

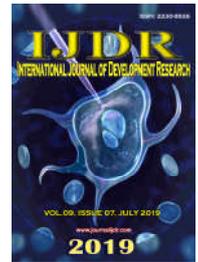


ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research
Vol. 09, Issue, 07, pp. 29046-29055, July, 2019



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

INTER-CHIEFDOMS RELATIONSHIPS AND TRADITIONAL DIPLOMACY AMONG THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING MBO CHIEFDOMS OF SOUTHWEST CAMEROON 1905-2001: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 11th April, 2019
Received in revised form
03rd May, 2019
Accepted 29th June, 2019
Published online 31st July, 2019

Key Words:

Diplomacy, MboTraditional,
Ngen, Relationships,
Trade, Marriage.

ABSTRACT

Basically, this paper examines traditional diplomacy in the Mbo region. It demonstrates that Mbo people never lived in isolation, but always in communion with each other. The study shows how the leaders and peoples of the various chiefdoms interacted in the twentieth century by living, working and trading together. It shows that cooperation and conflicts characterized the relationships among and between the chiefdoms and that through diplomatic methods, conflicts were always resolved and harmonious relations reestablished. Despite the major external obstacle like the colonial boundary that was imposed and divided the Mbo community between two colonial powers, the chiefdoms and kinsmen on both sides continued to maintain diplomatic and other contacts across the boundary until independence and reunification of Cameroon. The Mbo ignored the international boundary that separated them in the same way that the makers of the boundary ignored the ethnic affinity and group cohesion that the Mbo had. Cordial relationships were established and maintain among the Mbo chiefdoms through traditional marriages and during the enthronement of chiefs and funeral entertainments. The issues that strained traditional diplomatic relations included the construction of a motto road, the creation of an administrative unit and boundary dispute.

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Citation: Forka Leypey Mathew Fomine. 2019. "Inter-chiefdoms relationships and traditional diplomacy among the english-speaking mbo chiefdoms of southwest Cameroon 1905-2001: A historical survey," *International Journal of Development Research*, 09, (07), 29046-29055.

INTRODUCTION

The role of economic activities and trade links in Mbo traditional diplomacy: The dominant economic activities of the Mbo in the twentieth century comprised agriculture, hunting, fishing and trade. All these activities fostered diplomatic relations between the chiefdoms in the Mbo region. Among these economic activities, agriculture ranked first. The major activity that remained the principal occupation of the Nkongho and the Ngen was palm-nut harvesting.¹ This important economic activity involved all the family members, thereby creating an opportunity for division of labour. The division of labour was strongly gender-based. The men were responsible for harvesting the palm-nuts while the women and

the grown-up carried the nuts in well weaved baskets to the homes. The children then picked the nuts on the day chosen by their father. The washing and processing of the nuts was done by men and women collectively, while the women were solely responsible for carrying the processed palm oil to *esegeanzaah* or *duonkuon* markets. This important economic activity greatly improved inter-chiefdom relations in the Mbo region. Using palm oil which was abundant in Mbo, as an item of royal exchange and gift, the Mbo chiefs established diplomatic links with other chiefdoms, especially those of the neighbouring Western Grassfields where palm oil was scarce. For instance, when Fonjungo left Ndunglah in the Western Grassfields and settled in Nkongho Mbo, he received gifts from Ndunglah, the chief of Ndunglah, which included goats and corn. This was as a result of the diplomatic relations that existed between the two chiefdoms. In return, chief Fonjungo sent diplomatic gifts of palm oil and other palm products like kernels to the chief of Ndunglah.² Palm-nut harvesting also

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¹ J.C. Rutherford, An Assessment Report on the British section of the Mbo Tribal Area in the Mamfe Division of the Cameroon Province, AF 32, Buea National Archives 18th June 1923, p.166.

² Interview with Clement Fossungji, Councillor Njungo Rural Council, Njungo, 15 June 2001.

greatly improved inter-chiefdom relations as people from different chiefdoms rented³ palm estates from other chiefdoms. In 1999 for example, a total of seventeen men from Upper Nkongho resided temporarily at Ngen where they rented estates from local owners and harvested palm-nuts. Palm-nut harvesting therefore encouraged the tendency of togetherness among the Mbo chiefdoms. But agriculture in Mbo was not limited to palm-nut harvesting. The region has some of the richest soils in Cameroon. This favoured subsistence farming.⁴ The system of agriculture was basically shifting cultivation.⁵ In terms of production, the Mbo earned their living from the land. All other activities were set around agriculture as in other rural areas in Cameroon.⁶ Concerning cash crops coffee was, as it still is, the most grown cash crop in the entire region. Cocoa, another important cash crop, was grown only in some privileged areas. In Upper Nkongho, cocoa was grown in Lebe and Maydeshi. In Nkongho Mbeng, it was grown in Lekwe and Mbetta and among the Ngen chiefdoms it was grown at Fotabongkwa. Those who did not own coffee or cocoa farms worked in the estates of others in the different chiefdoms on payment basis. This enhanced cooperation between the chiefdoms. Hunting and fishing were also important economic activities which fostered diplomatic ties between the various chiefdoms. These two activities were dominant sources of income in the Ngen, except for the chiefdoms of Fotabongkwa. Before the provisional imposition of the colonial boundary through Mbo land in 1916, which was confirmed in 1919 and which divided the Mbo into English-speaking and French-speaking sectors, the Mbo concept of a political or ethnic boundary, as Verkijika G. Fanso rightly puts it, was expressed in terms of neighbours with whom the particular state or polity shared the boundary.⁷ Boundaries were therefore approximated zones where different groups met and transacted business or hunted. Such a boundary in Mbo was often a forest where hunters from different chiefdoms hunted. Such forests served as points that united chiefdoms and promoted peace and the tendency for togetherness. Big animals killed in such forests, even in normal daily life, were shared among the chiefs that claimed common ownership of the forest and had established diplomatic alliances in the region. Even where diplomatic ties did not exist, the mere sharing of such big animals like the gorilla, elephant and tiger, created opportunities for diplomatic alliances to be established. For instance, in 1985, Godfred

Fosaah, a sub-chief in Mbetta, killed a gorilla and took it to his paramount chief Mathias Fomelong of Mbetta.⁸ The chief communicated the other paramount chiefs in the region and they collectively shared the gorilla. This enhanced the existing relations among the Nkongho Mbeng chiefdoms. The production and circulation of goods between the Mbo chiefdoms enhanced the existing inter-group alliances. Through the circulation of goods, diplomatic links were established. The exchange network linked chiefdoms, including even those which had conflicting relations. For example, from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s when the chiefdoms of Mbetta and Dinte had conflicting relations over land dispute, they were still linked to the exchange network in the region. But transportation was an obstacle to trade in the region. However, in 1962 a futile attempt was made to dig a motor road linking the chiefdoms of Nkongho-Mbo.

Foot-paths remained the dominant means of transportation connecting chiefdoms. It was by use of the traditional foot-paths that the chiefdoms of Tock, Njungo, Mbenfeeh, Nzeletete, Lebe and Lebock were linked together. Similarly, the chiefdom of Lebock and those of Nkongho Mbeng were linked by foot-paths. The same foot-paths connected the chiefdom of Elumba to those of Etoodi, Tangang, Nzoa, Fotabongkwa and Kamalumpéh. These foot-paths facilitated contact between the inhabitants of the various chiefdoms. Easy contacts enhanced relations because contact was a requirement of development.⁹ Contacts among the Mbo chiefdoms had profound effects on cultural patterns, ideas and traditional institutions. Foot-paths linking the Mbo to neighbouring chiefdoms enhanced inter-group trade. Lebock in Nkongho was linked by foot-paths to Nzezang in the French-speaking Mbo territory, while the chiefdom of Dinte in Nkongho Mbeng was similarly linked to Basekwe in the French-speaking Mbo territory. As concerns commerce, the principal articles of trade included salt, clothes, palm oil, knives, locally manufactured hoes, kerosene, smoked meat and fish, cocoyams, plantains and others. The Mbo were engaged in short and long distance trade. The short distance trade was carried out within the Mbo region while long-distance trade was carried out between the various Mbo and neighbouring chiefdoms. The Mbo were also engaged in the making and selling of drums, mortars, pots, baskets, sleeping mats, fishing nets and thatches. Through the buying and selling of these items, various links were established between the chiefdoms. Upper Nkongho and Nkongho Mbeng depended on the Ngen for most of their supply of smoked meat and fish. Lower Ngen depended partly on the Nkongho for their supply of foodstuffs, particularly cocoyams until the 1990s¹⁰ when they started producing them in a quantity enough to feed them. The chiefdoms of Nkongho Mbeng depended on those of Upper Nkongho for their supply of wine tapped from dead palms until the 1990s¹¹ when they began to buy from Basekwe. This fostered trade links between the chiefdoms of upper Nkongho and Nkongho Mbeng. Distance trade brought together people of different geographical and culture areas.¹² In markets like those of

³ The rent included a fowl or 2000 francs CFA had to be given before 1st January every year. The duration of any palm estate on rent was one year. On the 31 December every year, the contract terminated. A fixed number of tins of palm oil had to be given to the landlord, depending upon the dimension of the estate.

⁴ It was concerned basically with the production of food crops to feed the family. The quantity of food crops produced was usually small and enough only for the family with no surplus. But with time and changing conditions Mbo women started producing cocoyams and selling in Ngwatta market in French-speaking Mbo territory and in duonkuon market at Ngen. Some were equally sold at esegemanzaah.

⁵ It involved the desertion of an exhausted piece of land for a new place. The abandoned and deserted land went back to forest for several years before it was cleared again. With this system of cultivation, the farmers went further away from home. But, even where the old farms had not been re-cleared, the farmers went to the farms at irregular intervals to harvest such crops like plantains bananas, colocasia leaves and cocoyams corms for planting a new farm. This type of farming compelled the farmer to clear the forest in the dry season and burn before tilling. In this way, only the very thin surface layer of the top soil was tilled and gathered into mounds. Beans, maize, pumpkins and vegetable were planted on the mounds.

⁶ V.G Fanso, *Cameroon History Schools and Colleges*, Vol.2: *The Colonial and Postcolonial Periods*, (London: Macmillan Educational Ltd, 1989), p.5

⁷ Verkijika G Fanso "Trans-Frontier Relations and Resistance to Cameroon-Nigeria Colonial Boundaries 1916-1945" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Yaounde, 1982), pp.123-124.

⁸ Interview with Godfred Fosaah, sub-chief and hunter, Mbetta, 3 June 2001.

⁹ Eugene Black, *The Diplomacy of Economic Development*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 38.

¹⁰ Personally, carried cocoyams to the Ngen main market at Etoodi while I was a school boy in Mbetta.

¹¹ After the 1990s the Nkongho started buying wine tapped from dead palms from Basekwe in the French-speaking Mbo territory. Since the 1990s the Nkongho Mbeng natives buy more from Basekwe than from Njungo in Upper Nkongho.

¹² Fanso, "Trans-Frontier Relations," p. 307.

Ngwatta, Ndunglah and Mbokambo in French-speaking Mbo, the buyers and sellers from both the English-speaking and French-speaking territories were often in close touch with each other. Consequently the spirit of togetherness and solidarity was advanced. Evidently buyers and sellers helped enormously to boost inter-chiefdom relations.¹³ Before 1922, the commonest system of trade in Mbo was trade by barter. This was the exchange of goods for other goods. This type of trade had numerous disadvantages. Barter required that a trader should look for someone who was in need of his goods and who had goods that he too needed, before they could exchange.¹⁴ More so, a trader might have a single item for exchange, but might in turn need two different items which were possessed by two individuals who might not be interested in his own item. This posed a serious problem. Barter was common at *esegemanzaah* in the chieftdom of Njungo. During the short German period, the mark was introduced and it facilitated trade. From the 1920s on, the British currency was introduced – the shilling – which lasted until the introduction of the French currency – Communauté Financier Africain (CFA) in 1962.

Market places were dotted here and there all over the Mbo region. But the only two markets that held almost every day were *esegemanzaah*¹⁵ in Njungo and *duonkuon* in Elumba. The others were weekly markets and sometimes used to close down. In the year 2000, His Royal Highness Chief Fonven Andrew Ekesangha re-opened the *esegengong*, the market in his chieftdom, which had closed down for unknown reasons. He invited the chiefs of Upper-Nkongho and the populace to attend. When the market was re-opened on 7 October, attendance was great. Among those who came from Upper-Nkongho were four traditional title holders and a good number of ordinary people.¹⁶ During the re-opening ceremony, Chief Fonven Adrew Ekesangha thanked the populace and the title holders for responding positively to his invitation. He told his subjects that anybody who produced two tins of palm oil

¹³ During discussions with traders in Mbetta like sub-chief Augustin Fonji-Etabong, Fonjock Hycinth and Nkong James who traded on distance markets revealed that sometimes people buy goods from them because of the past friendship that they had established. Like that, they too were obliged to give out goods on credit.

¹⁴ Roland Yenhanuy Mbiba, "Nso" and Her Neighbours: A study of Inter-Group Relations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (Post Graduate Diploma dissertation, University of Yaounde, 1919), p. 46

¹⁵ When Fonjocksack who later became Fonjungo left Ndunglah in the Western Grassfield and settled in Mbo under the canopy of his host Fonjock, four chiefs built him a house. A special door was put for him, Fogu, Fonki, Fonven, Fontem, Foreke Cha-Cha and Fondunglah. It was after this that he proposed that the market at Leki was small. He then invited the chiefs of Ndunglah, Fontem, Foreke, Lewoh and Wanchen who met and decided that a market should be created in Njungo. In the presence of these chiefs and the crowd, chained. A hole was dug in the site chosen for the market in which Matempa was buried alive. The diplomacy of human sacrifice was aimed at stabilizing the market. Before being buried, Matempa cursed the people that the market will always be noisy even if there are only two people there on the market day. Fonjocksack named the market *esegemanzaah* after one of his slaves which was called Fosach Manzaah. To maintain diplomatic relations with his former host Fondunglah he also gave the market a Bamileke connotation *Aminacop*. The chiefs then had a feast and during the feast, they decided that the market should be holding after every eight days. Fonjocksack also passed an order that any person who brings a commodity to sell in the market should bring another one to his palace. The commodities that were brought to his palace were often assembled and he shared with the paramount chiefs of the chieftdoms of Lebock, Mbenfeeh, Ngyientu, Nzeletete and Lebe. This fostered diplomatic relation between the chieftdom of Njungo and the others. From his own share of the commodities, he gave Fonjinkeng and Fosackngong.

¹⁶ Interview with Victor Ntweteeh-Fonjungo, Njungo, 12 June 2001. He also narrated to me how they were entertained with six jugs of palm wine and abundant food by the paramount chief of Lekwe.

would always take one to *esegemanzaah* market and the other to the newly re-opened market.¹⁷ His intention was to maintain cordial diplomatic relations with the chieftdoms of Upper-Nkongho. The markets in Mbo played a vital role in traditional diplomacy. They were places where people from different regions interacted. Beside the principal objective of buying and selling goods in the markets, some people might go to the market only for the purpose of meeting friends, sometimes to arrange with those concerned a marriage for their relative. Some people went to the market to hear news while others went to arrange for a joint cooperative venture such as fishing, hunting, farming and house-building. The market was also a place where *lekee* widows of a dead chief first came out in public, after seven weeks of mourning. The market place was also visited by chiefs from different chieftdoms to share a cup of palm wine. It was on such occasions that new diplomatic relations were established and the already existing ones consolidated.¹⁸ The market was a place where the family of a girl about to be given in marriage began the ceremony of *ekekweeh*.¹⁹ This was a procession which usually started from one end of the market to the main entrance, as was the case at the *esegemanzaah*, market. The procession usually moved at the speed of a tortoise. Bells were rung as men came to offer the women leading the procession gifts varying from money to manufactured goods. The purpose of *ekekweeh* was to fatten the girl who was to get married in order to facilitate her conception.

Marital and Linguistic Links among Mbo chieftdoms

From time immemorial, marriage has been used to improve inter-chieftdom relations in the Mbo region. The role that marriage played in traditional diplomacy was predominant. Inter-chieftdom marriages at the level of chiefs especially and even at the level of ordinary persons, improved inter-chieftdom relations by promoting cooperation and preventing conflicts between the chieftdoms concerned. According to Verkijika G. Fanso, marriage alliance between groups brought lasting relations because children of such marriages belonged to both groups through their parents. Through these children themselves, peace and good will easily replaced war and hostility between the groups.²⁰ In the Western Grassfields generally, neighbouring Fondoms sought to consolidate their relations through the exchange of princesses. Royal marriages in the Western Grassfields as well as in Mbo land were therefore used to neutralize hostile relations and to strengthen ties.²¹ In Mbo diplomatic alliances through marriage were

¹⁷ Interview with Victor Ntweteeh-Fonjungo, Njungo, 12 June 2001.

¹⁸ Interview with Cornelius Fotabong Fobisongnzock, sub-chief, Lekwe, 7 July 2001.

¹⁹ This was one of the acts of traditional marriage in the Mbo region. Through this, young girls who were to get married were initiated into the life of amariéd woman. During the period, the girl was accompanied in a confined room by at least two of her female relatives who lectured her on how to live with her husband when she gets married. The grown up girl who was to get married was also accompanied by about ten junior girls ranging from five to ten years of age. It was organized by the family of the bride with the material and financial assistance from the family of the bridegroom. The girls often had quite a nice time, during their five weeks of seclusion, they spent most of the time eating, drinking and sleeping. They bathed at least three times each day. From the beginning of the fattening period to the last week, they were dressed in pieces of clothes tied round their waists which they neither changed nor washed. The common dishes on such occasions were koki-beans and fufu served with "Nyaakunyaah" (pork meat).

²⁰ Fanso "Trans-Frontier Relations," p. 221

²¹ Mbiba, "Nso" and her Neighbours," p.27; Paul Nchoji Nkwí, *Traditional Diplomacy: A Study of Inter-chieftdom Relations in the Western Grassfield*, (Yaounde: Department of Sociology, University of Yaounde, 1987), p. 46.

common. A few examples will suffice to justify this. The first paramount chief of Dinte, Fotabong Tambocksack, got a wife from Betang in the French-speaking Mbo territory. This was aimed at maintaining cordial diplomatic relations with the parent chiefdom from where his lineage originated before migrating to their present site. Paramount chief Fotabong Nsanda, his successor, got wives from the chiefdoms of Lekwe and Mbetta. It was the same with his successor, Fotabong Nke. He too acquired wives from the chiefdoms of Mbetta and Lekwe. These marriages enhanced diplomatic relations between the chiefdom of Dinte and those of Mbetta and Lekwe. When chief Fotabong Esendege became the paramount chief of Dinte, he continued to maintain diplomatic relations with the chiefdom of Lekwe until he passed away on 21 May 1993 because his wife came from there.²² On 15 June 1993, Fotabong Michael Elad whose wife came from Mbetta, succeeded his father to the paramount throne of Dinte. In 1994, just after one year relations between the chiefdom of Dinte and Lekwe deteriorated.²³ Although this was as a result of some other factors, he maintained cordial relations with the chiefdom of Mbetta from where his wife came. This supports the notion that inter-chiefdom marriages enhanced diplomatic relations between the Mbo chiefdoms.

Moreover, in Upper-Nkongho, diplomatic links through marriage were very common. The wife of the paramount chief of Njungo comes from Lebe. Diplomatic relations between the chiefdom of Njungo and Lebe has been established on this basis. The four wives of the predecessor of the present Fonjungo, came from Njungo, Foreke and Lebang Fontem. These foreign wives enabled the paramount chief of Njungo to establish cordial relations with those chiefdoms.²⁴ In any event, the tendency of a person from Mbo marrying a fellow Mbo, no matter from what chiefdom, was greater than marrying a non-Mbo. This is probably because, although separated by the existence of many chiefdoms, no Mbo was a stranger to another. The importance of inter-group marriage especially between chiefdoms speaking different languages, also promoted bilingualism and multilingualism in the Mbo region. Marriages between the chiefdoms of Ngen and those of Nkongho, more than trade, facilitated multilingualism because they involved constant movements and prolonged residence of peoples from one linguistic community to the other.²⁵ The two Mbo chiefdoms of Tock and Lebe which frequently married their women from the neighbouring Bangwa group helped to introduce the Bangwa dialect in both chiefdoms. This, no doubt, fostered diplomatic ties between the two chiefdoms and that of Foreke in the Bangwa area. Another importance of inter-chiefdom royal marriages in tradition diplomacy is that through such marriages, heirs to the thrones were people with blood relations in both chiefdoms. Such heirs when they succeeded their fathers usually established closer relations with their mother's chiefdoms. Women as wives in other

chiefdoms were therefore very important in traditional diplomacy in Mbo region.

Cordial links established during the Enthronement of Chiefs: The ceremony of the enthronement of chiefs as well as kingmakers and sub-chiefs in different Mbo chiefdoms was often an occasion during which diplomatic relations were started and the existing ones consolidated. Attendance of enthronement ceremonies by traditional title holders was always a visible sign that the chiefdoms concerned had cordial relations with each other. Title holders did not attend enthronement ceremonies officially if they were not formally informed and invited. In Nkongho where succession to chieftaincy was hereditary, the ruling chief designated his successor whose name was kept secret before his death.²⁶ He confided his choice to one of his kingmakers. On the day of enthronement, the new chief was caught by two masked *tregeeh* from among his brothers of the royal family. The future *mfor* then underwent rituals and was instructed and initiated into all the secret societies in the palace. If he was a paramount chief then all the members of *etemzoooh* would confer on him the new status of *morh* or *echabuoh* (paramount chief). The rituals were aimed at transforming him from an ordinary person into the father of his people and owner of all the land in the chiefdom.²⁷ During the initiation all the traditional secrets and customs of the land were revealed to him. The paramount chief was usually enthroned together with the *ekaah* and *mafor* both of whom had functions in the palace. Among the chiefdoms of Ngen where succession to chieftaincy was generally rotatory, the process of enthronement was not as complicated as in the Nkongho chiefdoms where it was hereditary.

Nevertheless, diplomatic relations could still be established during the enthronement. During the enthronement of chief Ediankumbek Mathias of Fotabongkwa in 1992, for example, the paramount chief of Mbokambo was invited as a diplomatic ally and he responded positively by attending the ceremony and offering a goat to the new chief of Fotabongkwa as a gift. Also, in 1997 when the chief of Mbokambo was to be enthroned, the chief of Fotabongkwa attended the ceremony on formal invitation and also gave the newly enthroned chief of Mbokambo a goat.²⁸ Through the exchange of such gifts, the two chiefdoms cemented their diplomatic relations. Fotabongkwa had renewed diplomatic relations with the chiefs of Ehuyampeh, Ekzenwo and Elumba dating from the time of their enthronement. Diplomatic relations during the enthronement of chiefs was not limited to the Ngen chiefdoms. Until the early 1990s, the chiefdom of Dinte had established diplomatic relations with the chiefdom of Lekwe from the time of enthronement of their chiefs and through the exchange of gifts. On 15 June 1993 during the enthronement of Chief Fotabong Michael Elad, the paramount chief of Dinte, the chiefdoms that had diplomatic relations with Dinte were represented either by their paramount chiefs or highly ranked title holders in the chiefdoms. On this particular occasion, the chiefdoms whose paramount chiefs were present included

²² Interview with Thomas Fonzooh, Kingmaker, Dinte, 8 August 2001.

²³ There were convincing proofs that the relationship of Dinte and Lekwe started deteriorating in the early 1990s. During a conversation with His Royal Highness Fonven Andrew Ekesangha the paramount chief of Lekwe, he informed me that when he took over the throne in 1994, during the first general meeting in the same year, he proposed the continuation of the digging of the motor road from the terminus of the road in Mbetta to Loteeh where it was initially agreed that the road will reach. Instead, the chiefs of Mbetta and Dinte gave priority to water and electricity projects.

²⁴ Interview with Clement Fossungnji councillor Njungo Rural Council. Njungo 15 June 2001

²⁵ Fanso "Trans-Frontier Relations," p. 227

²⁶ This was to avoid suspicion which could lead to his rival brothers killing him or doing him harm. In many cases, the heir lived most of his life out of the palace before succession. For instance, His Royal Highness Fonven Wilson Nkongho the former paramount chief of Lekwe lived in the palace of the Fon of Fontem in Bangwa for many years before taking over the throne in Lekwe.

²⁷ Interview with Forsack-Nzock, sub-chief, Njungo, 15 June 2001.

²⁸ Interview with Andrew Enokee Asue, regent chief of Fotabongkwa, Fontabongkwa, 13 July 2001.

Lebe, Mbenfeeh, Singem, Mbetta, and Njoagwe. The chiefdom of Lekwe was represented by its regent chief, Fossoh Nozck. The chiefdoms of Lebock and Nzeletete were represented by their *mafors* (queen mothers).²⁹ During the enthronement of Chief Fonven Andrew Ekesangha in 1994, the chief of Njungo who could not attend the ceremony sent envoys to represent him and his chiefdom.³⁰ During the enthronement of chiefs, Mbo chiefs who usually attended always used the occasion to exchange gifts and intensify their diplomatic relations. The gifts which might be in cash or kind were made to renew ties with the particular chiefdom and personal relations with the new chief.³¹ Chiefs of Mbetta also exchanged gifts with those of Lekwe and Lebock. On 13 August 1999, during the enthronement of sub-chief Fonge-Etabong of Mbetta, he received a gift of 5,000 francs CFA, highly valued beads and five bottles of beer from sub-chief Fonji-Etabong of Lekwe. The gifts symbolised friendship, togetherness and oneness in the region. Still during the enthronement of sub-chief Fonge-Etabong of Mbetta, he received a gift of a jug of palm wine, kolanuts and an amount of 3,000 francs CFA from sub-chief Fonkeng Thomas Ntegeseh from the chiefdom of Lebock.

Diplomatic links established during funeral entertainments: Death was acknowledged everywhere as the eventual end of life in the physical world. Deaths of chiefs and important notables were also provided occasions for expressing diplomatic sympathy and support. Funeral entertainments, especially of paramount chiefs, kingmakers and sub-chiefs were occasions which either influenced diplomatic relations positively or negatively. The funeral rites and celebrations were used to enhance diplomatic ties between the chiefdoms. Failure to dispatch envoys with a message to the funeral of a chief was a clear and convincing indication that there was no diplomatic relation between the chiefdoms concerned. Whenever a chief died, only members of the secret societies, *etemnzoo* among the Nkongho chiefdoms and *muankum* among the Ngen chiefdoms, had access to the room where the corpse was lying. The corpse was washed, rubbed with camwood and carefully wrapped up in a big loin cloth before burial.³² After burial, the day for ceremonial mourning was announced. This was the beginning of the celebration. But, before beginning the celebration, a sub-chief went round the yard silently with *leboeogegee*³³ on his head. This was a sign that the celebration had begun.³⁴ Three secret societies played a vital role in royal funeral celebrations in Mbo. These secret societies, namely *Muankum*, *etemnzoo* and *tregeeh* equally encouraged close relationships between chiefdoms. *Muankum* was the secret society of the Ngen chiefdoms. The origin of *Muankum* is linked to the mysterious appearance of a spirit to one lonely man in Mwaneguba,³⁵ perhaps according to

oral tradition, when people started living in Ngen. Membership was compulsory for any grown up man whose father and mother were *muane*goes.³⁶ This secret society admitted members for life. A new member for initiation gave koki corn, a goat, ten litres of palm oil, a cock and koki beans to old members who came from different chiefdoms, even from Bakossi villages. The juju association therefore became the rallying point for inter-chiefdom unity. *Muankum* played a vital role during the burial of a chief.³⁷ Members of the secret society who attended the burial had access to it. Through it, the spirit of togetherness was enhanced between the Ngen chiefdoms.

In Nkongho, *etemnzoo* and *tregeeh* were and still are the secret societies concerned with the funerals of chiefs. Membership was hereditary. Another secret society that played an important role in royal funerals and traditional diplomacy was *tregeeh*. This society could be owned by a paramount chief or a kingmaker. Requirements for membership included a goat, three jugs of palm wine, koki corn and koki beans. The juju association was responsible both for announcing the death of a chief and for the burial. Due to the vital role that royal funerals played in traditional diplomacy in Mbo region, a number of diplomatic alliances were formed that emanated from it. For instance, when paramount Chief Fogu of Lebock died, he could not be buried without chief Fonven of Lekwe and his *tregeeh* being there to perform some rituals. Similarly, if it was the paramount chief of Lekwe who died, that of Lebock would be expected to do the same before burial.³⁸ The two chiefdoms maintained these reciprocal relations through the exchange of *piyahnkoh* (knife used for the incision of tiger). If either of them died, the *piyahnkoh* was given to the other who was still living.

The chiefdom of Tock also established diplomatic alliances which were evident during the funerals of chiefs. Tock had diplomatic alliances with the chiefdoms of Njungo and Foreke in Bangwa. Whenever the paramount chief of Tock, died, the chiefs of Njungo and Foreke had to be specially informed before burial. The chiefdom of Lebe also had diplomatic relations with the chiefdoms of Foreke and Njungo. Chiefdoms that had cordial relations and attended the funerals of others were obliged to perform certain rituals and sacrifices which included the tearing of the mouth of a fowl and pouring blood on the ground and reading the omen, or throwing the cotyledon of split kolanut and interpreting their lie or pouring palm wine to make a libation to the dead chief. All these activities improved inter-chiefdom relations as they were made to safeguard and protect the lives of the living. Besides cordial relations, there were also conflicting relations in Mbo that stemmed from different types of conflicts.

Sources of Conflicts and Manifestations: The sources of inter-chiefdom conflicts in Mbo were multifarious and rooted in personal and local interests. In the last century, inter-chiefdom conflicts were common, some lasting for short and others for long duration. The longest conflict of interest which strained diplomatic relations between some Mbo chiefdoms was the conflict between Upper-Nkogho and Nkongho-Mbeng. Informants in the various regions advanced different reasons

²⁹ Interview with His Royal Highness Micheal Fotabong Elad, paramount chief of Dinte, Dinte, 5 August 2001.

³⁰ Interview with His Royal Highness Andrew Fonven Ekesangha, paramount chief of Lekwe, Lekwe, 5 July 2001.

³¹ Interview with Denis Fotingnji, sub-chief, Dinte, 7 August 2001.

³² From the chiefdom of Tock in the North of Mbo region to that of Lekwe in the South, informants who were all old people attested the fact that before burying a chief, they had to wrap him in a big piece of cloth.

³³ Special species of grass which symbolised peace and the authority of chiefs. The same species of grass was placed on a stone which was in turn carefully placed on three short sticks pinned in the ground and this symbolised the authority of all the chiefs in Nkongho.

³⁴ Personally witnessed such a scene fortunately on 4 March 1999 during the funeral entertainment of late chief Fondeck of Lekwe chiefdom at Bantoh. During the occasion, sub-chief Fonji Nkeng Nicolas placed *leboeogegee* on his head and went round the yard without anybody talking to him.

³⁵ Esembe Linus Ngalame, "Bakossi and their Neighbours: A Study of

Conflicts and Co-operation from pre-colonial to 1976" (Degree of Doctorat de 3e Cycle dissertation, University of Yaounde, 1995), p.37

³⁶ This refers to a native of Ngen or Bakossi

³⁷ Rotherfoord, "Assessment Report," p.125

³⁸ Two informants supported this fact, Chief Fonven Andrew Ekesangha supported the fact with sub-chief Fona-Nkem in Ngiesang Lebock.

for the origin of this conflict. According to the informants, Upper Nkongho and Nkongho-Mbeng had a common market – *esegemanzaah* – which was situated at Ngyientu in Upper-Nkongho. The selling sections in the market were divided according to zones and chiefdoms. Initially, there no huts built in the section of Nkongho-Mbeng. Out of a sudden in 1925, Fonkengmezaah, a native of Upper-Nkongho, deliberately decided to build huts in the section of Nkongho-Mbeng and started collecting rents forcefully from the natives of Nkongho-Mbeng. But the natives of Nkongho-Mbeng refused to pay the rents, and Fonkengmezaah decided to destroy the huts. The act made all the natives of Nkongho-Mbeng to boycott the market and to take the matter to the court in Mamfe where Upper-Nkongho was fined an amount of thirty-five pounds to pay to Nkongho-Mbeng.³⁹ Another source of conflict was the motor road project. According to the plan of the project, a road was to be dug from Ndunglah through Upper-Nkongho to Nkongho-Mbeng.⁴⁰ Every able-bodied male adult from both sectors of Nkongho had contributed an amount of one poun each for the project. But when the road reached the chiefdom of Lebock in Upper- Nkongho, the people of Upper-Nkongho refused further financial contribution for it to continue to Nkongho-Mbeng. Moreover, a native of Upper-Nkongho stated that the natives of Nkongho-Mbeng should carry the caterpillar on their heads to their own territory. For this reason, the caterpillar stopped digging the road at Lebock.⁴¹

Another source of conflict was the demand for the creation of an administrative unit in the Mbo hinterland. This became a source of conflict because the Ngen, Nkongho-Mbeng and Upper-Nkongho chiefdoms each wanted to be the headquarters of the administrative unit. The people of Upper-Nkongho are said to have drawn a secret map of the Mbo hinterland, which they sent to the Ministry of territorial Administration, indicating that Upper-Nkongho was in the middle of the area. When the people of Nkongho-Mbeng discovered the map in the ministry, it gravely strained the relations between the two communities.⁴² This intensified the conflict between the two communities. This conflict originated in the late 1990s and is still unresolved. Some informants in Upper-Nkongho had a different explanation concerning the origin of the conflict. As recounted by Mathias Fossung from Ngyientu, the conflict originated during the consecration of Bishop Cornelius Fontem Esua of Kumbo Diocese who is a native of Nkongho- Mbeng. On that occasion in 1982, Catholic Christians from Upper-Nkongho and Nkongho-Mbeng went to Kumbo in separate transport vehicles. On their way back from Kumbo, the vehicle carrying the Christians from Upper- Nkongho had an accident

³⁹ Three informants in Upper Nkongho (Njungo), all of them, old people, agreed that the market incident was the first incident that strained the relationship between Upper Nkongho and Nkongho Mbeng. In a conversation with the three old men – Mr Michael Asong, Mr Sylvester Fonken and Mr Clement Fossungmji Micheal Asong aged about 90 years further said that he saw JWC Rotherfoord in 1923 when he wrote the “Assessment Report” on Mbo. He uses this to support the fact that he was an eye-witness of the 1925 event.

⁴⁰ Every abled-bodied male adult from both sections of Nkongho had contributed an amount of one pound each for the project.

⁴¹ Informants in both chiefdoms supported this fact. Sub-chief Fotindongsung Philip from Ngyientu in Upper Nkongho was of the same opinion. He had also sampled the opinions of elders in Upper Nkongho concerning the conflicts between Upper Nkongho Mbeng who said the same thing. In Nkongho Mbeng, age informants like Mr Michael age approximately 78 years, Mr Fossoh Joseph age approximately 75 years and Mr Christopher Fonkeng Sua age about 75 years all supported this claim.

⁴² Interview with His Royal Highness Micheal Fotabong Elad, the paramount chief of Dinte, Dinte, 5 August 2001.

along the Tiko-Douala Road.⁴³ Financial assistance was then demanded from the different chiefdoms for the treatment of the victims. All the chiefdoms of Nkongho-Mbeng refused to contribute and this resulted in the conflict between the chiefdoms.⁴⁴

Another issue that brought disparity between the chiefdoms of Upper- Nkongho and Nkongho-Mbeng was the attitude of the Catholic missionaries stationed in Nkongho-Mbeng towards the people of Upper-Nkongho. Informants in Upper-Nkongho were of the opinion that, during the ordination of Cornelius Fontem Esua as reverend Father in 1971, the entire population of Upper-Nkongho went to Mbetta with gifts of different kinds but that after the ordination, the reverend father did not appreciate their efforts either by writing to them or by going to offer Holy Mass at Njungo. From this, the Christians felt that the Father had slighted them and were bitter against his chiefdom. Another claim of the Catholic Christians and the people of Upper-Nkongho generally is that the inter-parish football competition, for which Bishop Fontem Esua was offering, was being competed only in Nkongho- Mbeng and not in the entire parish.⁴⁵ For this reason, the chiefdoms of Upper-Nkongho decided to sever all special links with those of Nkongho- Mbeng. When the wind blew off the roof of the Catholic Church at Lebock in 1990, the main mission in Mbetta did not assist financially or materially in the repairs. No person from Nkongho-Mbeng supported. The community of Lebock alone shouldered the repairs by buying fifty sheets of zinc and nails for the roof.⁴⁶ This intensified the conflict between Upper-Nkongho and Nkongho-Mbeng.

But, in a discussion with Reverend Father Augustine Ndi, the parish priest of Mbetta, he advanced strong and convincing arguments against the accusations put forward by the Upper-Nkongho people against the church in Mbetta.⁴⁷ According to Father Ndi, after the ordination of Bishop Cornelius Fontem Esua in 1971, he probably wrote to all the Christians in Mbetta parish. He further stated that it was not necessary to write to individual missions and out stations. Concerning the roof of the church at Lebock, he doubted if the community of Lebock officially applied for financial assistance from the parish council. He said he did not find such a request in the parish office. In any event, according to him, there was no fund in the parish council reserved for the repair of churches in the out stations.⁴⁸ The conflict between Upper-Nkongho and Nkongho-Mbeng manifested itself in different ways. The most visible of the ways wads on 12 February 2000. On that day, Minister Elvis Ngolle Ngolle of the Government of Cameroon made an official visit to Nkongho-Mbeng. In spite of the fact that all the paramount chiefs in Mbo were informed and invited to the reception ceremony together with their subjects, only the chiefs of Lebock with their subjects attended from Upper-Nkongho.⁴⁹ The absence of the other chiefs and their

⁴³ Interview with Mathias Fossung, Ngyientu, 29 September 2001. He was a member of the delegation that left Upper Nkongho for Kumbo in 1982.

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Interview with Charles Lepasha Fonkeng-Nfor, Catholic Christian, Baptized and confirmed, Lebock, 17 June 2001. Sub-chief Fonsa-Nkem who contributd more than any other person in the Church repair was given *tregeeh* and *lefeem* (secret societies) by the paramount chief of Lebock for his good work.

⁴⁶ In a conversation with the former catechist of Lebock, he revealed to me that they always send their alms to Mbetta according to the church laws but he resigned as a catechist in the year 2000.

⁴⁷ Interview with August Ndi, Reverend Father, parish priest of Mbetta parish, Mbetta 7 October 2001.

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ Personally attended the visit ceremony and observed that there were no participants from other chiefdoms in Upper Nkongho except Lebock

subjects was an indication of the crack in the relations between Upper-Nkongho and Nkongho-Mbeng. There was also the problem of chieftaincy that was another source of conflict between chiefdoms. For example, in 1967 at Sukee where Nkongho chiefs carried out diplomatic negotiations, Honourable Nzo Ekang-haki proposed to the chiefs of Nkongho the creation of more chiefdoms in order to facilitate the possibility of a sub-division in Nguti. As a result Fonjungo, the paramount chief of Njungo created four new chiefdoms. The paramount chief of Lekwe was asked to do the same in his large chiefdom but he refused, although he promised to consider the matter as time evolved.⁵⁰ Eventually he made Sekangha and Lekwe as separate chiefdoms, but did not accord Sekangha the same status because his economic assets were there.⁵¹ In 1971, he nominated Evaristus Foto Tanyi as sub-chief and introduced him to the Meme House of Chiefs (MHC).⁵² The conflict emanated from the fact that in 1998, the paramount chiefs of Mbetta and Dinte recognized sub-chief Evaristus Foto Tanyi as the paramount chief of Lekwe. This strained the relationship between Lekwe and the chiefdoms of Mbetta-Dinte. The antagonism between the chiefdoms manifested itself on 15 January 2001 when the D O of Nguti sub-division visited the Mbo hinterland. On that day the youths of Lekwe blocked the border of Lekwe and Mbetta which resulted in severe confrontation between the natives of Lekwe on the one hand and those of Mbetta-Dinte on the other.⁵³ Apart from chieftaincy crisis, land disputes also ruptured diplomatic relations between Mbo chiefdoms.

Lebock-Nzezang Land Dispute

Before the imposition of the international boundary that divided Mbo into English-speaking and French-Speaking, the concept of boundary was like in other pre-colonial African societies. The concept implied that traditional states and polities were demarcated by enclaves or zones, not by fixed points or lines. Such boundaries, according to Verkijika G. Fanso, were usually vague, but it was clear enough that the people sharing them were divided into independent polities. The notion of geometric lines and fixed points was, however, used to define the location and boundaries between farmlands and hunting grounds and was very rarely used to define political divisions. Political boundaries were rarely used to define political divisions.⁵⁴ Political boundaries were rarely specified on the ground before the imposition of colonial boundaries. It was the traditional manner of approximating the boundary that led to the Lebock-Nzezang land dispute in 1995. Although the relations between the neighbouring Lebock and Nzezang chiefdoms were outwardly harmonious, underneath was subdued tension. Although the conflict between them broke out in 1995, tension had been moulding in the frontier zone since the 1970s and the 1980s. Lebock-Nzezang land

dispute originated partly because of economic motives and partly because the natives of Nzezang wanted a share of the vast forest that the natives of Lebock possessed. From the 1980s onward, the demand for local food-stuffs in the Ngwatta market became high. Cocoyams and plantains which in the 1960s and 1970s were less in demand became highly valued at Ngwatta market. Lorries came to Ngwatta on market days from Douala, Nkongsamba, Melong, Santchou, Dschang and elsewhere in search of cocoyams and plantains without difficulties. The increase in the demand for food-stuffs in the Ngwatta market also increased the value of land in the chiefdoms of Lebock and Nzezang. This made the quest for more land imperative in both chiefdoms. Beside the increase in the demand for food-stuffs, the chiefdom of Lebock also had a forest which Nzezang wanted to share.⁵⁵ The land dispute and confrontation occurred when men and women from Lebock went to clear the forest at their frontier zone with Nzezang. They were attacked by the men from Nzezang who invaded the whole area. This led to intense fighting on 26 September 1995 when a man from Nzezang first hit sub-chief Mathias Fonsa-Nkem on the head with a stick. In the course of fighting, people from both chiefdoms sustain severe injuries although no deaths were registered.⁵⁶ The fight led to permanent antagonism and suspicion between the inhabitants of both chiefdoms. The injured men from Lebock went to Kumba General Hospital for treatment where, it is claimed, they spent a total of approximately 130,000 francs CFA.⁵⁷ When the injured men of Lebock returned from Kumba, they took the problem to the D O of Nguti who took steps to settle the land dispute. An investigation commission was set up to study the matter. An injunction was passed against the use of the disputed land until the problem will be solved. Since that injunction, no work has been tolerated on the frontier zone between Lebock and Nzezang. The dispute is still to be finally settled. In any event, the boundary dispute severely disrupted the diplomatic relations between the two chiefdoms.⁵⁸

Mbetta-Dinte Land Dispute

Another conflict which ruptured diplomatic relations between Mbo chiefdoms was the Mbetta-Dinte land dispute. The dispute occurred from 1973 to 1984. The dispute was between Chief Fotabong Joseph of Dinte and his people on the one hand and a group of people led by Lucas Fonjock⁵⁹ from Mbetta on the other. Before examining how the conflict was handled by the various courts, there is need to examine the remote cause of the dispute. Initially, there was no fixed boundary separating the chiefdom of Dinte from that of Mbetta. There was equally no limit to where inhabitants of both chiefdoms could farm because of the surrounding forest. Either chiefdom had about the same surface area as the other, but Dinte was less populated. After the establishment of the Mbetta-Dinte boundary at Fua-Fua by the chiefs of the both chiefdoms, the inhabitants of Mbetta continued to farm at

⁵⁰ Interview with Micheal Fortah-Ngock, Sub-chief and Deputy Mayor Nguti Rural Council, Lekwe, 6 July 2001.

⁵¹ It is on this ground that Sekangha and Lekwe have not been handled in this dissertation as separate chiefdoms. Also, on 15 January 2001, paramount chief Fonven Andrew Ekesangha introduced sub-chief Foto Tanyi Evaristus to the Do of Nguti sub-division as his subject who has worked in Kumba and is retired. Like that chief Fonven Andrew Ekesangha showed his paramountcy over Sekangha and Lekwe.

⁵² Interview with Micheal Fortah-Ngock, sub-chief and Deputy Mayor Nguti Rural Council, Lekwe, 6 July 2001.

⁵³ Fondeck Blaise Fontem to Forka Leypey Mathew Fomine 22 August 2001. Fondeck Blaise Fontem was an eye-witness of the event of 15 January 2001 which marked the climax of the conflict between the chiefdom of Lekwe on the one hand and those of Mbetta and Dinte on the other.

⁵⁴ Fanso, "Trans-Frontier relations," p. 7

⁵⁵ Interview with Mathias Fonsa-Nkem, sub-chief and quarter head of Etintoh, Lebock, 17 June 2001.

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ Interview with Joseph Epundugu, victim of Lebock-Nzezang land dispute, Lebock, 18 June 2001.

⁵⁸ Interview with Vincent Forzeh, sub-chief, Lebock, 18 June 2001.

⁵⁹ The acts of Lucas Fonjock influenced the diplomatic relations between Mbetta and Dinte because in the 1970s and the earlier 1980s, he was the regent chief of Mbetta. For this reason his continuous trespass with some of the natives of his chiefdom into the land of Dinte had a negative effect on the diplomacy of Mbetta at the time. His decisions were on behalf of the entire autonomous chiefdom.

Dinte because of good neighbourliness and close marital relations. This was during the reign of paramount Chief Fotabong Nsanda of Dinte.⁶⁰ But then, a group of people from Mbetta led by Lucas Fonjock decided to cultivate farms on Dinte land. They did not only undermined the authority of Dinte but even claimed ownership over the land by changing the boundary line from Fua-Fua to river Mekoooh, near the palace of the paramount chief of Dinte. The immediate cause of the land dispute was the provocative act which occurred on 10 April 1973. On that day, seven people from Mbetta – Peter Fossoh, Leo Nfonjock, Francisca Makongho, John Ekuntangha, Mary Nkombu, Emambu Nforzong and Lucas Fonjock – after working on the farms that legitimately belonged to Dinte, went to the compound of sub-chief Fortah of Dinte and pushed down the stone which was the symbol of his authority. This act provoked the entire Dinte community that took the matter to the Nguti Customary Court.⁶¹

The first suit against the leader of the group from Mbetta, Lucas Fonjock, was that they had illegally encroached into the land of the Chief of Dinte and were cultivating without any authorisation from him thereby causing a breach of the peace that had reigned between the two chiefdoms.⁶² The Customary Court passed judgement in favour of the plaintiff, Chief Joseph Fotabong of Dinte. But the defendant and his group refused to honour the judgement and continued to farm on the disputed piece of land. Chief Fotabong then referred the matter to the DO of Nguti sub-division. The DO of Nguti intervened in the problem and asked Lucas Fonjock to stop the illegal cultivation of the land. When Fonjock failed to obey, the DO sent him a letter in which he stated that:

Despite my letter N^o 439/P3/7/145 of 20th January 1982 to you in connection with the farm dispute between chief Joseph Fotabong and you, it has been reported that the following people authorized by you are farming the disputed plot: Leo Nfonjock, John Ekuntangha, Mary Nkombu, Emambu Nforzong and Francisca Makongho. You and your collaborators are seriously warned to stop farming the area.⁶³ Lucas Fonjock and his group still ignored the warning letter of the DO and for that reason, Chief Fotabong took the case to the Court of Appeal in Kumba. There the judgement was still passed in his favour and he was then awarded title to the land in dispute. The court ordered Lucas Fonjock and his group to quit the area and to keep to the original boundary. He was advised in his interest to respect the order of the court and to inform whoever had been developing interest or farming on the land to quit. Further encroachment would lead to arrest by the forces of law and order.⁶⁴ Still because of persistent defiance of courts decisions, the chief of Dinte sued Lucas Fonjock at the Kumba High Court in 1984. There Lucas Fonjock was fined to pay 40,000 francs CFA as transport compensation to chief Fotabong and he and his group were compelled to quit the disputed area with immediate effect.⁶⁵ It

was then that Dinte regained ownership over the territory. But diplomatic relations between the chiefdoms of Mbetta and Dinte had been strained and remained so until the early 1990s when paramount chief Fotabong Micheal Elad took over the throne in Dinte.

Summary

Several issues helped to establish and cement traditional diplomatic relations between and among Mbo chiefdoms. A conspicuous example is the trade links that were established in the region. The trade links that were established in the Mbo greatly enhanced economic cooperation and promoted traditional diplomacy in the area. Short-distance trade linked the peoples of the various Mbo chiefdoms and made them to be in close touch with each other. Thus, the spirit of togetherness and solidarity was fostered. Marriage links also promoted traditional diplomacy in Mbo. Marriages between the chiefdoms of Nkongho and those of Ngen that spoke different dialects encouraged multilingualism and fostered communication in the region. Secret societies also promoted traditional diplomacy in the Mbo region. A member of a secret society in any chiefdom was authorised to particulate in the activities of a similar secret society wherever he went in Mbo. This unified the members of the secret societies. Royal burials and celebrations were also used to enhance diplomatic ties between separate Mbo chiefdoms. Failure to dispatch envoys with a message to the funeral of a chief implied that there were no diplomatic relations between the chiefdoms concerned. During the enthronement of chiefs, Mbo chiefs who attended such occasions usually on official invitation used the occasion to promote their diplomatic ties sometimes by pouring libations. For these diplomatic ties to last long, understanding needs to be reinforced especially among the paramount chiefs in order to pave the way for smooth, successful and productive inter-chiefdom relations in the region. The abundant human and economic resources in palm oil, coffee, cocoa and kolanuts, if properly managed, should help the economy of Mbo to improve and the life style of people to change. What is needed is vision, determination, commitment, dynamism and new orientation to foster inter-chiefdom relations.

Women and youths everywhere in Africa generally play vital roles in traditional diplomacy. But this fact is hardly given prominence. Women as agents of biological procreation, as those who beget heirs of chiefs, have hardly been given the opportunity to do the same at diplomatic level. Women might be better resolvers of inter-chiefdom conflicts and promoters of peace. The youths on their part have been acting prominently in the various traditional modes of cooperation like farming and house building. They are also more numerous and more energetic than the adults. For this reason, they deserve to be encouraged and involved in various aspects of traditional diplomacy in their society. A coalition of women, youths, chiefs and adults can surely foster solidarity among the inhabitants and produce a new social, economic and cultural order based on peace, dignity and commitment. Diplomatic relations between and among Mbo chiefdoms will also improve if a unique language was developed or if multilingualism was encouraged so that people of different chiefdoms can communicate with each other easily. This is because language is a vital factor of identity.⁶⁶ Such a linguistic development will, for example, facilitate diplomatic

⁶⁰ Interview with His Royal Highness Micheal Fotabong Elad, the paramount chief of Dinte, Dinte 5 August 2001.

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² Chief Joseph Fotabong, state Council Legal Department Kumba, Disturbances of the quiet enjoyment of my land situated at Dinte village. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Customary Court in Nguti and the High Court in Kumba were mobile, ie holding sessions in Nguti and Kumba.

⁶³ Divisional Officer Nguti sub-division, Trespass to Land, Rf. N^o ANT.66/142(see appendix 3)

⁶⁴ Appeal Court Case N^o9/93-94, Ref. N^o ANI, 66/315

⁶⁵ Interview with Calextus Forsack-Nkiech, sub-chief and elder, Dinte, 6 August 2001.

⁶⁶ Ngwane, *Settling Disputes in Africa*, p. 223

relations between the people of Nkongho and those of Ngen who speak different languages. One or both of the two dominant languages, *Lekongho* and *Letse*, may be developed as *lingua franca* all over Mbo land. Another way by which inter-chiefdom relations can be encouraged and diplomatic relations enhanced is through the use of elders. The use of elders in conflict resolution and promotion of peace within chiefdom or between chiefdoms must never be neglected. Elders played these roles better in pre-colonial times than the courts that were set up by the colonial and independent governments. Modern courts that promote heavy fines, punishment and imprisonments have not helped to promote traditional diplomacy and inter-chiefdom relations in Mbo. For inter-chiefdom cooperation to be enhanced in future, the various chiefdoms should have mutual respect for each other, avoiding hatred, gossips, suspicions, insults, discrimination, provocation and jealousy. These vices can be avoided through inter-marriage and trade links. The people of different chiefdoms should be encouraged to participate in the traditional associations that foster togetherness like the *njangi* groups, credit unions and cooperative societies. Through such associations, inter-chiefdom and group relations can be encouraged and enhanced.

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