

MINE, FOREST AND GENDER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CURSE OF RESOURCES IN EAST CAMEROON: THE CASE OF BAKA AND BAGYELI WOMEN

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Abstract: *This article intends to be an instrument which challenges not only the international community, the public authorities but also the actors of the civil society on the subject of the secular discriminations which the gender undergoes in the context of the socio-environmental changes, the multiple stigmatizations and the marginalization on the issue of the redistribution of natural resources in East Cameroon. Indeed, despite the advent of the Rio de Janeiro summit held in 2000 in Brazil where women made history by claiming inalienable rights, Cameroonian women in general but especially those of Baka and Bagyéli in particular did not been on the side lines of this holistic mutation. In addition to the rich potential in natural resources that abounds in the East Cameroon region, the alarming observation is rather deplorable, to see that even the challenges of the National Program for Participatory Development (PNDP) fail to integrate the initiatives of support for indigenous women as key players in public decentralization policies with a view to eradicating poverty in rural areas. Because neither the forest nor the mines, exploited at artisanal, semi-industrial, and even local scales do not help to restore the right to well-being in favour of the real engine of development that is women. Based on an interdisciplinary methodology, a theory focused on liberal neo-institutionalism. It is under this prism that the interest of this research is based, which is accompanied by a rich documentation of both archival and oral sources, field surveys, reports, photos, decrees and even laws.*

Keywords: mine; forest; gender; natural resources; East Cameroon

1. Introduction

The socio-environmental changes in the exploitation of mining and forestry resources in most parts of Africa over the past two decades have witnessed major significant reforms. Cameroon for its part had opted for an equitable reform of the redistribution of resources which would take into account all social layers but above all, a major concern on gender. However, this appropriate and beneficial initiative did not live up to its noble expectations with regard to the undeniable role that women play in the project of economic development and social growth. Despite the texts and laws that guarantee equality between men and women, this vision of the world has only remained legal in form, because the Baka and Bagyeli women of East Cameroon continue to be victims of multiform marginalization's and discriminations which are not unrelated to the many mining and forestry resources abounding in the East Cameroon region (Abega, 2007: 12). These latter, speechless and powerless, are still bathed in the lamentable miasma of unparalleled precariousness and pauperization. From Bétaré-Oya to Batouri, from Kambelé to Kolomine to Yokadouma, neither gold, nor diamonds, nor forests and even other natural substances exploited on an artisanal or semi-industrial scale are only the domains reserve enjoyed by capitalists in the service of the exploitation of man by man. According to the International Financial Institutions (IFI), according to the partnership agreements with the countries potentially rich in natural resources, the objective consisted in the consolidation of

resources and the improvement of tax havens as a hope for these regions of get out of their financial difficulties and embark on a path of development. This renaissance resulted in the opening of the sector to multinational mining and forestry companies. Tax incentives including the granting of tax holidays were the main tool used in this strategy of liberalizing the mining and forestry sector. After more than fifteen years with this model of mining and forestry in East Cameroon, we will examine how the Baka and Bagyeli women continue to suffer from marginalization in the policies of redistribution of resources and its impact on the level of local development (Larrere, 1991: 23). Through a rich and varied documentation, made up of archives, books, articles, theses, reports, oral sources, and field surveys, this research aims to challenge the public authorities and the international community to take into account of women for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

1. General on the exclusions made to gender in the context of the redistribution of natural resources in East Cameroon

Cameroon abounds in numerous natural resources; therefore the exploitations have an impact in the redistribution of the rent on the national economy, in the context of the exclusions made to gender. A very widely recognized potential, therefore, the mining and forestry sector arouses in popular imagery an asset for social growth and the development of local communities. Indeed, can we imagine the emergence of Cameroon on the expected horizon if women, the driving force of development continue to suffer from marginalization in public policies? Isn't it the symbol and the representation of the dynamics that participate in the realization of well-being projects?

1.1. Symbolism and representation of gender in the redistribution of resources in East Cameroon

Symbolism is one of the main characteristics of African societies. This is reflected both in the rites and in the events that mark out everyday life. The processes of symbolization and the symbolism constitute the object which directs the actions of the actors every day in any society. The world of individuals and their societies is inseparably material and ideal. This double nature is found in everything that makes a sign and a symbol (Althabe, 1991: 15). Man is the only animal that continually develops and re-elaborates its environment in the threads of language, conscious and unconscious representations, and institutions that capture and fix the differences around powers, sexes, generations in systems of rites and of beliefs. Nothing and no one escapes the need to symbolize, the power of the symbol, the rationalizations that they nourish. The processes of symbolization are therefore at the heart of socialization and subjectivities; but also, in particular in times of crisis or rapid change, "symbolization" and "symbolizations", when cultural forms undergo and move at the rate of social change.

To understand the gender inequalities between men and women about the redistribution of resources, it is important to start from the representations built on mining and forestry operations to realize the dynamics of access, control and use of resources. Social representations are organized systems made up of all the knowledge of common sense which does not signify discrimination and marginalization as the social sciences have long stipulated. Integrating the notions of a

central core having a generating and organizing function and of peripheral elements ensuring the functions of concretization, reproduction and defence (ILO, 2007: 13). The representation functions as a system of interpretation of reality which governs the relations of individuals to their physical (equality) and social environment, it will determine their behaviour or their practices. Representation is a guide for action, it guides actions and social relations. It is a system of pre-coding reality, because it determines a set of anticipations and expectations.

Cameroon is an ethnic mosaic, where we find different identity representations. Depending on whether one is Baka or Bagyéli, the representations and the symbolism linked to the right of autochthony vary. As a result, the analysis of women's economic rights is inseparable from representations and practices. They are one of the foundations. The importance of social representations linked to women's access to national wealth emerges clearly in the speeches and determine practices. These extracts bear witness to this. In the Baka and Bagyéli civilization, people have a traditional conception of forest and mining resources of being the geniuses of their God revealed to men as a common gift that is exploited from generation to generation but above all for the benefit of the development of the community.

1.2. Gender and social division of resources among the Baka and Bagyéli in East Cameroon

Women participate in production activities, economic growth and especially the socio-cultural development of its community. However, in the equitable redistribution of resources, they are unequally representative or weakly involved in the march towards a world of integration of values. However, even in the distribution of work by sex, they carry more weight than men. They work longer than men, women do housework, also work in the fields like men, which should be a key element on the part of political decision-makers, the political elite and of government to take into account the restoration of inequalities (ILO, 2007: 85). All the factors seem to have a correlation, if socio-cultural constraints thwart their interest in development. The social division of labour does not predispose them to have control over the institutional and regulatory mechanisms in matters of wealth. They most often take care of domestic and agro-pastoral work. Even if they have always worked in the large family plantations, they still remain under the supervision of the man who is the head of the family. A set of constraints relating to the modes of distribution of wealth and the status of women in the communities make it difficult for them to access natural resources. In some localities the women take care mainly of the household and do not become active in the exploitation of productive resources according to a customary chief, the women take care of the household and still play an important role in their family. The woman cannot be the head of the family instead of the man. To give women powers, you have to have a lot of resources. Powers and responsibilities are clearly shared, men have their roles and women theirs. Women perform their duties in an exemplary manner.

2. The paradox of resources in the context of gender marginalizations

In Cameroon, although oil, a liquid mining resource, remains the main contributor to the state budget, this is not an exclusivity that discriminates against other resources which are also exploited at international and artisanal scales. like gold,

diamond, bauxite or wood. However, even if the reforms of Cameroon's mining and forestry sector aim to increase the growth of the country's economy while providing a better framework for artisanal mining and forestry activities, the 2012 EITI report indicates that revenues from the extractive sector remained stable at around \$ 1.5 billion in 2012, or 31% of the state budget (Nguede, 2016: 13).

2.1. Gender and redistribution of natural resources in the context of decentralization in East Cameroon

Cameroon initiated a decentralization policy in the 90s with the aim of bringing the populations closer to decision-making centres and involving them in the management of public affairs and resources (Daou, 2001: 8). In a simple sense, decentralization can be defined as a mode of organization of the structures of the administration in which a legal personality is conferred on communities of interest or on public services. Decision-making power is exercised by bodies acting under simple legal control. In its implementation, decentralization has two fundamental aspects: one technical and the other territorial. In the latter case, it necessarily results in the taking into account of a specifically patio-geographical interest: it therefore has a territorial basis, a material element of which is land or land. The term land refers to everything that is linked, directly or indirectly to the land (soil, forest, fauna, water, etc.) and to the relationships between people around the land.

In addition, decentralization aims at a better involvement of the populations in the policies of fight against poverty by favouring their community participation. Community taken from a sociological perspective refers to: Belonging to a group or a community, as well as the rights and duties associated with it. It is not simply a statute conferring rights and obligations but also a practice allowing individuals to take part in the construction of their societies. It is not only a set of rights and responsibilities, it is also a game of interaction and influence within the community. Citizenship therefore relates to the enjoyment of the civic rights attached to nationality. Empirical studies define three fundamental dimensions: active political involvement which denotes an interest in the management of public affairs, the exercise of the right to vote and finally voluntary participation in activities of general interest. Citizenship rejects concrete inequalities in social status and political competence (Abega Ondo 1998: 17). It is based on the principles of equality in access to well-being for each individual without distinction of social categories. Decentralization has now become an institutional approach for democratization and inclusion of local communities in the majority of African countries, including Cameroon. However, the objective of equity through an active and participatory citizenship of all sections of the population, in particular women, young people, the excluded in general, remains very little taken into account. The policies of the Government of Senegal within the framework of decentralization do not adequately take into account the gender approach. "Among the challenges of decentralization, the participation of the vulnerable group of women in decentralization continues to arise. Gender remains a component that is only added in the speech.

One of the postulates in the context of this research is that the mechanisms and laws in force in the field of land and natural resource management, in a context of decentralization, have not led to access, control and equitable gender participation in local communities. To test such a hypothesis, the research was linked to the gender

approach and looked at the power relations between the different actors, the needs and the constraints of the different social groups, in particular the vulnerable groups, among which are women. (Daou, 1992: 6). These interrelationships between the effectiveness of the rights of people in general, and of women in particular, fit perfectly into the theoretical framework of gender justice, which is based on citizenship. Gender is a category of analysis that helps to understand the status of women and men; their places and their relationship to formal (legislation) or informal (cultural and social norms) institutions. These norms, based on inequalities linked to class, age and sex, define the rules for access and control of natural resources. It is in this sense that we must understand the social vision according to which: Introduce gender analysis, and question both the status and roles of women and men in social stratification, on impact of social relations of sex or gender on situations that concern the individual or group, but also to question the way in which social status and roles are determined by belonging to a given sex (Larrere, 1991: 19).

2.2. The social foundations of the law implementing the mining and forestry code in the equitable redistribution of resources.

The effective granting of land rights to women is one of the most difficult challenges facing the contemporary world. One of the difficulties in developing effective land rights laws and policies is the multiplicity and complexity of access routes to natural resource law (ILO, 2007: 37) as well as the significant gap often observed between the provisions of law and the reality of women's lives. Member States and the international community have agreed on a whole series of commitments in favour of the granting of forest and mining security. There is indeed a political dynamic and consensus in favour of the promotion of land tenure security for women for equal rights to land, property and inheritance which manifests itself through a set of norms relating to rights. fundamentals. This is the case quite recently, through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the 2005 World Summit, which see (Abega, 2007: 14) in the rights to land resources and women's inheritance, an important indicator of women's empowerment and human development.

However, the fight is far from won given the complexities of the issue. Indeed, the issue of redistribution of natural resources has been one of the most delicate issues in the history of Cameroon. The essential element of this law was the creation of a national domain covering almost the entire territory. By the force of this law, natural resources in Cameroon have become a common patrimony of the State which no one can appropriate. The mining and forestry codes have made it possible to set up a regulatory framework for economic and social development centred on grassroots development strategies, whether community or individual. This last aspect was "theoretically and on paper" "the most important insofar as it aimed at the economic and social advancement of the rural population", "the most numerous and most deprived national layer." To achieve the goals of the law, it was necessary to constitute appropriate institutions capable of opposing the "traditional feudal forces" (Althabe, 1965: 26). its effects depend closely on the functioning of the bodies and institutions created within the framework of administrative decentralization, but also on the economic, political and social environment.

In addition, the decentralization policy introduced by the constitution of 96 also aimed to regulate the often competing social forms of natural resource use, their modes

of access and exploitation (Daou, 1992: 30). The forest is not only an economic good or a commodity, it also has important social, political and cultural dimensions. The forest is not just about exploitation. It also includes all the rules defining the rights of access, exploitation and control of its renewable natural resources. It is not a simple relationship between man and nature, it is a social relationship, between individuals or social groups about the ecosystem, ecological biodiversity and its variable resources. This social relationship involves many challenges, economic of course (access to the forest is a condition for production, the distribution of resources determines economic inequalities), (ILO, 2007: 77) but also social (inequalities, relationships between groups social), political, identity. The control of forest resources does not only have issues of farms or agricultural production. There are close links between equitable access to forestry and mining resources and democracy.

In reality, almost all women do not have access to formal mineral and forest resource rights. And this exclusion weakens the ability of women to invest in the exploitation of key production sectors. The new communities are essential elements of the decentralization cycle underway in Cameroon and among the powers conferred on them, the management of "land areas" is considered to be one of the most significant and one of the most fraught with consequences. They constitute the basic unit of the Cameroonian political system. Cameroon's mining and forestry organization is centered on a relatively new and "artificial" political and administrative unit, in any case outside the traditional system of resource distribution. The "village" level where the traditional management system operates is totally absent from the new regulatory framework (Nguede, 2016: 11).

3. Taking Baka and Bagyeli women into account in decision-making

The exploitation of gold and diamonds are not part of the traditional activities of these peoples. Whether it is the Bantu, the Bagyéli or the Baka, their way of life usually refers to activities such as agriculture (food or cocoa), hunting, gathering and gathering. The entry of gold panning into their activities causes changes and adaptations in their way of life. The new market economy involves a significant deterioration or even destruction of traditional values and customs, which have been fundamental for the maintenance of community, tribal, clan and family solidarity and unity.

3.1. Gender and modes of access to natural resources among the Baka and Bagyéli in East Cameroon

The conception of natural resources has long been limited to the exploitation of petroleum as the sole resource for mining production throughout the national territory. However, this conception does not make it possible to fully understand the dynamics implemented in terms of access, appropriation, control and use of mining and forestry resources. Forestry and mining are not a simple factor of production, they are also carriers of wealth that societies value in the context of economic production (Abega, 1998: 29). Access to land should be analysed through a cross-reading of the concepts of space and resources. Space is only at stake through the resources found there. These resources (mines, forest, land, water, flora and fauna) are truly "resources" from an economic and social point of view only on condition that they are capable of beneficial use for the improvement of well-being. (Daou, 1965: 23).

Consequently, land would rather be the relationship between men about the land and its resources and not the relationship between man and land as a factor of production. As a result, women's access to the equitable redistribution of resources reflects their place in local society, but also in the modern legislation in force.

In the context of the problem of redistribution of natural resources, alongside cultural and social norms, the division of labour based on sex is a factor that determines access and control of land. This means that the gender perspective is important in the sense that it allows a link between the theoretical approach and the practices in the field of forest and mining management of the emergence of a new approach to citizenship that considers that development cannot be achieved in a context where human rights are not effective. This perspective justifies the need to engage women who constitute 52% of the Cameroonian population in the battle for access, appropriation and control of land by women, especially in rural areas. In Cameroon, any coherent development policy must have a rural and agricultural basis. Agriculture contributes on average nearly 20% of the GDP and employs 70% of the working population (Nguede, 2016: 47). 59.3% of the population, or approximately one in ten Cameroonians live in rural areas. These are characteristic features of a rural economy heavily dependent on agriculture. The Cameroonian State has put in place a legislative and regulatory system aimed at making agriculture and the rural world play a leading role in the economic development of the country. The successive reforms relating to agriculture, in particular, the New Agricultural Policy (NPA), and more recently, the agro-sylvo-pastoral orientation policy (POASP).

3.2. Sociocultural gender constraints and natural resource management among the Baka and Bagyéli of East Cameroon

The proven predominance of traditional resource management in Cameroon means that the first constraints identified in this study on the consideration of women's rights in the equitable redistribution of resources (Daou, 2001: 67) are of a socio-cultural and anthropological nature. Analysis of the literature grids has shown that these constraints are acutely posed to women in general, even if they can be more or less accentuated from one area to another. It shows that the management of resources does not take into account the social practices, customs, traditions and socio-economic organization of populations in local communities. To show the full importance of the traditional system of resources and its restriction with regard to women, some interviewees only mentioned in their speech the socio-cultural constraints (social constraints) as being the factors blocking the access of women to resources. In his speech, the president of the environment commission of the Casamance zone affirms that the problems (low appropriation of land, limited access to certain resources, etc.) that women encounter in relation to the redistribution of resources are purely and simply socio-cultural. (Larrere, 1991: 11). He is supported in his remarks by a notable who is in the sylvopastoral zone. For this notable, socio-cultural constraints constitute the main constraints to women's access to land. These are only one element of a socio-cultural organization in which women are excluded from the management, control and redistribution of natural resources. Social constraints are made up of all the norms (heritage) and social roles (socio-economic organization, differential socialization, social division of labour) that marginalize Baka and Bagyéli women in access and control of mineral resources and forestry in East Cameroon.

3.3. Material and technological constraints

The use of land and resources requires the use of materials; however rudimentary they may be. In Senegal, the means of production have long remained traditional. But in recent years, modern production techniques have been increasingly popularized. Particular importance is therefore given to material and technological constraints by the population concerned. We see that the people who call up socio-cultural constraints as being the main obstacles to women's access to land also report the material problems facing women. This is the case of this President of the National Program for Participatory Development (PNDP), for the East-Cameroon region (Nguede, 2016: 7) who juxtaposes material and socio-cultural constraints to explain the problems facing women. for access to land. In fact, the women who manage to access a plot are often confronted with the lack of agricultural equipment for the farm. A woman leader of an organization from the same locality explains: The problems that women encounter is linked to the lack of means. Even to cultivate the field that her husband has ceded to her, the woman has no materials. They cultivate by hand or they wait for their husbands to finish their fields to lend them their equipment and yet women cultivate in the same way as men with such large fields. Women really lack the means.

On the accession of Cameroon to independence, the legislator, while wanting to break with the colonial system without renouncing the best of ancestral tradition, sought to reinvent new rules and social practices aimed at exploiting natural resources. and redistribution of wealth without distinction of sex, as well as its uses. In this context, several legislative and regulatory texts have been adopted in order to establish a system of resource exploitation capable of promoting a rational use of mines, forests and even land, in accordance with economic and social development plans. With the great reform of the mining and forestry codes of 1964, almost all the resources of the soil and the subsoil, approximately 95% were made national domain by the law of 1964 (Althabe, 1965: 8). At the end of article 1 of this law, the natural resources of the soil and the subsoil are automatically constituted by the regulations in force applicable within the framework of the mining and forestry codes in their principal domains. Indeed, the development of natural resources requires material and financial means, which is one of the conditions for preserving the sites to be exploited. Cultural and social discrimination are inseparable, with a vicious circle that takes into account the relationship between poverty and human rights. In this context, the inclusion of women in decision-making becomes a legal imperative because women must promote their rights in order to live.

At the end of our reflection on the issue of exclusions made to Baka and Bagyéli women in East Cameroon, in the policies of redistribution of natural resources. This analysis refocuses the theoretical and empirical links between the inequalities of rights by sex with regard to natural resources, which constitutes a brake for economic, socio-cultural development. Discrimination against women in the context of equity in the wealth produced by resources shows the importance of the cyclical nature of the evolution of exports and the prices of natural resources and the risks that these cyclical variations introduce into the economy. economy, politics and society. These effects are very generally negative in Africa, but they are variable, in particular according to the quality of the economic and political institutions. Local decentralization, as a means of protecting the rights of populations over their resources and of reaping the benefits of

their exploitation, is a critical aspect of the management of natural resources, especially since several factors are at play: the possible competitive uses, interests and disputed claims; the tendency of the political elite to ally with international companies to capture the production of mineral deposits; and the remoteness of the wealth created by natural resources which facilitates the dispossession of local populations. Good governance of natural resources would aim to preserve equity, rights, gender and livelihoods of populations and to hold private companies accountable for their decisions.

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