

Conflict in the Kugha Watershed

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The Kugha watershed covers an area of about 90 hectares on the Kugha Hill. It is located in Ndu Sub-Division, in the Donga Mantung Division of the North West Province of Cameroon. The Kugha Hill is the highest point in Ndu and 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 potable water for the villages, quarters and individuals living within the communities of Kugha. With some water catchments still left unexploited, the watershed is seen to be a potential potable water source for surrounding communities and its environs if properly managed.

There are still some traces of natural forest in this watershed. However, some of the villagers enjoying potable water here are aware of the gradual disappearance of the forest and so have taken some measures to protect the watershed in their catchments. On the other hand, the 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, and are now in their fourth generation there, with cattle rearing as their livelihood. Other indigenous people now take advantage of the availability of grazing land to rear their cattle, while farmers - mostly women - are scrambling for the fertile farmlands. Some have gone as far as putting boundaries on land that has been known for the past hundred years, to be a sacred place and a “no mans land”. All of these factors have gone a long way to increase human activity on the Kugha watershed.

During feasibility study trips, conflict-related activities between the stake holders of the Kugha watershed could be seen. The whole watershed has been invaded by human activities that pose threats to the springs:

- Forest extinction: as far back as 1910 among the Wimbun tribe of the Donga Mantung Division, tampering with the water catchment area was unheard of. In addition, the Kugha watershed was a sacred place and the natural forest covering the catchment area used to be protected even from stray animals and hunters. With time, the respect given to such areas has faded as the forest is disappearing. The council members who used to keep these traditional laws are corrupt, as some of the members are even party to the sale of such forestland.
- Farm land expansion: there is a scramble over the fertile lands of the Kugha Hill that before was virgin and used only for grazing by Fulani. In the Ndu Sib Division, the daily concern of people is how to feed their families. The women shoulder this responsibility as their culture holds that they are the bread winners. Women are farming the same fields that their ancestors farmed during the past century. The men, who used to earn meagre wages from the Ndu tea plantation which used to be the only employing sector, were sacked during the privatisation that has occurred since 2003. Due to heavy pressure on arable land, this has caused women to tend to move up into the hills in search for more fertile farmlands located in the watersheds. They seem to have forgotten the dangers that threaten with uncontrolled exploitation of the watersheds.
- Eucalyptus plantations: the eucalyptus tree offers some advantages to farmers. Most is used as a source of fuel, as poles for electricity and telephone cables and for income generation for making furniture and house roofs. Eucalyptus trees are providing a greater share of the income of their owners. Farmers of the Kugha watershed are ignorant even in the use of eucalyptus trees as boundary

plants as they know little about the adverse effects they have to the watershed. Unproductive farmlands are being replanted with eucalyptus trees and are important to the farmers.

- Tea plantation: when the Ndu Tea Plantation was privatised, which used to employ over 50% of the working population of the surrounding Kugha villages, over 364 laborers lost their jobs. Some of these laborers have started to cultivate their own tea plantations and the Kugha watershed is being invaded by two new plantations. Although the tea plants themselves are not destructive to the watershed, the tea farmers often use chemical fertilisers 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 threatening to take over..
- Water catchment construction: tapping of potable water from the Kugha Hill is done without any control. This involves digging and laying pipes which further exposes the spring catchments. If the catchment constructions were controlled, just four of the 11 constructed could served all of the beneficiary communities. Without control and proper management, this activity leads to frequent conflicts between the communities as other water mains are destroyed in the course of construction or in the search for springs’ sources. The Fulani are often deprived of the springs during construction and little care is taken over their water needs for domestic use.

Reasons for conflicts

Some of the conflicts that arise include:

- Farmer-grazer conflict: this is very common, not only in Ndu, but throughout 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’ fences, leading to their cattle feeding on the farmers’ crops.
- Farmer-tea farmer conflict: tea farmers impose tea planting on peasant farms, which leads to uprooting plants and ending up as conflicts that have to be settled at local councils and eventually courts.
- Farmer-eucalyptus farmer conflict: eucalyptus trees, once grown up, render the land unproductive. This causes the farmers to abandon their farms in search for more fertile land and so 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 a spring source already tapped by a poorer village below, depriving that village from their spring. This often leads to conflicts as villagers destroy water mains and even storage tanks of their opponents. The Fulani also claim compensation of a stand pipe and drinking pool for their animals once any catchment is constructed. Without this, they will allow their animals to graze on the protected catchment areas and by doing so, expose and destroy the water mains with their animals’ hooves.

Proposals for conflict resolutions

The Kugha watershed needs Watershed Management Committees (WMC) made up of representatives from villages and individuals that tap potable water from this watershed. The grazers, tea farmers, peasants and eucalyptus farmers need to form a farmers’ committee that follows by-laws on how to better manage their land. Then the council, which is formed by the local government together with the administration, needs to recognise the watershed as the water source for the villages within its environs and control the better management of this watershed.

Practical actions

Watershed management committees and farmers' committees are needed for better management of the Kugha watershed. Attention of the council and the administration of Ndu Sub-Division needs to be drawn to the importance of this watershed. With the help of the administration, control and better management of all activities on this watershed can be introduced.

The various committees should be sensitised on how to protect and better exploit the watershed and so avoid conflict with other stakeholders.

Feasibility studies were carried out by:

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Cattle path above an unprotected spring catchment



Water mains destroyed by angry Fulani



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



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



From left to right George-ACADEO field worker, Elvis-student, Farmer Tanto and Denis-SOF