchments:** Depending on the financial strength of a village, they may go up stream to tap the spring source already tapped by a poorer village, depriving the village from their spring. This often leads to conflicts as villages destroy water mains and even storage tanks of their opponents. The Fulani also claim to be compensated with a stand pipe and a drinking pool for their animals, once any catchment is constructed. Without this, they allow their animals graze on the protected catchment areas and as such destroying exposing and destroying the water mains with their hooves.

PROPOSALS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS

From our study, we discovered that the Kugha watershed needed a Watershed Management Committees (WMC) made up of the representatives from villages, quarters and even individuals that tap portable water from this watershed. The grazers, tea farmers, peasants, and eucalyptus farmers needed to form a farmers committee existing with by-laws on how to better manage their land. The Council which is the local Government together with the Administration needs to see this watershed as the only water source for the numerous villages within its environs. And as such control the better management of this watershed.

PRACTICAL ACTIONS

We envisage forming the Watershed management committee and the Farmers committee for better management of the Kugha watershed. We will also draw the attention of the Council and the Administration of Ndu Sub Division to the importance of this watershed. With the help of this Administration, a control and better management of all activities on this watershed will be introduced.

The various committees shall be sensitized on how to protect and better exploit the watershed and as such causing no conflict to any stakeholder.



1. Cattle footpath right above an unprotected spring catchment



2. Destroyed water mains by angry fulani to benefit from portable water



3. Fenced farm, threatened spring, encroached tea and maize farms and eucalyptus boundary



4. Fulani women fetching water from the running springs. They are not provided with potable tap water

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