



# NGUTI COUNCIL, SOUTH-WEST REGION, REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON FOREST COMMUNITIES AND THEIR TRADITIONAL WAY OF LIFE

September 2016



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## This leaflet presents information on the reality and traditional way of life of local communities in the Council of Nguti, Kupe-Muanenguba Division, in the South West Region of Cameroon.

The information in this leaflet was gathered during a participatory mapping activity, jointly carried out with communities as part of the "Mapping and Forest Governance" project, implemented by AJESH (Ajemalibu Self-Help) with technical support from

FODER (Forêts et Développement Rural) and the Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK). The programme has supported communities within Nguti Council area to map their customary land tenure and resources.

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### DESCRIPTION OF NGUTI COUNCIL AREA

The Council of Nguti is situated in Kupe-Muanenguba Division in the South West Region of Cameroon. It is bordered to the south by Konye Subdivision in Meme Division, to the south west by Ndian Division, to the north west by Manyu Division and to the east by Bangem Subdivision in Kupe-Muanenguba Division.

The Council was created by Presidential Decree in 1967, and became operational in 1968. It covers a surface area of 204,852 hectares with an estimated population of 20,060 (excluding Manyemen village, which was not mapped and for which no data was collected). There are 54 villages and nine clans which are geographically separated by the Mbayang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary.

At this point in time, a number of projects related to forest exploitation, mining, conservation, the agro-industries and infrastructure construction are either underway or planned in Nguti, with important implications in terms of land use within the Council area. Amongst these are the Herakles Farms' oil palm project, a number of individual oil palm plantations, two forest management units (proposed FMU 11007 and FMU 11006), a council forest, three community forests (REPACIG, NLOMARC and MBACOF), three sales of standing volume, two protected areas (Mbayang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary and Bakossi National Park) and the proposed construction of the Kumba-Mamfe road. Some of these pose serious challenges to the rights of local communities to forest lands and resources.



## MEETING THE COMMUNITIES OF NGUTI COUNCIL

There are four tribes inhabiting Nguti Council: the Bakossi, the Balong, the Bassosi and the Mbo. All of them share the same ancestors as descendants of Ngoe, who was married to Sumediang. They had seven sons and lived in Mwekan, in the western part of the Muanenguba mountains.

As prosperity increased in terms of property and wealth, there was a need to expand into new areas to avoid internal clashes over land and resources. People began to travel further to hunt and gradually moved out of their original settlements.

The Bakossi are the children of Ngoe's first son (Asomengoe), who moved southwards from the Muanenguba mountains. The Bakossi in Nguti are divided into two clans: the Abongoe and the Ngemengoe.

The Balong are the children of Kaahngoe whose son "Elonge" or "Elong" opted to search for land that could be secured without contest (i.e. free land). Some of them settled in present day Manyemen (Upper Balong) while others moved southwards to settle at Malende, Muyuka and the land on both sides of the river Mungo.

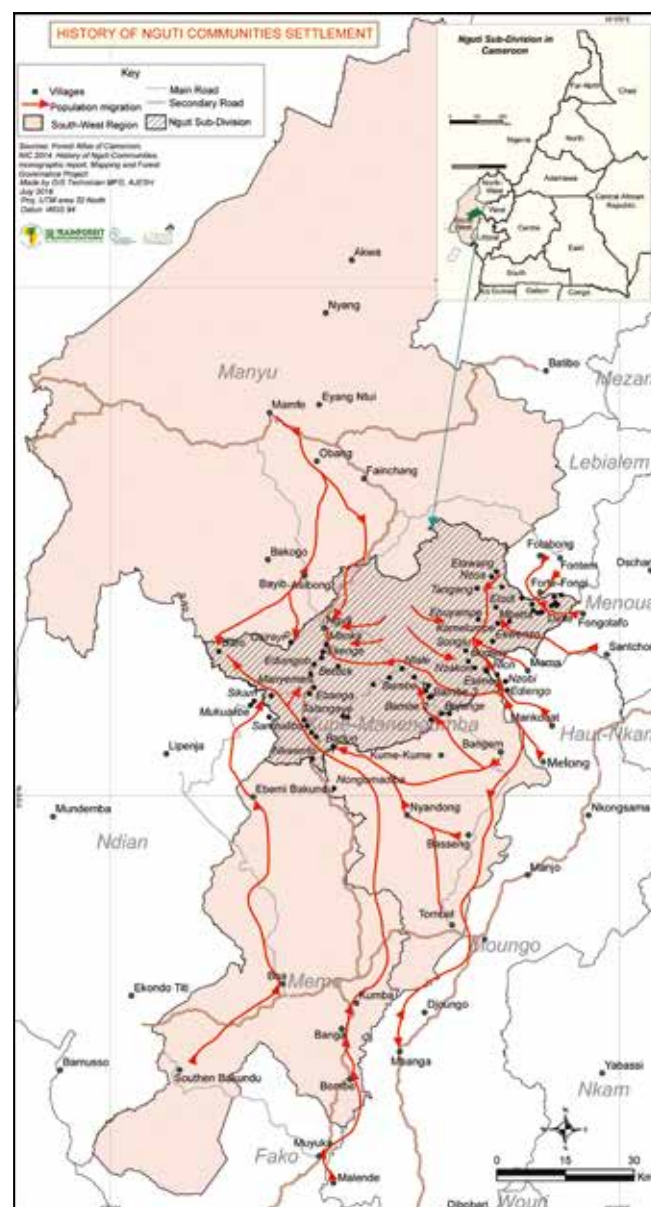
The Bassosi are the children of Abongoe. During violent clashes, the "Nssosi" group settled in the west. The Mbo, on the other hand, are the children of Mbongoe. They came into constant conflict with the people they met whilst travelling northwards, but managed to gain a strong foothold. Mbongoe had to deal with southward drifting people probably of Sudanese origin. They fought at every instance, gaining and losing here and there. The present day Mbo land is undulated terrain and extremely remote.<sup>1</sup>

"Where our ancestors settled, they are telling us that it is a forest reserve. Just behind my house, I cannot move. What does the future hold for me and my family? All we depend on is inside that forest."

Bambe villager

"We and our forefathers have lived all our life in this hinterland, sustaining life and paying our children's school fees for decades now from the resources provided by this forest, which has been given to the SG SOC company. Where will we go now with our children, what will our children inherit from us when we die, how will our children and descendants survive in this world?"

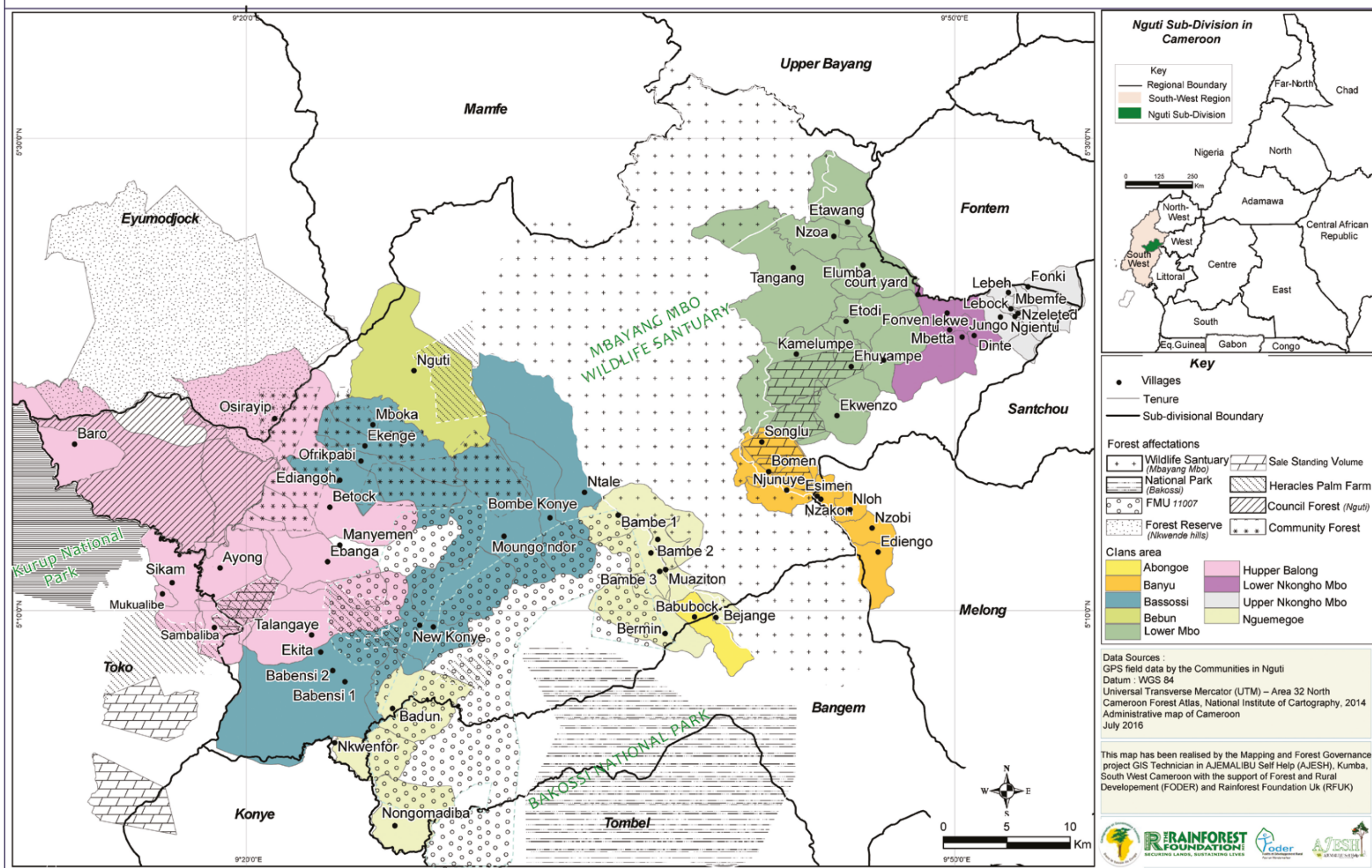
New Konye villager



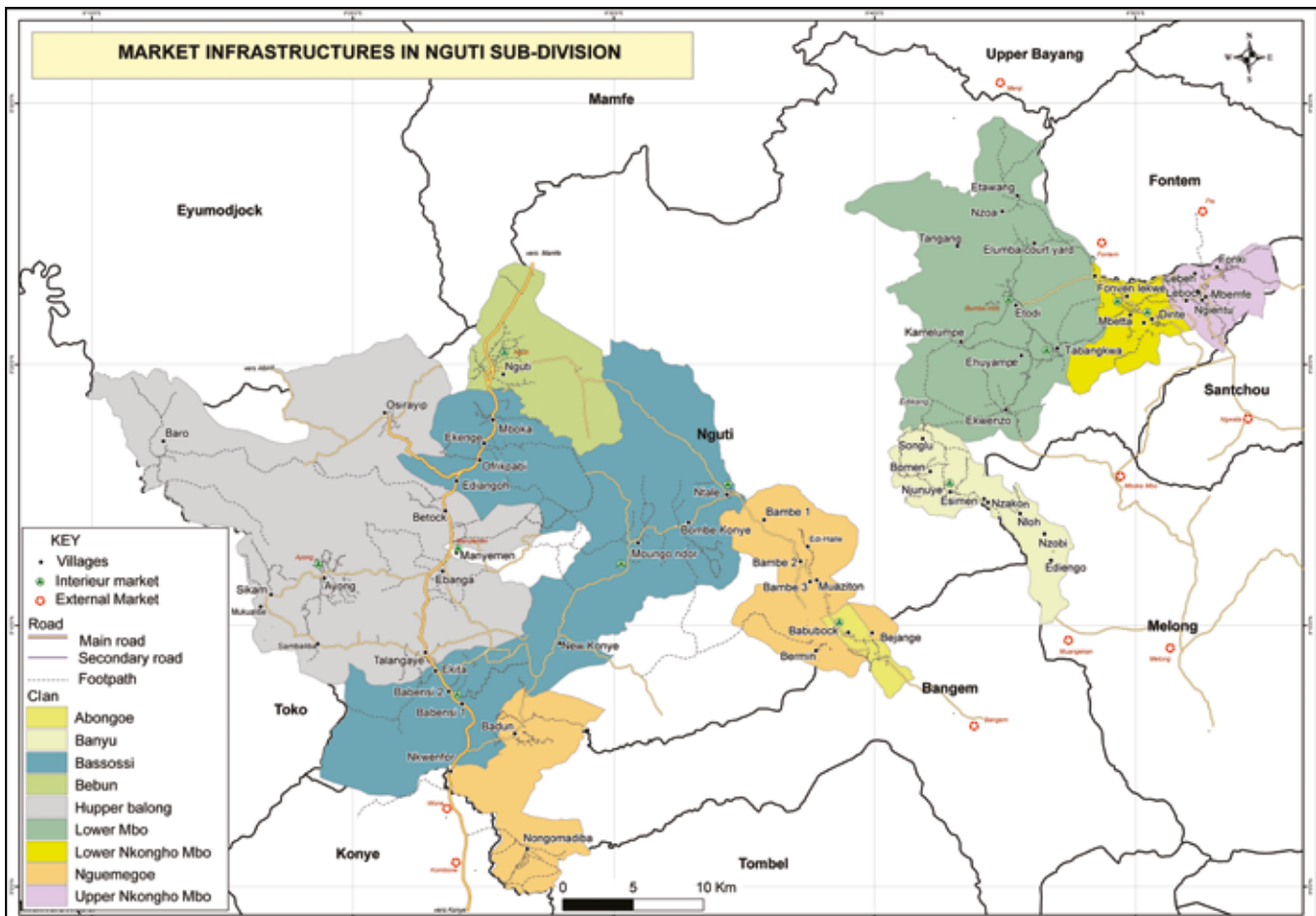
<sup>1</sup> Nguti Council Monographic Study, Programme for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (PSMNR), South-West Region, available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/41067505/nguti-council-monographic-study-impact-monitoring-of-forest-6>



## GENERAL LAND TENUE IN NGUTI COUNCIL AREA







“What we value the most is this forest, because it was given to us by our ancestors who lived here for decades. Now that it has been taken away from us, I do not know what will become of us and our families in the years to come.”

Babensi II villager

“Our customary lands have been converted into a reserve forest by the Government. This means we cannot farm there again in order to sustain our families. We have been told we can never go there again, but we are scared of what that will mean for our children’s future.”

Bejange villager

The main economic activities of communities in Nguti are farming (70 per cent), hunting (20 per cent), fishing (five per cent) and the collection of non-timber forest products (5 per cent). Generally, each clan has a market where they sell food and cash crops. Since the local markets are not open to non-residents, they mostly go to regional markets in the neighbouring subdivisions, namely Ngwata, Santchou, Mbokambo, Magwekang (Melong) and Wone (Konye). The main local markets are Elumba Mbo, Mbetta, Nguti and Manyemen, where farming produce (cocoa, coffee, palm oil, vegetables) and other food items (bush meat, salt, fresh fish) are sold. This illustrates how reliant local communities are on forest land and resources. When access to these is compromised, so are the communities’ livelihoods and wellbeing.

The land tenure situation in the Nguti Council area is somewhat unclear today because of population migration. Most of the communities living there now were not present before the 1950s. Many have migrated from the forest in order to have access to the Kumba-Mamfe road (the main road), while others were displaced during wars and the “maquis” period where the Germans and the revolutionaries from the United Population of Cameroon (UPC) party were fighting for the independence of Cameroon. Many of them lost their families and belongings at that time.

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Many villages have developed as a result of splitting off from the original territories that were established around 1927. These now have large areas and populations, without clearly defined customary lands.

Nevertheless, many communities have common areas for some activities such as gathering, hunting and farming. This is not the same with fishing. For example, in the Banyu clan, the area of fishing per community is well known throughout the rivers within the forest. Some of the villages do not have heavily flowing rivers, so inhabitants have to move far to fish and hunt. Moreover, the Mbayang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary, the Bakossi National Park, Nkwende Hills, the Council forest and areas allocated to other various projects as mentioned above are hotspots for the many livelihood activities of these clans.

Each clan has a 'head' who leads the other members of the clan during traditional activities. Even though the communities that make up a clan are often geographically dispersed, they still perform the same traditions and they are aware of their clan boundaries. Some of these boundaries are natural landmarks, such as the big Boma tree between Talangaye and Ebanga or a series of trees planted by the German settlers between Tangang and Nzoa. There are also hills, large rocks, streams, forest and roads that indicate the limit of a clan or community to another. In many cases however, boundaries between clans could not be clearly defined, because communities from different clans all practiced their activities in the same area without any restrictions. This situation has changed continuously due to an increased pressure on lands, stemming both from an increase in population and a growing demand for land by investors. Witnessing a rampant sale of their lands, communities and clans have sought to define their customary boundaries as a way to protect themselves against this.



## SOCIO-ECONOMIC DATA OF THE COMMUNITIES IN NGUTI COUNCIL<sup>2</sup>

Population density: 10 inhabitants/hectare

The Nguti Council area has more than 50 per cent of the total population of Kupe Muanenguba Division. Since the terrain is partially undulated and highly inaccessible, the population is heavily concentrated in an area known as the “Mbo hinterlands”. The Mbo communities, thickly populated, belong to five clans:

Lower Mbo, Bebum, Banyu, Lower Nkongho and Upper Nkongho. The Bakossi clans of Abongoe and Ngemengoe are relatively sparsely populated, while the Bassosi and Upper Balong have a more widely dispersed population.

Clan	Village	Children	Women	Men	Total
Bassosi	Ediengoh	28	35	40	103
	Ekenge	71	180	150	401
	Ofrikpabi	26	32	42	100
	Mungondor	123	186	191	546
	Bombe Konye	220	181	180	581
	New Konye	28	86	90	204
	Ntale	128	186	216	530
	Mboka	220	181	169	570
	Babensi II	150	200	180	530
	Babensi I	440	355	705	1500
Upper Balong	Ekita	23	43	37	103
	Betock	30	34	39	103
	Ayong	210	171	170	551
	Sikam	220	180	181	581
	Baro	60	30	49	139
	Osirayib	20	26	24	70
	Talangaye	80	109	99	228
	Ebanga	50	100	80	230
	Nguti	422	800	898	2120
	Lower Mbo	40	50	56	136
Lower Mbo	Etawang	20	20	25	65
	Nzoa	61	71	78	210
	Tangang	90	200	210	580
	Enunyampe	60	83	84	237
	Ekwenzo	67	84	80	251
	Kamelumpe	72	81	79	252
	Tabonkwa	76	100	84	280
	Etodi	77	95	88	278
	Fonven Lekwe	150	199	194	543
	Dinte	100	86	108	394
Lower Nkongho	Mbetta	150	172	142	518
	Upper Nkongho	117	210	210	528
	Mbemfe	57	160	156	373
Upper Nkongho	Lebeh	40	88	66	194
	Njungo	200	297	258	755
	Fomki	170	257	228	655
	Njientu	92	99	98	289
	Nzeleted	60	93	68	221
	Ngemengoe	74	90	150	313
	Bambe	71	103	112	286
	Bejange	60	160	100	320
Ngemengoe	Muanziton	68	78	60	206
	Bermin	150	160	187	497
	Nongomandiba	58	82	80	220
	Nkwenfor	100	86	108	320
	Njuinyue	42	96	80	218
	Songlu	25	32	30	87
	Ediengo Banyu	36	56	49	141
	Essimen	20	37	33	90
	Nloh	12	31	27	70
	Nzorbi	45	71	64	180
Banyu	Bomen	19	23	17	59
	Babubock	200	390	409	999
TOTAL		4688	6614	6545	20060

<sup>2</sup> Community monographic reports, Mapping and Forest Governance Project – Cameroon, 2014-2016.



## EDUCATION

The area has a sufficient number of primary schools but insufficient numbers of secondary schools in relation to the population and there are not enough teachers. In the Mbo hinterlands, many government teachers leave because of the difficult access to the area and the lack of telephone and road networks. The only way of accessing the area is trekking (95 per

cent). Generally, only about 30 per cent of existing classrooms are in good condition, and 50 per cent of them are built by the communities themselves. Due to the insufficient number of classrooms and teachers, it is common to find one classroom accommodating two classes. Generally, teaching facilities are poor and do not allow for adequate learning.

Level	Number of schools	Number of students	Number of teachers
Nursery	20	707	32
Primary	41	5534	147
Secondary	10	1448	101
Total	71	7689	280



## HEALTH

Access to quality health facilities is challenging for Nguti communities because of poor road networks. There are two main reference hospitals including Manyemen and St. John in Nguti, where people usually go for treatment. Due to poor road conditions, people from the Mbo hinterlands go to Melong, Santchou and Bangem. Most of the health centres (Ntale, Ayong, Jungo, Mbetta) have gas refrigerators for vaccine storage, where drugs are scarcely available. The most common sicknesses are malaria, typhoid, eye infections, joint pain and sexually transmitted infections. There have also been some reported cases of malnutrition.



Clan	Number of health centres	Number of nurses	Number of beds	Number of patients per year
Bassosi	1	2	7	n/a
Upper Balong	1	1	60	n/a
Bebum	2	14	70	5000
Lower Mbo	2	2	9	n/a
Lower Nkongho	1	11	40	n/a
Upper Nkongho	1	2	20	500
Abongoe	1	1	5	75





## WATER SUPPLY

Some of the communities have a water supply from several streams within the Council area but the water supply systems have been suffering from poor maintenance, with around 80 per cent of them not functioning. Some wells have been drilled (forages), but also do not function because of poor management and maintenance. As a result, villagers have to walk long distances in search of potable drinking water in streams and rivers that often deplete during the dry season and are dirty during the rainy season due to rapid runoff. Therefore, the availability of drinking water can be a problem, particularly in the dry season.

In the western part of the Council, where companies UNI PROVINCE and SG Sustainable Oils Cameroon (SG SOC, a subsidiary of Herakles Farms) carry out logging and industrial agriculture, most of the major streams that communities use for water catchment have been disturbed. This has caused poor water quality and insufficient quantity to supply water lines. This affects the Manyemen-Ebanga-Betock water supply, the Talangaye-Ekita water supply and the Babensi I and II water supply systems.

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## ELECTRICITY

There is almost no supply of electricity in homes or offices throughout the municipality. For 99 per cent of the population, lighting is only achieved through the use of kerosene and solar panels. Few people use generators when the need arises. The main hospitals, St. John of God Hospital and Manyemen Hospital, companies (CAFECO, SGSOC) and other businesses and local shops use generators.

Only the clan of Upper Nkongho Mbo is supplied with electricity by a national company. The project was initiated and sponsored by elites of this clan in 2011 with the aim of connecting a cable line from Ngwata (Santchou) to Njungo, and was successfully completed in 2016. It now provides electricity to all the seven villages of the clan (Njungo, Mbemfe, Lebock, Lebe, Nzeleted, Ngientu and Fonki). It is important to note that the Nguti Council has many rivers and waterfalls that can enable electricity production.

## COMMUNICATIONS

There is one Post and Telecommunications office with one staff member. There are no television or radio signals within the municipality. There is no newspaper. Mobile telephone networks are mostly available (MTN, Nextel and Orange). The lack of electricity makes it difficult for mobile phone owners to recharge on a regular basis. Access to roads is also one of the main challenges faced by Nguti communities.

## THE MAPPING AND FOREST GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME

It is estimated that over 50 million people depend on the Congo Basin rainforest for their wellbeing and livelihoods, including as many as 700,000 indigenous hunter-gatherers, commonly referred to as 'Pygmies', most of whom are still at least partially nomadic. Sadly, these groups constitute some of the most disenfranchised and poorest people in Africa. Many lack access to the most basic state services and often see almost no benefit from the exploitation of the forest territories they inhabit and consider their own under customary law.

There is growing evidence that the securing of such traditional land and resource rights is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty in forest areas and slow deforestation, which in turn can contribute to the slowing of climate change. The clarification of land issues, including customary tenure, is increasingly being recognised as a cornerstone of good forest governance and responsible investment.

The Mapping and Forest Governance Programme, funded by the British Department for International Development (DfID), aims to contribute to poverty reduction, sustainable management and improved governance of tropical rainforests in the Congo Basin. This is done through the documentation of forest communities' land tenure and governance systems, and through the promotion and implementation of forest communities' rights to land and forest resources. Particularly, the programme seeks to:

### **Give forest communities a voice in forest policy development through:**

- Supporting community-led mapping activities on customary lands and resources covering up to five million hectares of the Congo Basin rainforest
- Developing and testing real-time community forest monitoring systems
- Building legal capacity to support communities' land and resource rights as well as their basic civil and political rights

### **Give policy-makers the tools to make informed decisions about the forests through:**

- The continued development of the MappingForRights geo-web platform, a forest land and resource rights spatial database for the Congo Basin
- Facilitating decision-making processes for forest communities, government agencies and the private sector
- Applied research in key policy areas (e.g. land tenure, forest zoning and community-based forest management)

## PROGRAMME PARTNERS IN CAMEROON

The project is implemented in Cameroon by local civil society organisations with the support of The Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK). Ajemalibu Self-Help (AJESH) is the key implementing organisation in the South West Region, and works in partnership with Yaoundé-based association Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER).

Ajemalibu Self-Help (AJESH) is a civil society organisation that was created in 2006 and is based in the town of Kumba, in the South-West Region of Cameroon. Its vision is to achieve an empowered, healthy and sustainable society that is free from poverty and injustice and in harmony with its environment. AJESH works with the goal of empowering communities towards the improvement of their well-being through the participatory management of their natural resources.

Forêts et Développement Rural (FODER) is also a Cameroonian civil society organisation. Based in Yaoundé, it was created in 2002. Its vision is of a fair society free from exclusion and discrimination, which puts natural resources at the service of sustainable development. FODER aims to create an enabling environment for sustainable development through actions that ensure justice and equity, human rights and democracy, the transparent, participatory and sustainable management of natural resources, the protection of biodiversity and an enhanced quality of life and natural environment.

The Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK) is a British NGO created in 1989 and based in London. Its mission is to support indigenous people and traditional populations of the world's rainforest in their efforts to protect their environment and fulfil their rights to land, life and livelihood. RFUK promotes the establishment of community rights over rainforest lands, tackling the root of the problems related to deforestation and paving the way for local people to benefit fairly from the use and protection of forest resources.





# MAPPING FOR RIGHTS

Putting communities on the map



## SUPPORTED BY: :

The Department for International Development (UKAID - DFID)

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