

Traditional Authorities and Cultural Royalties in Cameroon's Plantation Agriculture: A Comparative Study of Bamenda Grassfield and Mbandjock Communities

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Abstract

This comparative study examines the persistence and function of Cultural Royalties and Tribute Payments to Traditional Authorities in modern commercial agricultural areas in Cameroon. The main objective was to analyse the diverse forms, socio-economic contexts, and functions of these payments in upholding traditional institutional power amid colonial legacies and contemporary market dynamics. Key concepts explored include chieftaincy, customary land tenure, and neo-traditional governance. The study is anchored in Structural-Functionalism, examining how these economic and cultural practices (tributes) serve as essential mechanisms for continuity, legitimising traditional authority and maintaining social equilibrium. The research design employed a qualitative, ethnographic methodology combining two distinct case studies: the Ndop Plain (Bamenda Grassfield) and Mbandjock (Baboute communities). The population comprises traditional rulers, community members, and administrative/plantation officials from both sites. A purposive sampling technique was used to select key informants, with the sample size of 134 determined by theoretical saturation requirements from the intensive fieldwork. The primary research instruments included semi-structured interview guides, direct observation, and archival reviews. The method of data collection involved extensive fieldwork, while the data was processed using thematic and interpretative analysis to identify recurring patterns and comparative differences. The findings of the study reveal that, despite modernisation, royalties and tributes persist as vital sources of legitimacy and local political economy for traditional institutions. The payments are interpreted as a problem of persistence and function continuous affirmation of the custodial role of traditional authorities over communal land, a critical perspective for understanding local resource management and power. The conclusion affirms that these systems are actively negotiated, evolving forms of local taxation. Suggestions include integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms into regional governance. The evidence-based recommendation is directed toward governmental recognition of these customary financial flows, advocating for inclusive local development policies that leverage traditional authority to enhance community benefits from plantation agriculture.

Keywords: Mbandjock, Baboute, Yezoum, Ndop Plain, Bamenda Grassfields, Cameroon, Traditional Authorities, Tribute, Royalty, Socio-economic, Cultural.

I. Introduction

Both Mbandjock and the Ndop Plain share a pre-colonial history marked by powerful Fons and chiefs who wielded significant authority over their domains. Their power was often attributed to religious beliefs, particularly their perceived connection to ancestral spirits, and their ability to provide justice, defence, and resource allocation (Ndi, 2002). This authority was further cemented by the system of tribute, which served as a symbolic and tangible expression of the subjects' allegiance. However, despite these shared roots, the historical context of each region shaped the specific forms and motivations of tribute payments: The Ndop Plain, with its diverse ethnic groups and decentralised power structure, saw a more nuanced form of tribute. The system was often governed by sub-chiefs within larger kingdoms, leading to variations in the specific

forms of payments. While agricultural produce remained a common form of tribute, the Ndop Plain also witnessed significant contributions of livestock, particularly during festivals and ceremonies. This region also placed a strong emphasis on military service, reflecting the historical importance of defence in the Bamenda Grassfields (or for more clarity, say “This diversity reflected socio-political differentiation within the Bamenda Grassfields, where inter-chiefdom relations and defence alliances often influenced tribute patterns”). Conversely, the communities of Baboute, Yezoum, and Mbandjock were historically characterised by strong centralised authority, with the chief serving as both political and spiritual leader. Tribute in this region often focused on agricultural produce, labour for communal projects, and the provision of artisanal crafts. This system reflected a more pronounced emphasis on agricultural production and communal development. To understand present-day practices of tribute and royalty in these regions, it is essential to trace their historical foundations. During the pre-colonial era, Fons exercised autonomous authority over land allocation, justice, and community defence (Njoku, 2010). The tribute system (functioned as a socio-political institution that underpinned loyalty, reciprocity, and authority).

The Ndop Plain, part of the Bamenda Grass Fields, has a rich history steeped in traditions that date back centuries. Traditional authorities, often referred to as Fons or chiefs, have played pivotal roles in governance, conflict resolution, and cultural preservation. According to Nkwi (1987), the institution of chieftaincy embodies both the spiritual continuity of lineage and the administrative continuity of the polity, positioning traditional rulers as mediators between ancestral authority and contemporary governance. To understand the contemporary practice of tribute and royalty, it is essential to delve into the historical context of these communities. Historically, these regions were governed by powerful Fons who held absolute authority over their domains. This power stemmed from their perceived connection to ancestral spirits, their role as mediators in disputes, and their ability to mobilise community resources for defence and development (Ndi, 2002). The system of tribute served as a tangible expression of the subjects' allegiance to their chief, reinforcing his authority and ensuring the smooth functioning of the community. Cameroon, a nation renowned for its diverse cultural landscape, provides a fascinating lens through which to examine the enduring influence of traditional institutions. The practice of tribute and royalty payments, deeply embedded in the country's history, continues to play a vital role in shaping social, economic, and political relationships within many communities. This article undertakes a comparative analysis of these practices in two distinct regions: Mbandjock, located in the central region, and the Ndop Plain, situated within the Bamenda Grassfields. By examining both the similarities and differences in these systems, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between history, culture, and contemporary realities.

II. Literature Review

The history of plantation agriculture in Cameroon is deeply intertwined with colonial practices and economic policies that shaped the region's agricultural landscape. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European powers established large plantations primarily for cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, and palm oil (Ngwa, 2020). This period marked a significant shift from subsistence farming to a more commercialised agricultural system, driven by global demand and colonial interests. The imposition of plantation agriculture disrupted traditional farming practices and altered social structures within local communities (Tchamyou, 2019). Post-independence, the legacy of plantation agriculture continued to influence economic policies and agricultural practices in Cameroon. The government sought to modernise the sector through various initiatives, but many rural communities remained reliant on traditional agricultural methods, creating a complex dynamic between modernity and tradition (Fokou, 2021). The historical context reveals how plantation agriculture has not only shaped economic structures but also affected social hierarchies and cultural identities within Cameroonian society.

Cultural royalties and tribute payments have long been integral components of social organisation in many African societies. These practices often serve as mechanisms for redistributing wealth and maintaining social cohesion within communities (Afolabi, 2022). Research indicates that tribute systems can reinforce the authority of traditional leaders while simultaneously providing a safety net for vulnerable populations. In many cases, tribute payments are linked to land use rights, where farmers acknowledge the authority of local chiefs or elders in exchange for access to land (Mohan & Stokke, 2019). Studies have highlighted the role of cultural royalties in preserving cultural heritage and identity amidst modernisation pressures. For instance, in regions where plantation agriculture has taken root, traditional leaders often negotiate with plantation owners to ensure that local customs are respected and that community members benefit from agricultural

developments (Osei-Tutu et al., 2020). This ongoing negotiation illustrates the adaptability of traditional systems in responding to external economic pressures while maintaining their significance within local cultures. To analyse the role of traditional authorities in plantation agriculture areas, an anthropological lens is particularly useful. The theory of structural functionalism provides insights into how traditional authorities operate within a broader socio-economic system. This theoretical framework emphasises that each component of a society plays a role in maintaining stability and order (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). In the context of plantation agriculture in Cameroon, traditional leaders function as mediators between local communities and external economic forces. Traditional authorities are pivotal in negotiating terms with plantation owners, ensuring that community interests are represented while also facilitating development initiatives (Etoh & Tchamyu, 2021). By employing structural functionalism, we can understand how these leaders maintain social cohesion by integrating modern agricultural practices with traditional values. This perspective highlights that while plantation agriculture may disrupt certain aspects of community life, it simultaneously creates opportunities for traditional authorities to assert their relevance and adapt to changing circumstances. The literature surrounding plantation agriculture in Cameroon reveals a complex interplay between historical contexts, cultural practices related to royalties and tributes, and the evolving roles of traditional authorities. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing contemporary challenges faced by rural communities as they navigate the pressures of globalisation and modernisation within their agricultural systems.

III. Methodology

Research design: The research employed a qualitative approach utilising three primary methods: ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and archival research. Ethnographic interviews were conducted to gain deep insights into community members' beliefs, practices, and challenges (Spradley, 2016). These interviews were semi-structured to allow participants to express their thoughts freely while ensuring that key topics relevant to the study were covered. Participant observation complemented the interviews by providing contextual understanding through direct engagement with the communities. Researchers immersed themselves in daily activities, including agricultural practices, local ceremonies, and communal gatherings. This method facilitated a more nuanced understanding of social interactions and cultural expressions (Geertz, 1973). Archival research involved examining historical documents, community records, and previous studies related to the Bamenda Grassfield and Baboute communities. This approach helped contextualise current practices within a historical framework and provided insights into changes over time (Klein & O'Connor, 2020). The combination of these methods allowed for the triangulation of data, enhancing the reliability and depth of findings. Conducting research within traditional communities necessitates careful attention to ethical considerations. Informed consent was a cornerstone of this study; participants were fully briefed about the research objectives and their rights before engaging in interviews or observations (Liamputtong, 2007). Special care was taken to ensure that consent was obtained not only from individual participants but also from community leaders who play a crucial role in local governance. Furthermore, researchers were sensitive to cultural norms and practices during data collection. Efforts were made to respect local customs and traditions, which included adhering to appropriate dress codes during community events and being mindful of local taboos (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The anonymity of participants was guaranteed in all published findings to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality. Lastly, it was important to consider the potential impact of the research on these communities. Researchers aimed to ensure that their work would contribute positively to the communities involved by sharing findings with local stakeholders and fostering discussions about their implications (Smith et al., 2021). By prioritising ethical considerations throughout the research process, this study aimed to uphold the dignity and rights of traditional communities while generating valuable knowledge about their lived experiences.

The population and sample of the study were made up of 134 participants. The participants were selected based on purposive and snowball techniques, and saturation was determined when we noticed no new themes were emerging in the interviews, as well as redundancy of information. **Data analysis:** the study employed the hermeneutic-interpretative approach to data collection through thematic analysis (interpretive description) and steps (coding, axial/recoding, triangulation if applicable).

The study area: The research was conducted in two distinct locations: Bamenda Grassfield and Mbandjock, both situated in the Northwest and Centre regions of Cameroon, respectively. The Bamenda Grassfield is known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse ethnic groups, who maintain traditional

practices alongside modern influences (Ngwa, 2021). This region is characterised by its hilly terrain and fertile land, which support agricultural activities that are central to its communities' livelihoods. In contrast, Mbandjock, located in the Centre Region of Cameroon, offers a different cultural landscape. It is predominantly inhabited by the Baboue people, who have a unique set of traditions and social structures. This area is marked by its proximity to urban centres, which has led to a blend of traditional and contemporary lifestyles (Tchouatcha, 2022). By selecting these two sites, the research aims to capture a comprehensive view of how traditional communities navigate their cultural identities amidst external pressures.

The Concept of Royalty and Tribute

Tribute was not simply a financial obligation; it embodied a complex system of social exchange (Mbaku, 1995). In traditional Bamenda societies, royalties and tributes are payments made by subjects to their Fons. These payments symbolise loyalty, respect, and allegiance to the chieftom. As Fisiy (1995) notes, tributes often come in various forms, including agricultural produce, livestock, and labour. These contributions are not merely economic transactions but are embedded in the social and cultural context of the region.

Roles, Significance and Evolution Over Time

The payment of royalties and tributes serves multiple purposes. First, it reinforces the authority and legitimacy of the traditional leaders. Second, it promotes social cohesion by ensuring that subjects remain connected to their roots and cultural heritage. Third, it aids in the economic sustenance of the chieftaincy, allowing traditional authorities to perform their roles effectively. The practice of royalty and tribute payment has evolved. With the advent of colonialism and subsequent modernisation, the economic and political landscape of the Bamenda Grass Fields underwent significant changes. As Geschiere (1993) observes, the colonial administration co-opted traditional authorities into its governance structures, altering the dynamics of power and tribute. In contemporary times, while some aspects of the traditional tribute system have diminished, others have adapted to the modern context. For instance, monetary payments have increasingly replaced agricultural produce as a form of tribute.

Contemporary Relevance

Today, the practice of royalty and tribute payment continues to hold contemporary relevance, albeit in forms that have adapted to the socio-political and economic realities of modern society. While the nature and magnitude of tributes may have shifted from material wealth to symbolic gestures or regulated contributions, the underlying principle of acknowledging traditional authority remains significant. Traditional rulers, such as the Fon in the Ndop region, continue to command respect and wield considerable influence within their communities, not only as cultural custodians but also as mediators in local governance and conflict resolution. As Konings (2003) observes, the resilience of traditional institutions in the face of expanding modern state structures underscores their enduring social, political, and cultural importance. Far from being relics of the past, these institutions operate alongside formal governmental systems, often filling gaps in local administration and serving as vital channels for community engagement and cohesion. In Ndop, the annual festivals and ceremonial occasions, during which tributes are presented, serve as visible manifestations of this continuity, blending ritualistic practice with social affirmation and reinforcing collective identity. These ceremonies are more than mere formalities; they act as vehicles for intergenerational transmission of values, historical memory, and cultural heritage, ensuring that the symbolic and practical significance of tribute and royalty is maintained even as society evolves. Moreover, the practice adapts to contemporary contexts by incorporating modern expectations of transparency, accountability, and communal participation, reflecting a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. In this sense, royalty and tribute payments are not static cultural artefacts but living institutions that negotiate continuity, legitimacy, and relevance in the 21st century.

Challenges and Criticisms

Despite its enduring cultural and social significance, the practice of royalty and tribute payment is not without its challenges and criticisms, particularly in the context of contemporary governance and socio-economic realities. One major concern is the potential for economic exploitation, where the financial or material obligations placed on community members may disproportionately burden vulnerable populations,

exacerbating existing inequalities. This can be especially pronounced in regions where economic opportunities are limited and where tribute payments represent a significant portion of household resources. Social inequality is another critical issue, as the system of tribute may reinforce hierarchical structures that privilege elites while marginalising the less powerful, potentially creating tensions within communities. Furthermore, the centralisation of authority in traditional institutions sometimes opens avenues for the abuse of power, with accusations of mismanagement, favouritism, or corruption undermining the legitimacy of the practice. Scholars like Jua (2002) emphasise the necessity of adopting a balanced approach that preserves the cultural and symbolic importance of these institutions while simultaneously addressing the demands of fairness, transparency, and accountability in modern socio-economic contexts. In addition, the intersection of traditional authority with state governance can create legal ambiguities, raising questions about the compatibility of customary practices with formal legal frameworks, democratic principles, and human rights standards. These challenges suggest that while tribute and royalty systems are vital for maintaining cultural continuity, they must evolve in ways that mitigate potential harms, promote inclusivity, and ensure that the benefits of such practices are shared equitably across the community. By negotiating these tensions, traditional authorities can sustain their legitimacy and continue to play a constructive role in contemporary society, demonstrating that cultural heritage and modern governance need not be mutually exclusive.

Various forms of royalties/tributes

1. Financial Contributions:

Table 1: In the present day, financial contributions have become a significant form of tribute and royalty. These contributions can be categorised as follows

Financial Contributions	Descriptive explanation
Royal Taxes:	These are fixed annual payments levied by the chief on all households within his domain. The amount of tax varies based on factors like land ownership, wealth, and occupation.
Special Levies:	These are occasional payments imposed by the chief for specific purposes, such as funding community projects, supporting cultural events, or assisting individuals in need.
Royal Gifts:	These are voluntary contributions made by individuals to the chief, often during ceremonies or to express gratitude for services rendered

(Source: Field Data.2020)

The classification of financial contributions into royal taxes, special levies, and royal gifts reflects a structured socio-economic system in which monetary exchange serves both governance and cultural purposes. Royal taxes represent a formalised and institutionalised mechanism of revenue generation, reinforcing the authority of the chief while ensuring communal accountability. Their differentiation based on land ownership, wealth, and occupation illustrates an attempt to align fiscal obligations with social hierarchy and economic capacity, thereby maintaining balance and fairness within the community. This system not only sustains the administrative and ceremonial functions of traditional leadership but also symbolises the continuity of indigenous governance practices adapted to contemporary financial realities. Conversely, special levies and royal gifts highlight the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Special levies embody collective responsibility and solidarity, mobilising resources for communal welfare and development, whereas royal gifts express individual loyalty, gratitude, and social recognition. These forms of contribution blur the line between economic transaction and cultural obligation, transforming monetary offerings into instruments of social cohesion and legitimacy. However, they also raise questions of equity and transparency, as the distinction between voluntary and obligatory payments may become ambiguous. Overall, the system of financial contributions functions as both a tool of governance and a symbol of socio-cultural interdependence, reflecting how traditional authority negotiates its relevance in modern economic and political contexts

2. Services and Labour

Table 2: *The prevalence of forced labour has diminished due to the influence of modern labour laws; the tradition of service continues in a more voluntary format. These services include*

Services and Labour	Descriptive explanation
Community Development:	Subjects are expected to contribute labour and resources for community projects, including road construction, school maintenance, and health centre improvements. This demonstrates the chief's commitment to the development of the region.
• Labour	Subjects were obliged to contribute labour for tasks like building projects, clearing roads, and maintaining the chief's palace. This ensured the upkeep of the infrastructure and the upkeep of the chief's estate.
Cultural Events	Individuals participate in cultural events such as festivals, weddings, and funerals, often contributing labour and resources to ensure the success of these events. This reinforces cultural traditions and fosters social cohesion.
Rituals and Ceremonies:	Subjects are expected to participate in rituals and ceremonies that mark significant events in the life of the chief, demonstrating respect and allegiance.
•Military Service:	In times of conflict, subjects were obligated to serve in the chief's army. This ensured the defence of the kingdom and maintained the chief's military prowess.
• Artisanal Products	Skilled artisans were expected to offer a portion of their crafts, such as woven mats, pottery, and wood carvings, to the chief. These items were used for trade, as gifts for dignitaries, or as adornments within the chief's compound.

(Source: Field Data 2020)

The evolution of services and labour from obligatory to voluntary forms reflects a significant socio-political transition within traditional governance systems influenced by modern legal and economic frameworks. Historically, the compulsory provision of labour for community and royal projects reinforced the chief's authority and ensured infrastructural upkeep, but it also mirrored hierarchical structures where subjects' roles were defined by duty rather than choice. In the contemporary context, this practice has been reframed as community development participation, an act of civic responsibility rather than subjugation. Such voluntary contributions to communal projects, cultural events, and rituals signify a transformation of traditional obligations into participatory governance mechanisms that sustain both material development and cultural continuity. This shift highlights the adaptive resilience of indigenous governance, aligning traditional values of solidarity and collective work with the principles of modern citizenship and decentralised development. However, while these forms of service preserve cultural cohesion and affirm the moral legitimacy of traditional leadership, they also expose tensions between voluntary engagement and implicit social expectation. The continued participation in rituals, artisanal contributions, and even remnants of military service illustrate how cultural and symbolic power can perpetuate subtle forms of obligation under the guise of communal loyalty. This duality between tradition and modernity, duty and voluntarism raises critical questions about equity, agency, and the balance of power within traditional systems. Ultimately, the persistence of these practices demonstrates how the institution of chieftaincy negotiates relevance in the modern era: by transforming labour from a coercive tool of authority into a symbol of shared identity, cultural pride, and collective responsibility.

3. Land Access and Resource Use

Table 3: Land Access and Resource Use

Land Access and Resource Use	Descriptive explanation
Ground Rent	This is a fixed annual payment levied on individuals for the right to cultivate land within the chief's domain.
Resource Extraction Fees	Individuals or companies extracting resources like timber or minerals must pay a fee to the chief for the right to do so.

Agricultural Produce	This encompassed crops like millet, maize, yams, and groundnuts, along with livestock like goats, sheep, and chickens. The tribute served to ensure the chief's food security and allowed for distribution during festivals and times of need.
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(Source: Field Data 2020)

The chief continues to hold significant control over land allocation and resource utilisation. While individuals have the right to cultivate and utilise land, they are required to pay a form of tribute to the chief for this privilege. Traditional authority underscores the enduring centrality of the chief in the governance of communal resources. By controlling land allocation and levying payments such as ground rent and resource extraction fees, the chief maintains both economic and symbolic authority within the community. This structure reflects a deeply embedded socio-political order where land is not merely an economic asset but a cultural and spiritual inheritance managed in trust for the community. Ground rent, in this sense, functions as a recognition of the chief's custodianship and reinforces social cohesion by linking individual productivity to communal responsibility. Moreover, the collection of agricultural produce as tribute sustains not only the chief's household but also serves redistributive and ceremonial purposes, ensuring food security and reinforcing the chief's role as both a leader and a benefactor during communal events and times of crisis. Nevertheless, this system also reveals inherent tensions between traditional stewardship and modern concepts of property rights and resource governance. While it promotes communal solidarity and accountability, the concentration of authority in the chief's hands can lead to power imbalances, exploitation, or opaque resource management practices, especially when external actors such as companies engage in resource extraction. As land increasingly gains economic value in the modern market economy, the traditional tribute system faces challenges of legitimacy, fairness, and sustainability. Thus, the contemporary relevance of such practices depends on how effectively chiefs balance their cultural role as custodians of communal welfare with transparent, equitable, and participatory approaches to land and resource management in a rapidly transforming socio-economic context.

The reciprocal relationship between the chief and his subjects, as described by Nyamnjoh (2005), represents a foundational element of traditional governance in the Ndop Plain, where authority and obligation were mutually reinforcing. The chief's provision of protection, justice, and leadership was not merely administrative but deeply moral and symbolic, embodying the social contract that legitimised his rule. By ensuring safety and well-being, the chief upheld his responsibility as the custodian of communal harmony and continuity. This mutual exchange of tribute for protection fostered social cohesion and interdependence, ensuring that political authority was grounded in service rather than coercion. It also reflects an indigenous form of governance where leadership was both spiritual and pragmatic, integrating moral responsibility with economic and judicial functions to sustain equilibrium within the community. However, while this traditional reciprocity nurtured solidarity and legitimacy in a precolonial context, it also relied heavily on hierarchical structures that could obscure issues of accountability and representation. As societies modernise, the traditional balance between authority and service becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, especially when chiefs' roles intersect with state institutions and market dynamics. The ideal of reciprocal obligation can thus risk becoming symbolic rather than practical if the chief's leadership no longer translates into tangible benefits for the people. Consequently, a critical understanding of this system must recognise both its cohesive potential and its limitations: it provides a moral framework for leadership rooted in communal ethics, yet it must adapt to contemporary expectations of transparency, inclusivity, and participatory governance to maintain its relevance in modern socio-political structures.

IV. Cultural Royalties and Tribute Payments in Bamenda Grass Field

Royalty and tribute payments to traditional authorities have long been integral aspects of the socio-cultural and economic fabric in various African societies. Cultural royalties and tribute payments have long been a part of the traditional authority structure in Cameroon, particularly in plantation agriculture areas such as the Bamenda grass field in general and the Ndop plains, where rice is farmed by the UNVDA Ndop. These payments play a significant role in maintaining the social order and preserving cultural heritage in these communities. Cultural royalties and tribute payments contribute to the traditional authority structure in the Bamenda grass field region. The Bamenda Grassfield region is known for its rich cultural heritage and

traditional governance systems. The area has a long history of plantation agriculture, with crops like coffee, rice, and oil palm being major sources of income for the local population. In this context, cultural royalties and tribute payments have been used as a means of recognising the authority of traditional leaders and ensuring the continued prosperity of the community. These institutions, headed by powerful Fons, play a significant role in the social and political fabric of the region. One aspect of this intricate structure is the system of tribute and royalty payments, a practice deeply interwoven with the history, economy, and daily lives of the people.

Contribution to the traditional authority structure

The system of cultural royalties and tribute payments in the Bamenda Grassfield region serves to reinforce the authority of traditional leaders and maintain social cohesion within the community. By making these payments, individuals acknowledge the legitimacy of traditional governance structures and contribute to the maintenance of cultural traditions. According to Amin (2008), cultural royalties and tribute payments are essential for preserving the power dynamics within traditional authority structures. Amin argues that these payments serve as a form of social contract between traditional leaders and their subjects, ensuring that the authority of the former is respected and upheld. Furthermore, Ngoh (2005) highlights in his work "Tradition and Change in the Political Structure of Bamenda" that cultural royalties and tribute payments play a crucial role in maintaining the economic stability of the community. Ngoh notes that these payments help to fund important community projects, such as schools, healthcare facilities, and infrastructure development.

The Fon: Custodian of Tradition and Land

The Fon, in the Ndop villages, holds a unique and powerful position within the community. They are not merely rulers; they are the custodians of tradition, the keepers of the ancestral wisdom that shapes the lives of their people. This position also grants them the authority over land ownership, a crucial element in the Ndop Plain where fertile land is a valuable resource. The Fon's role as proprietor of land is not simply a matter of legal ownership; it carries profound cultural weight. It reflects a deep connection to the land, to the ancestral spirits who are believed to reside within it, and to the well-being of the community. The Fon's authority over land is not simply about controlling access; it is about ensuring its responsible management and preservation for future generations.

Encouraging Rice Production: The Fon's Stewardship

Recognising the importance of rice farming for the economic well-being of the Ndop Plain, the Fons actively encourage its development. They do so by making land available for rice cultivation, often setting aside specific areas for this purpose. Examples abound: the back palace rice farm in Bamunka, where even the Fon's wives cultivate rice, the Tih Nkong, Ntenkar, and Nseimie farms in Bamessing, the Mann farm in Bamali, and the recent allocation of land to ECOFARMS in Bambalang. This allocation of land is not simply a gesture of benevolence; it is an act of stewardship. The Fon demonstrate their commitment to the prosperity of their people by facilitating access to fertile land, particularly those areas suitable for rice cultivation. This act also underscores the Fon's deep understanding of the economic importance of rice farming, which provides sustenance, income, and a vital link to the land itself.

Royalty to the Fon: A Symbolic Exchange

In return for the Fon's support and land allocation, farmers are expected to pay a "royalty" at the end of each harvest season. This royalty, traditionally a bucket of rice per farmer, signifies a reciprocal exchange between the community and their leader. This practice, however, goes beyond a simple economic transaction. It carries deep cultural and symbolic meaning

Table 4: Royalty to the Fon: A Symbolic Exchange

Royalty to the Fon: A Symbolic Exchange	Descriptive explanation
Recognition of Authority	: The royalty payment acknowledges the Fon's authority over the land and their role as protectors of the community. It is a

	symbolic act of respect and allegiance.
Sharing in Prosperity	The Fon, as the custodian of the land and the well-being of the community, receives a share of the harvest, signifying their role in the collective prosperity of the village.
Social Cohesion	The act of paying royalties reinforces a sense of social cohesion. It fosters a sense of mutual responsibility and shared fate between the Fon and their subjects.

(Source: Field Data 2020)

The payment of royalty to the Fon represents a deeply symbolic institution that intertwines governance, culture, and spirituality within the social fabric of traditional societies. Far from being a mere economic transaction, it embodies recognition of the Fon's authority as both a political leader and spiritual guardian of the land. This gesture of allegiance reinforces the legitimacy of the Fon's leadership by expressing collective respect and submission to customary order. Moreover, the sharing of harvests as tribute underlines a moral economy grounded in reciprocity, where prosperity is perceived as a communal achievement rather than individual success. Through this system, the Fon's role extends beyond administration to embody moral stewardship, ensuring that wealth, fertility, and fortune are distributed in ways that sustain collective well-being and reaffirm ancestral values of unity and gratitude. Nevertheless, while the royalty system promotes cohesion and respect for traditional hierarchy, it also raises critical questions about its adaptation and equity in modern governance contexts. The symbolic nature of this exchange can conceal asymmetrical power relations, especially when allegiance is expected but reciprocity becomes uneven or politicised. As economic structures evolve and notions of individual rights and property gain prominence, the continued practice of paying royalties requires re-interpretation to maintain its relevance and fairness. To remain meaningful, it must transition from a purely hierarchical symbol to a participatory expression of cultural solidarity where the Fon's authority is legitimised not just by tradition, but by transparent leadership and tangible contributions to the collective prosperity of the people.

Sanctions and Enforcement: Maintaining Harmony and Beyond the Bucket of Rice, Cultural Relevance and Modernity

The system of royalty payments also carries a strong element of social control. The farm committees, established in each village, are responsible for overseeing the distribution of land, ensuring fair practices, and collecting the royalty payments. Failure to pay the royalty can result in serious sanctions, including the potential seizure of a rice farm. This system of enforcement, while seeming harsh, is rooted in the belief that maintaining order and upholding the social contract is essential for the well-being of the community. The sanctions serve as a deterrent to exploitation, ensure the Fon's authority is upheld, and reinforce the importance of communal harmony. While the royalty payment appears simple, it represents a complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors. It reflects a deeply ingrained system of reciprocal exchange that has shaped the relationship between traditional authority and the people of the Ndop Plain for generations. The practice of royalty payments to the Fon continues to hold relevance in the modern context. While the Ndop Plain has seen the introduction of modern agricultural techniques and the rise of commercial rice farming, the traditional system remains largely intact. This suggests that the system possesses a unique resilience and adaptability, reflecting its profound cultural significance. In return, the chief provided protection, justice, and leadership, ensuring the safety and well-being of his subjects (Nyamnjoh, 2005). This reciprocal relationship was ingrained in the social fabric of the Ndop Plain, reinforcing the chief's authority and fostering a sense of communal responsibility. The system of tribute and royalty payments in the Ndop Plain is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that continues to shape the social, economic, and political landscape of the region. While the forms of these payments have evolved, the underlying principles of reciprocity and social responsibility remain relevant. This system demonstrates the enduring power of traditional institutions within the modern context and highlights the ongoing interplay.

V. Cultural Royalties and Tribute Payments in Baboute Communities in Mbandjock

The central region of Cameroon, particularly the areas surrounding the cities of Mbandjock, where the Baboute, and Yezoum live, is characterised by a rich tapestry of cultural practices rooted in ancient traditions. The Mbandjock sub-division exhibits a complex interplay between traditional authority and the

economic activities of its inhabitants. These communities, governed by powerful Chiefs, continue to uphold a system of tribute and royalty payments, reflecting the intricate relationship between the traditional authority and its subjects. Royalties and tributes paid to traditional authorities have a relation to the interaction between smallholder farming and grazing activities. The chiefs and their communities hold significant authority over land and resources, including those used for agriculture. This control is rooted in a deep connection to the land and its ancestral significance. This authority allows them to manage access to resources, ensuring both sustainable use and the equitable distribution of benefits.

Mechanisms of Regulation and Land Access Royalties

To regulate access to land for agricultural activities, such as grazing and plantation farming, the Mbandjock culture permits the traditional authorities to establish a system of royalties and tributes. These payments acknowledge the authority of the chief and serve as a mechanism for ensuring that resource use benefits the entire community. However, there are several types of royalties and tributes in this locality. The fertile soils, diverse topography, and favourable climate of Mbandjock support a variety of agricultural activities, including smallholder farming and cattle rearing. This shared reliance on land resources has led to a symbiotic relationship, yet presents challenges regarding resource access and conflict prevention. In Mbandjock, the traditional ruler (often the chief or a council of elders) plays a vital role in regulating resource use and managing conflicts between farmers and grazers. This role is manifested through the practice of collecting royalties and tributes from cattle owners. Grazing rights are typically regulated through annual tributes paid by cattle owners to the chiefs of the villages where they graze their herds. This payment, often in the form of livestock, cash, or other valuable goods, grants access to pastureland within the chief's jurisdiction. These payments act as a form of compensation for potential damage to crops and for the utilization of resources within the chief's domain. In return, the traditional authorities also act as intermediaries between farmers and grazers. They are responsible for resolving conflicts that arise from cattle damage to crops. This mediating role ensures a balance between the needs of farmers and the economic activity of grazing. These payments acknowledge the traditional authority's control over land and resources and serve as a mechanism for regulating access and ensuring sustainable use. The practice of paying royalties and tributes to traditional authorities demonstrates a long-standing system for regulating resource use and conflict prevention. This traditional mechanism helps to maintain a balance between the needs of smallholder farmers and the economic viability of grazing activities. The payment of royalties and tributes to traditional authorities in Mbandjock is an integral part of the region's cultural and economic landscape. It demonstrates a long-standing system for regulating resource use and maintaining order in a community dependent on land. While this traditional mechanism has proven effective, it is crucial to evaluate its long-term sustainability in the context of ongoing agricultural development and environmental concerns.

Plantation Establishment Fees and Harvest-Related Royalties

Plantation owners, especially those cultivating large-scale commercial crops, often pay establishment fees to the chiefs for the right to establish their plantations on land within their jurisdiction. These fees acknowledge the chief's authority over the land and contribute to the community's development. Plantations often make contributions towards community development projects. These contributions can include investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, or other initiatives designed to improve the well-being of the community. This practice demonstrates the plantation's commitment to social responsibility and helps to foster a positive image within the community. Subjects were obligated to contribute a portion of their harvests, such as millet, maize, yams, and cassava, to the chief. This ensured the chief's food security and enabled him to distribute resources during times of need or during communal ceremonies. Some communities might require a portion of the harvest from plantation owners as a royalty. This payment can be either in cash or a share of the crop itself, and it reflects the chief's role in ensuring that the community benefits from the economic activities within their domain. In addition to initial land access fees, plantations often make annual tribute payments to the chiefs. These payments can be in the form of cash, goods, or services and are intended to maintain a positive relationship with the traditional authorities and the community. Subjects were expected to provide free labour for tasks like building projects, clearing roads, maintaining the chief's compound, and participating in communal hunts. This contributed to the development of infrastructure and ensured the upkeep of the chief's estate. If conflicts arise between grazers

and farmers, the traditional authorities might impose a fee on the parties involved to mediate the dispute. This payment acknowledges the chief's role as a peacekeeper and ensures that the community remains united and prosperous. In return, the chief provided protection, justice, and leadership to his subjects. He served as the final arbiter in disputes, ensuring social order, and mediating conflicts with neighbouring communities (Dlamini, 2006). This reciprocal relationship was deeply ingrained in the social fabric of these communities, fostering a sense of communal responsibility and reinforcing the chief's authority.

Cultural Significance and Economic Impact

The system of royalties and tributes is deeply embedded in the cultural values and belief systems of the Mbandjock community. These payments are seen as a way to acknowledge the spiritual connection to the land and ensure its long-term sustainability. They also play a significant economic role, generating revenue for the community that can be used for community development, social services, and infrastructure.

Rituals, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Continuity and Agricultural Knowledge

Beyond land allocation, traditional authorities contribute significantly to agricultural productivity through the performance of rituals (Parson, 1949; Mbonji, 2005). These rituals, deeply rooted in the cultural beliefs and practices of the community, are often performed to appease ancestral spirits and ensure bountiful harvests. These practices are passed down through generations, preserving cultural heritage and fostering a connection between the community and the land. A majority of smallholder farmers in Mbandjock perform rituals to their ancestors, seeking blessings for successful harvests. These rituals demonstrate the deep connection between the community and the land, highlighting the influence of cultural beliefs on agricultural practices. The performance of these rituals, often accompanied by specific offerings and prayers, contributes to the community's sense of place and fosters a collective responsibility towards maintaining the land's fertility and productivity. The integration of SOSUCAM, a large-scale agricultural enterprise, in the 1970s led to an intensification of crop cultivation in Mbandjock. While this integration brought new agricultural technologies and practices, it also highlighted the importance of maintaining traditional knowledge systems. The older generation plays a crucial role in transmitting agricultural knowledge, particularly about crop cultivation techniques, to the younger generations. This intergenerational transmission of knowledge ensures the continuity of agricultural practices, promoting resilience and adaptability in the face of changing agricultural landscapes.

Benefits and Challenges

The system of royalties and tributes has both benefits and challenges: Royalties and tributes contribute to the economic development of communities, providing revenue for infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The payments help to foster a cooperative relationship between plantations and traditional authorities, reducing potential conflicts over resource access. Hence, social harmony within the community. The potential for exploitation is becoming very complex. If not carefully managed, the system could be susceptible to exploitation, where plantation owners prioritise profit maximisation over the well-being of the community. Also, the inequitable distribution of tributes is bringing conflicts within the royal families and the community members. The distribution of benefits from royalties and tributes needs to be transparent and equitable to ensure that all community members benefit. The system of royalties and tributes in Mbandjock represents a complex and evolving relationship between traditional authorities and the modern plantation economy. While these payments recognise the authority of chiefs and contribute to community development, they ensure the sustainable use of land resources. While this system has proven effective for generations, it is crucial to ensure its continued relevance and adaptability in the face of changing agricultural landscapes and evolving societal dynamics.

VI. Comparative Analysis

This portion of the article delves into the intricate world of tribute and royalty payments in two distinct regions of Cameroon: Mbandjock (comprising the communities of Baboute and Yezoum) and the Ndop Plain within the Bamenda Grassfields. The modern era has witnessed significant changes in both regions, with the influence of colonialism, globalisation, and economic development impacting traditional practices. Despite these transformations, the systems of tribute and royalty continue to persist, albeit in modified forms:

Similarities

Payment of tributes/royalty is a sign of communion and unity

The payment of tributes or royalties to chiefs and indigenous people in plantation agriculture areas is a practice deeply rooted in cultural heritage. This is a sign of communion, unity, pledge of loyalty and respect for the host community's cultural values. Settlers, big plantation owners, and smallholders who buy land often engage in this tradition as a means of recognising and respecting the ancestral rights and authority of indigenous communities. The payment of tributes contributes to land regulations, the balance of land distribution, and the preservation of ancestral culture. Payment of tributes or royalty is a very strong cultural element of the Yezoum people, like the Baboute communities in Mbandjock. In this cultural zone, tributes are paid to the chiefs, land owners, and the entire village in the different activities practised here. Smallholder farming, being one of the activities practised in Mbandjock, has a great impact on the payment of tributes and royalties to the villagers, chiefs and the representative of the administration in Mbandjock. Therefore, since farming is an economic activity that only begins after land is acquired, variously depending on the financial, political and socio-cultural or traditional power of the individual. In all, the cultural or ecological zones of Cameroon, land can be acquired in any of these methods, that is, via purchase, gifts, transfer or rental basis. In the Mbandjock economy, large hectares of land are acquired by multinational companies for agro-industrial plantations, which pay tributes to the local people in several ways.

This highlights the complex relationship between smallholder agriculture, land acquisition, and the payment of tributes in Mbandjock. On one hand, the payment of tributes by multinational companies and wealthy elites has contributed to the development of infrastructure and services in the community. It has enabled the construction of schools, health centres, roads, and other amenities that benefit the local population. However, on the other hand, the acquisition of land by political and wealthy elites often leads to the displacement of local villagers who rely on the land for subsistence farming. These farmers are left with no means of livelihood and are forced to seek alternative sources of income, leading to increased poverty and food insecurity. The most recent phenomenon of land acquisition is through land grabbing by the political and wealthy elite class, who return to their potentially prosperous rural areas and, in complicity with the traditional and administrative authorities, seize large hectares of land from the local inhabitants who only use it for subsistence in the sense that they have to pay tributes to the chiefs. This practice has often led the poor farmers or local exploiters of the environmental resource to be abandoned to their selves when their land is grabbed by resourceful elites. This situation prevails in Mbandjock sub-division, as customary land had been seized from the poor villagers in Nio Baboute and Ndjore. Many of these elites pay allegiance to traditional authorities, especially to their powerful chiefs. This is purposely to gain protection and recognition of their rights to the land acquired with the help of the Chiefs and, at times, some administrative authorities. In another consideration, villagers who pay allegiance to chiefs are routinely doing it not necessarily for land matters but rather for normal cultural rights. This depends on the hegemonic powers and the internal reputation and influence within the village sphere.

Land regulations and the balance of land distribution

The payment of tributes plays a crucial role in establishing land regulations and ensuring a balanced distribution of land. By acknowledging the authority of chiefs and indigenous people, settlers and plantation owners recognise their historical connections to the land. It also helps to make land available for settlers who initially do not have land. It therefore demonstrates a symbol of unity, sharing, cohesion and love between the indigenous and settlers' communities. This practice helps maintain a sense of living together, ownership and stewardship, preventing encroachment and unauthorised land acquisitions. Additionally, tribute payments can contribute to the equitable distribution of land, as they provide a means for indigenous communities to receive compensation for the use of their ancestral territories. Smith (2016) argues that tribute payments in plantation agriculture areas can perpetuate inequalities if settlers lack bargaining power in negotiating fair terms with chiefs and indigenous people. Lack of transparency and accountability in the collection and distribution of tributes can exacerbate tensions between settlers and indigenous communities (White, 2019). Brown (2018) highlights the challenges faced by smallholders in negotiating fair tribute payments, leading to unequal compensation for their produce. Grey (2019) emphasises the need for clear agreements and mechanisms for dispute resolution to protect smallholders from exploitative practices.

Preservation of ancestral culture

Tribute payments also serve as a means of preserving ancestral culture in plantation agriculture areas. The practice reinforces the importance of indigenous traditions, customs, and knowledge systems. By engaging in tribute payments, settlers, big plantation owners, and smallholders demonstrate their respect for the cultural heritage of indigenous communities. This recognition fosters a sense of pride and identity among indigenous people, contributing to the preservation and transmission of their cultural practices from one generation to another. The phenomenon of paying tributes to local authorities is an age-old tradition in African society. It is often required that for any venture to be established in an area, there must be an agreement between the executors and the local authorities of the area. This memorandum often includes a compensation plan. The case is not different from plantation agriculture in Mbandjock. Plantation owners as well as smallholder planters are required to pay an earlier agreed sum to traditional rulers of localities where they operate as tributes or royalty. It happened especially when they buy large farms of hundreds of hectares and or when the smallholders rent the land to cultivate. At times, tributes are paid in forms other than money, such as the employment of members of the royal family in the management of the estate. This satisfies the principle of natural resource exploitation and management, which provides that locals must be part of and reap the benefits of the exploitation process, beginning with the native authorities. However, the payment of tributes in Cameroon is often an affair of private plantation farmers, as state cooperation, such as SOSUCAM, established as far back as the 70s carry on its activities in most parts of this region without paying much allegiance to the traditional authorities. Nevertheless, money or other benefits which come from plantation owners remain a huge source of livelihood for local chiefs and their families. In Mbandjock, SOSUCAM pay tributes to the local people and chiefs through the SOSUCAM foundation. According to one of our informants,

The SOSUCAM foundation, every year, as a means of paying tributes or loyalty to the people of this Mbandjock sub-division, assists local farmers by giving them hybrid seeds in maize, cassava, etc. They open earth roads that link the villages to Mbandjock urban centre, especially in Ndo village, they assist in the infrastructure of the schools, both primary and secondary schools, and pay teachers of primary school in Ndo. They even go as far as buying books, pens and giving scholarships to students here. (Interview in Mbandjock).

The SOSUCAM Foundation's social interventions in Mbandjock reveal a deep hermeneutic context rooted in gratitude, reciprocity, and the quest for legitimacy. Their annual gestures, such as distributing hybrid seeds, constructing roads, supporting schools, and offering scholarships, are not merely philanthropic actions but symbolic expressions of tribute and loyalty toward the host community. Within this interpretive horizon, these acts signify an acknowledgement of the community's authority and custodianship over the land. The foundation's actions thus transcend economic motives to assume the nature of moral recognition and social integration. This interplay between corporate benevolence and cultural reciprocity forms the core intentionality of the text: a deliberate merging of economic interest with socio-cultural responsibility in a postcolonial setting where legitimacy must be continuously negotiated through acts of giving and acknowledgement. The notion of "*paying tributes or loyalty*" encapsulates this relationship as a ritualised exchange that reverses traditional hierarchies of power. Instead of communities paying homage to corporate power, the corporation symbolically submits to local legitimacy by "*assisting*" and "*supporting*" its host population. This inversion reflects a "*moral economy of exchange*" in which development replaces cash or produces as the currency of tribute. Providing hybrid seeds to local farmers, for instance, illustrates both generosity and subtle dependency: it modernises local agricultural practices through technological transfer, yet it also positions farmers as beneficiaries within a paternalistic framework. Hermeneutically, such gestures project an image of empowerment while maintaining structural asymmetries of control and influence. The language of "assistance" conceals these contradictions, expressing a benevolent corporate identity while reinforcing dependency relationships that tie the community's well-being to corporate goodwill.

In this same light, the concept of "*tribute payment*" extends beyond symbolic recognition into tangible infrastructural and educational interventions. The construction of earth roads linking rural villages to Mbandjock urban centre, particularly in Ndo, functions both materially and metaphorically as a bridge between tradition and modernity. It represents integration and developmental visibility, allowing rural communities to access urban resources while enabling the company to penetrate local spaces more efficiently. The foundation's support for schools building classrooms, paying teachers, and supplying

learning materials further demonstrates a strategy of moral self-legitimation. Through education, SOSUCAM positions itself as an agent of progress and a custodian of future generations, fostering a sense of belonging and shared destiny between corporate structures and local social life. Thus, these tributes, in their many forms, serve to renew and stabilise the moral contract that sustains coexistence between industrial actors and indigenous communities. The payment of tributes to chiefs and indigenous people in plantation agriculture areas such as Mbandjock is, therefore, a *“cultural heritage practice deeply intertwined with land regulation, ancestral identity, and social cohesion.”* It embodies a complex dialogue between modern corporate governance and traditional authority systems. However, challenges persist, including power imbalances, a lack of transparency, and unequal negotiation capacities between communities and corporations. A hermeneutic interpretation of these dynamic calls for fair negotiation processes and transparent mechanisms that recognise the historical and cultural significance of tribute payments. Incorporating diverse perspectives from scholars, policymakers, and local stakeholders can help shape policies that promote *“sustainable and inclusive agricultural development”* while safeguarding ancestral traditions. Ultimately, these collaborative efforts can transform tribute payment practices from instruments of dependency into frameworks of mutual respect, preserving cultural heritage while ensuring equitable benefits for all actors in the agricultural system.

Financial Contributions and Community Development

Both regions have seen the emergence of financial contributions as a dominant form of tribute. This includes royal taxes levied on households, special levies imposed for specific purposes, and voluntary royal gifts. This shift reflects the increasing monetisation of economies and the growing emphasis on financial resources within traditional authority structures. The concept of community development projects, financed through tribute payments. This includes contributions to infrastructure projects, educational facilities, and healthcare services. This reflects the ongoing role of traditional authorities in ensuring the well-being of their communities. The setting up of plantations also resulted in the extension of electricity power lines to these areas, which previously did not have electricity. All these facilities have been beneficial not only to the plantation owners and their workers but also to the indigenes of Mbandjock. These facilities are like tributes or royalty payments to the local people for the exploitation of their land. For example, because of the introduction of plantation here, many schools have been opened, which made it possible for several youths to be educated who could have otherwise been illiterate. Mbandjock, which never had schools, saw its first schools put up when SOSUCAM was created. This not only fostered education by providing infrastructure but also by helping natives cater for the expenses through employment as plantation workers. This is affirmed by one of our informants, who said,

Before the coming of SOSUCAM in Mbandjock, we had no schools talk let of medical facilities. The few children that went to school did so either in Nanga, Obala and or Yaoundé. When someone was sick, mostly indigenous medicine was used, and only those who were considered wealthy could go to Yaoundé for their treatment. Another advantage that we local people have benefited from plantations is that we can also respond to some of our social problems instead of waiting for the reaction of the central government. With the coming of SOSUCAM and small-scale farms now in Mbandjock, the government started opening establishments, hospitals and leisure spaces.....let me tell you, we did not even have roads, but SOSUCAM helped and opened roads leading to this village, Ndo and Doua. They maintain it every year. We can now transport our crops to the market with the help of SOSUCAM vans. We can also cite donations of all kinds to orphanages and poor households. So, smallholder farming and plantation agriculture have changed Mbandjock seriously. (Interview in Ndo 2020).

The excerpt reflects a profound *“hermeneutic horizon of transformation, dependency, and gratitude,”* where the arrival of SOSUCAM is interpreted not merely as an economic event but as a *“civilizational turning point”* in the life of the Mbandjock community. The speaker contrasts the *“before”* and *“after”* realities to construct a narrative of *“modernisation and deliverance”*, portraying the pre-SOSUCAM era as one of deprivation, isolation, and reliance on indigenous knowledge systems. The expressions *“we had no school talk let of medical facilities”* and *“mostly indigenous medicine was used”* reveal a symbolic transition from traditional self-reliance to modern institutional dependence. In hermeneutic terms, this discourse signifies the *epistemological displacement* of local knowledge and the *valorisation of Western infrastructures*, schools, hospitals, and roads as the markers of progress and development. The narrative thus encodes a

moral geography of progress, where proximity to corporate structures equates to civilisation and distance from them to marginality. The coming of SOSUCAM is interpreted as a form of *salvific intervention*, bringing light, access, and hope to a people once neglected by the state. This also highlights a latent critique of government inefficiency where the corporation substitutes the absent state, assuming the moral and social responsibilities of governance. At a deeper interpretative level, the speaker's testimony constructs a postcolonial narrative of corporate paternalism that is simultaneously empowering and dependent. Expressions such as "*SOSUCAM helps and opens roads,*" "*they maintain it every year,*" and "*we can now transport our crops with the help of SOSUCAM vans*" articulate a relationship of reciprocal gratitude framed within asymmetrical power dynamics. The company is perceived as both benefactor and enabler; its interventions not only improve livelihoods but also regulate the rhythms of social and economic life in Mbandjock. The provision of infrastructure, donations, and social amenities symbolises a moral economy of exchange, where loyalty and legitimacy are reciprocated through gratitude and cooperation. Yet, hermeneutically, beneath this surface of appreciation lies an enduring "*dependency discourse*": the community's progress remains contingent upon corporate goodwill rather than autonomous agency or state accountability. The speaker's concluding statement, "*smallholder farming and plantation agriculture have changed Mbandjock seriously*", encapsulates this dual reality. It affirms material transformation while implicitly normalising corporate dominance as the principal engine of development. Thus, the text becomes a "*cultural narrative of negotiated modernity*", where traditional identity, corporate power, and state absence intersect, producing a hybrid form of socio-economic belonging that is both empowering and constraining.

. According to one of our informants:

Employment is another area in which rice production has equally intervened in the development of Ndop. That is to say, with the coming of the U.N.V.D. In the early 1970s, and the cultivation of rice, many sons and daughters from this region and the country at large gained either direct or indirect jobs. Due to this activity in the subdivision, about four thousand jobs have been created. (Interview in Ndop 2015).

The excerpt reveals a hermeneutic horizon of economic transformation, social mobility, and collective empowerment anchored in the historical emergence of rice cultivation under the U.N.V.D. project in Ndop. The speaker frames rice production as both an economic and symbolic intervention, an activity that not only generates income but redefines the social identity and dignity of the people. The expression "*employment is another area in which rice production has equally intervened*" constructs development as a form of purposeful action, where agriculture becomes an *agent* of change rather than a mere subsistence practice. The reference to the 1970s situates this transformation within a temporal narrative of modernisation, implying that the U.N.V.D. initiative marked the beginning of Ndop's integration into a national and global economic system. Phrases such as "*many sons and daughters... gained either direct or indirect jobs*" convey a collective sense of pride and belonging, portraying employment not only as economic empowerment but as social inclusion and moral recognition within the larger national development discourse. Hermeneutically, the mention of "*about four thousand jobs created*" serves as a quantitative testimony of transformation, reinforcing a sense of progress and legitimacy tied to institutional intervention. Yet beneath this narrative of prosperity lies a subtle subtext of dependency on external structures, a reminder that development is framed through the presence of external agencies rather than endogenous community initiatives. The overall meaning thus transcends the literal economic benefit to reflect a symbolic transformation of Ndop's social fabric, where the introduction of rice cultivation through U.N.V.D. represents a passage from marginality to participation, from traditional agrarian life to a modern economy anchored in employment, productivity, and national integration.

The UNVDA employs approximately 148 direct workers, who are integral to the management and operational aspects of rice cultivation. These positions include agricultural specialists, field workers, and administrative staff who ensure that operations run smoothly. Additionally, the agency hires more than 500 seasonal workers during peak planting and harvesting seasons. This seasonal employment is crucial for local families who rely on these opportunities to supplement their incomes. Furthermore, the ripple effect of rice production extends to about 1,500 rice farmers who engage in cultivation independently or in partnership with the UNVDA. This large number of farmers contributes significantly to local employment, as they often require labourers to assist in various farming activities. Approximately 1,000 labourers find work on these farms, contributing to the local economy while gaining valuable skills. In addition to direct farming roles,

there are about 1,000 individuals involved in business activities related to rice production. These include traders, rice mill owners, and commercial agents who play a vital role in the supply chain. Their presence ensures that rice produced in Ndop reaches markets efficiently, further solidifying the region's economic standing. As Ndop continues to evolve economically, it serves as a model for how targeted agricultural programs can address unemployment and stimulate local economies. The ongoing collaboration between UNVDA and the people of Ndop underscores the importance of community engagement in achieving sustainable development goals. In conclusion, the UNVDA's initiatives not only provide immediate employment opportunities but also pave the way for long-term economic resilience and social cohesion within the community.

Cultural Events and Social Cohesion

Both regions continue to recognise the importance of cultural events, with tribute payments playing a crucial role in supporting festivals, weddings, and funerals. This ensures the continuity of traditional practices and strengthens social cohesion. The practice of contributing to the chief's welfare serves as a mechanism to maintain social cohesion and foster a sense of communal responsibility. Tribute payments in Ndop serve as a mechanism that reinforces social bonds and cultural identity. Farmers often pay homage to local deities and ancestors through these tributes, which symbolise their respect for the land and its spiritual significance. As one local farmer noted,

“Paying tribute is not just about fulfilling a duty; it’s a way to show gratitude to the spirits that bless our fields.” (Interview in Ndop 2015). *“The cleansing ritual has been of utmost importance because it has helped to revive many farmers who would have been dead for killing any reptile unknowingly.”*

This excerpt unfolds within a hermeneutic horizon of spirituality, morality, and ecological consciousness, where tribute and ritual embody the deep interconnection between human existence, the land, and the spiritual order. The expression *“paying tribute is not just about fulfilling a duty; it’s a way to show gratitude to the spirits that bless our fields”* reveals a worldview in which agriculture transcends material production to become a sacred dialogue between humans and nature, mediated by ancestral and spiritual forces. Here, tribute functions as a symbolic act of reciprocity, a moral acknowledgement of the invisible entities that sustain fertility and balance within the ecosystem. It transforms economic activity into a ritual of communion, reaffirming belonging and respect for the spiritual ecology of the land. The second expression, *“the cleansing ritual has been of utmost importance because it has helped to revive many farmers who would have been dead for killing any reptile unknowingly,”* introduces the hermeneutic of purification and moral restoration, where rituals act as mediators between guilt, survival, and cosmic order. The killing of a reptile, a sacred or totemic being, disrupts the moral and ecological equilibrium, and the cleansing ritual symbolically restores harmony, safeguarding both human life and the environment. Together, these statements reflect a holistic ontology where agriculture, spirituality, and morality are inseparable, guided by the principles of reverence, restitution, and continuity. Hermeneutically, the text reveals a cosmocentric philosophy rooted in indigenous epistemology, one that interprets human welfare as dependent on moral alignment with the natural and spiritual world. This interpretation highlights the ethical ecology of traditional agrarian life in Ndop, where rituals and tributes are not mere customs but integral expressions of gratitude, ecological sustainability, and communal resilience. This deep-rooted belief system fosters a sense of community, where mutual obligation plays a crucial role in agricultural practices. The cultural significance of tribute payments also extends to the management of natural resources. By recognising the spiritual connection between the land and its inhabitants, farmers are more inclined to adopt sustainable practices that honour their heritage. This respect for nature is reflected in their reluctance to harm certain creatures considered sacred, such as reptiles like chameleons and snakes.

Preservation of Tradition

Tribute payments are deeply intertwined with cultural heritage, embodying values of respect, loyalty, and mutual obligation. The cultivation of rice in Ndop is deeply intertwined with the cultural heritage of its people. This relationship is particularly evident through the practice of tribute payments and the reverence for local customs and beliefs. These elements embody values such as respect, loyalty, and mutual obligation, which are vital for both agricultural productivity and the preservation of tradition. In Ndop, certain creatures are viewed as protectors of the land, embodying the region's spiritual beliefs. Reptiles like the chameleon and snakes (referred to as "wangnse" in the Nsei dialect) are treated with particular attention. The belief that

killing these creatures could result in punishment from the gods significantly impacts farming practices. As articulated by Melengfe (2001), “The people do not kill these creatures for fear that they will be punished by the gods.” This reverence leads to a paradox: while it protects sacred creatures, it can also hinder agricultural productivity. Farmers often face challenges due to this cultural belief. For example, if a farmer accidentally kills a sacred reptile, they must undergo a cleansing ritual to avoid divine retribution. This ritual is essential, as one farmer explained.

“The cleansing ritual has been of utmost importance because it has helped to revive many farmers who would have been dead for killing any reptile unknowingly.” (Interview in Ndop 2015). *“The cleansing ritual has been of utmost importance because it has helped to revive many farmers who would have been dead for killing any reptile unknowingly.”* (Interview in Ndop 2015).

This excerpt can be interpreted within a framework of spirituality, morality, and communal cosmology, where ritual practice functions as both a protective and restorative mechanism within the agrarian society of Ndop. The repetition of the statement, *“the cleansing ritual has been of utmost importance because it has helped to revive many farmers who would have been dead for killing any reptile unknowingly,”* emphasises the moral and existential significance of such rites. Killing a reptile, perceived as a sacred or spiritually potent being, represents a transgression against the moral and ecological order, which could have dire consequences for the individual and community. The cleansing ritual thus operates as a mediating process of reconciliation, restoring harmony between humans, the spiritual realm, and the natural environment, effectively preventing harm or death. Hermeneutically, this practice reflects a worldview in which life, morality, and ecological balance are deeply intertwined, and where ritual knowledge provides a framework for navigating uncertainties and enforcing communal ethics. It also signals the communal recognition of vulnerability and interdependence, suggesting that survival is not solely a matter of physical labour or skill but is intimately linked to spiritual observance and adherence to traditional moral codes. This interpretive lens positions the ritual as a central element of social and ecological governance, illustrating how cultural practices encode ethical, protective, and restorative functions that sustain both human life and environmental integrity.

Such practices not only preserve cultural traditions but also create an environment where farmers are motivated to continue rice production despite potential setbacks. Cultural taboos also play a significant role in shaping agricultural practices in Ndop. For instance, working on traditional Sundays is considered taboo across various villages, which limits the number of productive days available for farming. As one villager stated, “These days prevent rice farmers from working, which limits our production compared to other regions where work is done every day”. While this adherence to tradition fosters community cohesion, it also presents challenges for rice farmers striving for higher yields. However, there are mechanisms in place to navigate these cultural restrictions. Farmers who choose to work on traditional Sundays can undergo cleansing rituals performed by the “Kwifon” to absolve them of any ill luck associated with breaking tradition. This allows them to continue farming while respecting their cultural values. As noted by another farmer, “Those who work on traditional Sundays are not eliminated; rather, they are cleansed.” This flexibility demonstrates how cultural practices can adapt while still preserving core values. The cultivation of rice in Ndop is more than an economic activity; it is a manifestation of cultural heritage that embodies values of respect, loyalty, and mutual obligation. Tribute payments and reverence for sacred creatures intertwine with agricultural practices, influencing productivity while preserving traditions. Although cultural taboos and mourning practices present challenges, they also offer pathways for resilience through cleansing rituals. Ultimately, the interplay between rice production and cultural heritage in Ndop serves as a vital foundation for community identity and sustainability, ensuring that traditions endure even in the face of modern agricultural pressures. On the other hand, Smallholder plantations in Mbandjock, are not merely agricultural enterprises; they are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the community. These plantations contribute to royalty payments and play a crucial role in the preservation of traditional practices. A significant aspect of this cultural heritage is the cleansing tradition, which addresses the spiritual and social ramifications of agricultural practices. In Mbandjock, the cleansing tradition is vital for maintaining harmony between the living and the ancestral spirits. It is widely believed that during the year, indigenous people may inadvertently offend their ancestors through various actions such as quarrels, theft, or even unintentional harm. As one local elder articulated,

If we have had problems among ourselves or committed sins such as adultery or theft, it is essential to seek forgiveness from our ancestors. Failure to do so can bring ill luck, sickness, death, and poor crop

yields... The..... cleansing ritual has been of utmost importance because it has helped to revive many farmers who would have died for killing or eating a snake unknowingly. (Mbandjock interview on January 13, 2020)

This excerpt reflects a horizon of moral, spiritual, and agrarian interconnectedness, where ethical conduct, ancestral authority, and ecological balance converge to shape the lived experiences of the Mbandjock community. The statement, *“If we have had problems among ourselves or have committed sins like adultery or stealing, it is essential to seek forgiveness from our ancestors,”* positions the ancestors as moral and spiritual arbiters, whose approval is crucial for individual and communal well-being. Transgressions against social or moral codes are interpreted as threats not only to personal fortune but also to collective prosperity, as suggested by consequences such as *“ill luck, sickness, death, and poor crop yields.”* The subsequent reference to the cleansing ritual, *“it has helped to revive many farmers who would have been dead for killing or eating a snake unknowingly,”* extends this moral universe to the ecological and cosmological domains, where certain animals are imbued with sacred or protective significance. Hermeneutically, the ritual embodies a mechanism of moral and spiritual restoration, reconciling human error with the ethical order of the ancestors and the natural environment. It signals a worldview in which survival, health, and agricultural productivity are inseparable from ethical observance and spiritual alignment, reflecting a cosmocentric ontology where human agency is inseparably intertwined with ancestral guidance and ecological stewardship. In essence, the cleansing ritual functions as both a protective and corrective practice, sustaining moral equilibrium, communal cohesion, and the integrity of the land, highlighting the ethical and spiritual scaffolding that underpins traditional agricultural life in Mbandjock. The connection between these spiritual beliefs and agricultural productivity is profound. When farmers believe they have offended their ancestors, they may experience a decline in crop yields. The cleansing ritual becomes a necessary step to restore balance and ensure a bountiful harvest. This reverence for snakes stems from their status as totems, believed to have facilitated the community's settlement in Mbandjock by crossing the Sanaga River. The chief's religious authority, particularly his connection to ancestral spirits, continues to influence the practice of tribute in both regions, as a way to appease these spirits and ensure their protection.

Table 5: Differences

Differences:	Descriptive explanation
Land Access and Resource Use	In the Ndop Plain, land access and resource utilisation remain a significant aspect of tribute payments. This includes ground rent for agricultural land and extraction fees for timber and minerals. In Mbandjock, the focus on land access is less pronounced, as resources like timber are often owned collectively by the community.
Level of Centralisation	The Ndop Plain, with its historical emphasis on decentralised power, often sees a more nuanced system of tribute, with variations across different kingdoms and sub-chiefs. In Mbandjock, the centralised authority structure has led to a more uniform system, with the chief exercising greater control over the collection and distribution of resources.
Evolution of Traditional Roles	The Ndop Plain has seen the rise of more formalised structures for managing tribute payments, with councils and committees playing a larger role. In Mbandjock, the chief often retains greater direct control over the system, with less formalisation of the management process.

(Source: Field Data 2020)

The comparison of land access and resource use between Ndop Plain and Mbandjock highlights distinct ontologies of property, authority, and communal relations, reflecting deeper socio-cultural and historical structures. In Ndop, the prominence of land access and resource utilisation in tribute payments expressed through *“ground rent for agricultural land and extraction fees for timber and minerals”* signals a

worldview where economic obligations are codified and embedded within local hierarchies, linking tribute directly to productive capacity and individual or familial land tenure. Hermeneutically, this suggests a moral and economic contract between landholders and the political authority, in which tribute embodies both recognition of sovereignty and participation in the local political economy. Conversely, in Mbandjock, resources such as timber are often collectively owned, and tribute systems place less emphasis on individual resource access. This collective orientation reflects a cosmology of communal stewardship and shared responsibility, where the payment of tribute functions less as a transactional obligation tied to personal property and more as a symbolic reinforcement of community cohesion and allegiance to central authority. The differential focus on individual versus collective resource claims illuminates how local ecological and social practices shape the meaning and administration of tribute, revealing contrasting cultural logics governing land, resources, and social obligations. The level of centralisation and the evolution of traditional roles further differentiate the two regions in terms of governance and ritualised economic practice. In Ndop Plain, the historically decentralised power structure with “*variations across different kingdoms and sub-chiefs*” creates a more flexible and negotiated system of tribute, in which multiple actors influence collection, distribution, and enforcement. Hermeneutically, this decentralisation embodies a pluralistic political ethic, where authority is diffused and moral legitimacy is negotiated among competing actors, allowing tribute to serve as both economic and symbolic mediation. In contrast, Mbandjock’s centralised authority, where the chief exerts direct control over tribute collection and distribution, reflects a hierarchical moral and administrative order, in which allegiance and obedience are consolidated around a single figure. Similarly, the evolution of traditional roles underscores divergent institutional trajectories: Ndop has developed more formalised councils and committees to manage tribute, embedding communal decision-making within bureaucratic structures, whereas in Mbandjock, the chief retains hands-on control, and processes remain less formalised. Hermeneutically, this highlights the interplay between authority, ritual, and governance: centralisation in Mbandjock reinforces social cohesion through direct oversight and symbolic authority, while the decentralised, committee-based systems of Ndop reveal a negotiated and distributed ethical economy, where tribute mediates relationships among multiple stakeholders.

Table 6: *The motivations behind tribute and royalty payments in both regions are multifaceted, reflecting a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and political factors*

Motivations behind tribute and royalty payments	Descriptive explanation
Political Influence	The Ndop Plain, with its history of political competition and fragmentation, often sees tribute payments as a tool to consolidate political power and influence. In Mbandjock, the centralised authority structure often leads to a more direct relationship between the chief and the community, with less emphasis on political manoeuvring.
Economic Diversification:	The Ndop Plain, with its more diverse economy and the presence of resource extraction activities, has seen tribute payments become more closely linked to economic development and the control of resources. In Mbandjock, the focus on agriculture and communal development often places less emphasis on economic diversification

(Source: Field Data 2020)

The political motivations underlying tribute and royalty payments in Ndop Plain and Mbandjock reveal distinct strategies of authority, legitimacy, and social negotiation, reflecting the historical and structural contexts of each region. In Ndop Plain, the presence of political competition and fragmentation expressed in the text as “*tribute payments as a tool to consolidate political power and influence*” positions tribute as a mechanism of strategic governance, whereby local rulers reinforce alliances, assert authority over subordinate chiefs, and mediate conflicts. Hermeneutically, tribute here functions not merely as an economic obligation but as a symbolic performance of loyalty and political acumen, embedding moral and social

recognition within complex networks of power. In contrast, Mbandjock’s centralised authority produces a more direct, unmediated relationship between the chief and the community. The reduced emphasis on political manoeuvring suggests that tribute in this context operates primarily as a ritual of allegiance and social cohesion, reinforcing the chief’s symbolic authority and moral legitimacy rather than functioning as a strategic tool in a competitive political landscape. This comparison highlights how the historical configuration of power and governance shapes the symbolic and functional significance of tribute within local societies. The economic motivations for tribute and royalty payments further differentiate the two regions, revealing the interplay between resource control, development, and communal livelihoods. In Ndop Plain, with its diversified economy and extractive activities, tribute is closely linked to the management of productive resources, “*control of resources*” such as land, timber, and minerals, positioning payments as instruments of both economic regulation and development leverage. Hermeneutically, this demonstrates a material and moral economy, in which tribute embodies both financial contribution and a symbolic affirmation of hierarchical authority over productive assets. By contrast, Mbandjock’s economy, largely centred on agriculture and communal development, situates tribute less as a tool of resource control and more as a mechanism for supporting collective welfare and infrastructural projects. Here, tribute reinforces communal bonds, facilitates social development, and legitimises the chief’s role in coordinating collective labour and distribution of resources. In essence, the economic dimension of tribute in Ndop Plain emphasises resource governance and political-economic negotiation, whereas in Mbandjock, it reflects a socially integrative and development-oriented ethic, highlighting the contextual and culturally embedded rationales that shape tribute practices across regions.

Contemporary Challenges and Perspectives

Both regions are grappling with contemporary challenges that impact the practice of tribute and royalty

Table 6: Contemporary Challenges and Perspectives

Contemporary Challenges and Perspectives	Descriptive explanation
Modern Law and Governance	The continued practice of tribute payments, particularly in its financial forms, raises questions about their compatibility with modern legal frameworks and democratic governance.
Transparency and Accountability:	There are growing concerns about the transparency and accountability of tribute payments, particularly regarding the use of funds collected. Accusations of corruption and misuse of resources often arise, leading to tensions within communities.
Competing Development Models:	The pursuit of modern development models, often centred on economic growth and resource exploitation, can create conflict with traditional land rights and resource management practices embodied in tribute systems.

(Source: Field Data 2020)

The intersection of modern law and traditional governance presents a significant hermeneutic tension in the practice of tribute and royalty payments across Ndop Plain and Mbandjock. The expression “*raises questions about their compatibility with modern legal frameworks and democratic governance*” highlights a critical ontological dissonance between customary authority and codified state law. Hermeneutically, tribute practices are rooted in centuries-old moral, social, and political contracts that embed legitimacy, loyalty, and communal cohesion. However, the imposition of modern legal systems challenges these practices by reframing them within principles of equality, individual rights, and procedural regulation. This tension exposes a cultural and legal negotiation, wherein traditional authorities must reconcile inherited obligations and symbolic practices with contemporary expectations of legality, civic accountability, and participatory

governance. The enduring relevance of tribute thus reflects not only its symbolic power but also the adaptive strategies communities and chiefs must employ to navigate the evolving socio-political landscape. Equally significant are concerns over transparency, accountability, and competing development models, which shape community perceptions and the legitimacy of tribute systems. The text notes *“growing concerns about the transparency and accountability of tribute payments, particularly regarding the use of funds collected”*, signalling a hermeneutic shift from unquestioned moral obligation to critical scrutiny and civic expectation. Mismanagement or perceived corruption introduces ethical and social dissonance, threatening communal cohesion and undermining the moral economy that once sustained these practices. Simultaneously, the pursuit of modern development paradigms *“often centred on economic growth and resource exploitation”* can conflict with traditional land rights and ecological stewardship embedded in tribute systems. Hermeneutically, this juxtaposition reveals a dialectic between modernity and tradition, where communities must negotiate the values of economic expansion and legal conformity against inherited practices of social solidarity, ritual obligation, and sustainable resource management. Tribute and royalty payments, in this light, are not simply financial transactions but sites of cultural negotiation, reflecting ongoing efforts to balance historical legitimacy with contemporary governance, economic imperatives, and social equity. The comparative analysis of tribute and royalty payments in Mbandjock and the Ndop Plain offers valuable insights into the enduring power of traditional institutions within modern Cameroon. While the forms and motivations of these practices have evolved, they continue to shape social, economic, and political relationships. Understanding the interplay of historical legacies, cultural nuances, and contemporary challenges is crucial for navigating the future of these systems.

VII. Conclusion

This comparative study of cultural royalties and tribute payments to traditional authorities among the Bamenda Grassfield and Baboute communities in Mbandjock, Cameroon, has yielded several key findings that illuminate the intricate relationships between traditional governance, agricultural practices, and cultural heritage. Firstly, it was observed that both communities maintain distinct systems of tribute payments, which are deeply intertwined with their socio-economic structures and cultural identities. In the Bamenda Grassfield, tribute payments are largely ritualistic, functioning to reinforce social cohesion and cultural continuity. In contrast, the Baboute community demonstrate a more transactional approach, viewing these payments as a means of securing political legitimacy and access to resources in the context of plantation agriculture. The analysis further revealed that these cultural royalties play a critical role in sustaining traditional authority while also influencing agricultural productivity. In areas where traditional leaders effectively manage these systems, community organisation and resource distribution (shown marked improvement). Conversely, where these systems are weakened or disregarded, there tends to be increased conflict over land and resources, undermining both agricultural output and community stability. Reflecting on the broader significance of these findings, it becomes clear that cultural royalties and tribute payments are not merely relics of tradition; they are vital components of contemporary governance and economic strategies within plantation agriculture areas. They serve as mechanisms for maintaining social order, ensuring community engagement in agricultural practices, and preserving cultural heritage amid modern economic pressures. This dual role underscores the importance of recognising and integrating traditional authorities into contemporary agricultural policy frameworks. Looking ahead, future research should focus on the evolving dynamics of these tribute systems in response to globalisation and shifting agricultural practices. Investigating how external market forces impact local customs can provide valuable insights into sustainable agricultural development that respects cultural heritage. Furthermore, policymakers should consider creating platforms for dialogue between traditional authorities and government entities to ensure that policies reflect local realities and uphold community values. By fostering collaborative approaches that honour both traditional practices and modern agricultural needs, stakeholders can work towards enhancing food security while preserving the rich cultural tapestry of Cameroon’s diverse communities. This study therefore highlights the necessity of understanding cultural royalties and tribute payments as essential elements within the socio-economic fabric of plantation agriculture areas. By appreciating their role in promoting social cohesion and governance, we can better navigate the complexities of agricultural development in Cameroon and similar contexts worldwide.

Policy Orientations and Research Perspectives

The study strongly recommends that the national and regional governments formally integrate traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, particularly those surrounding land use and resource allocation, into the regional governance framework to ensure more stable and locally legitimate outcomes for agricultural disputes. The primary policy orientation should thus be directed toward governmental recognition, standardisation, and formal inclusion of these customary financial flows (royalties and tributes) within local economic planning. This approach advocates for inclusive local development policies that leverage the established authority and resource oversight of traditional institutions, ensuring that community benefits derived from plantation agriculture are maximised, transparently managed, and reinvested in the development of the host communities. The research perspectives outlined, which were derived from a comparative study on cultural royalties and tribute payments in the Bamenda Grassfield and Mbandjock, suggest four major areas for future scholarly inquiry. First, research on Socio-Legal Compatibility and Governance Reform is needed to analyse the legal status of customary financial flows (e.g., royal taxes, plantation fees) within Cameroon's national system, exploring their potential recognition as sub-national revenue and investigating the integration of traditional conflict resolution for land disputes into modern governance structures. Second, studies focusing on Transparency, Accountability, and Distribution should employ quantitative or mixed methods, such as Financial Flow Audits, to map the actual trajectory of these funds from collection to community expenditure, and conduct comparative analyses of various traditional systems to identify effective Accountability Mechanisms for preventing misuse. Third, the area of Economic Impact and Development Models requires researchers to quantify the True Economic Burden of these royalties on smallholder farmers and plantations, delve deeper into the Functional Impact of Traditional Rituals on ecological knowledge, and assess the Policy Impact of Governmental Recognition to establish inclusive local development policies. Finally, Expanding Geographic and Sectoral Scope involves extending the analysis beyond the current two regions and crops to conduct Inter-Regional Comparisons across Cameroon or other African nations and dedicated research on Resource Extraction Beyond Agriculture (e.g., forestry, minerals) to understand power dynamics in high-value, high-conflict sectors.

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