



## Conflicts of Interest within and between Stakeholders in the Integrated Development Projects of Bafut Sub-Division

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**Abstract:** The role of stakeholders is significant in the integrated development of rural areas as the case with Bafut sub division. These stakeholders however face a series of setbacks especially in the management of resources for development. One these setbacks are conflicts of interest which are common between members of a development stakeholder or between one stakeholder and another. This study set out to investigate how conflicts of interest affect integrated development in Bafut sub division. One hypothesis was set to guide this study. The research method used was the qualitative and quantitative approach which led to data collection, processing and analyses. The result of this study shows that conflicts of interest are a serious hindrance to the realization of integrated development projects and their sustainability in Bafut sub division. These conflicts are often ignored especially by the government who feels that her authority and financial strength can overcome all barriers to ensure integrated development in rural communities. However, the effective collaboration or participation of all stakeholders is a pre-requisite to integrated rural development project in rural areas and Bafut sub division in particular.

**Keywords:** conflicts of interest, integrated development project, sustainable development

### Introduction

The role of stakeholders in the integrated development of rural communities has been of great interest to many scholars as countries are engaged to meet up with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for a better world by 2030. Sustainable development can easily be attained through the collective efforts of stakeholders in rural development projects whose varied roles can lead to sustainable development (Mansuri, 2004). The study is grounded by the seventeen SDGs which gives the sense of direction in the integrated development efforts of stakeholders in the development of Bafut Sub-Division.

Conflicts of interest are a major constrain to the realization of some development projects and their sustainability even though little attention has been given to this aspect by development scholars. In any community where people live and work together for the progress and development of their society, conflicts are inevitable because people have different ideologies, perspectives of reasoning and different objectives. Self-interest and egoism always comes in to destabilize some efforts. The resources can be available, but the management poses a serious problem (Roseland, 2000). Emphases are laid on challenges of communication, integration of the local population in community development, sources of funding, materials and regulatory authorities. This study attempts an answer to the research question in line with the hypothesis which states that “conflicts of interest affects integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-Division”.

Despite the benefits associated with stakeholders’ participation, a series of challenges are encountered such as managing time frame of projects, training and resources, finding the right stakeholder for work integration and balancing multiple inputs. The resources can be available, but the management poses a number of conflicts (Roseland, 2000). Emphases are made on challenges of communication,

integration of the local population in community development, source of funding, materials and regulatory authorities.

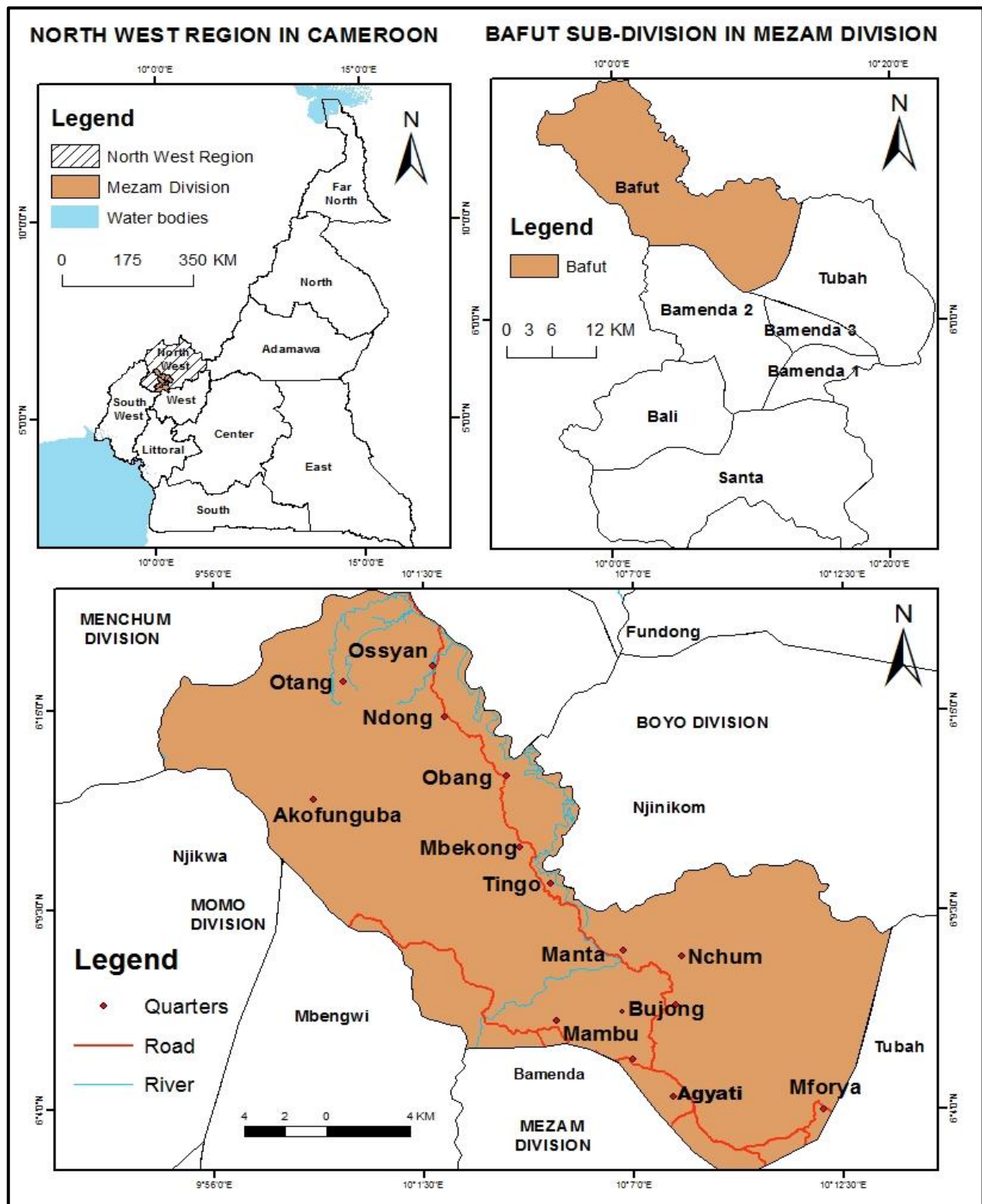
### **Problem statement**

The major challenge to integrated development in Bafut Sub-Division is conflicts of interest. The stakeholders have diverse views and objectives in the face of integrated development projects in Bafut and indirectly stir conflicts once they have something to benefit. The traditional council often exercise favouritism and back up wrong initiatives from influential persons for personal gains. The efforts made by VCP in the development of Bafut Sub-Division have been taken over by the Bafut development Manjong (BDM) which claims to have the authority and economic power even from branches all over the country and abroad. The elite who are fewer but having the economic power (forming the BELA) do not always agree with the ideas of manjong as they feel more educated and influential. It is even worst as some individuals see themselves above the entire community. Base on their political ambitions, they prefer to carry out projects single handed than collaborating with the development stakeholders. After using the community to achieve their aims, the project is abandoned often unsustainable. Under this situation, stakeholders like the Cooperative societies, Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) and others spend time to observe and criticise rather than pledging their contribution. The government's role through the Bafut rural council and parliamentary grants even go without any collaboration with the other development stakeholders or the beneficiary. Some stakeholders rather spend time discrediting others and projecting themselves than involving in community development projects. Some stakeholders and individuals end up embezzling money reserved for projects especially when there is confusion. It is against this background that this research was designed to answer the following research question.

The question therefore to answer is how far does conflicts of interest affect the integrated development of Bafut Sub-division? With an objective of assessing how conflicts of interest affect integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-division.

### **The study area**

Bafut Sub-divisions is found in Mezam Division of the North-West Region of Cameroon. It was created by a presidential decree of 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1993. It is located between longitude 10° 01' and 10°13' east of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude 6°05' and 6°11' north of the equator. It is bordered to the north by Menchum Division, west by Momo Division and south by Bamenda, the divisional capital of Mezam and to the east by Boyo Division (figure 1). Bafut Sub-division covers a surface area of 425 square kilometres and lies between the equatorial and tropical zone. The sub-Division is 12km away from the regional headquarters of the North West Region and makes up a Fondon of 52 quarters (Ngwa,1989)



**Fig 1. Layout of Bafut Sub-Division**

**Literature review**

Following a study carried out in East Africa amongst a group of stakeholders working in a network, Mukundane (2011) and Zachariah et al (2008) delineated the role and contribution of stakeholders’ participation in bringing up the sustainability of donor funded projects. The stakeholders involved participate in the project life cycle from the early stage of implementation of the project to the end and also empower the stakeholders in a working collaboration. The authors examined the various level of conflicts associated in their working relationships that can adversely affect their participation in sustainable development in general which are components of this work.

Roloff (2008) examines the stakeholders who come together in order to handle development issues in any community as a network because they are interactive. The author identifies cross-boundary problem issues and opportunities as pre-occupying for the stakeholders concerned. Since stakeholders' act in a web, the respective responsibilities of individuals, groups, or organizations facilitates the development objectives to be attained. The author did not foresee conflicts of interest between these stakeholders which are capable of restricting their contributions. This study covers the positive and negative aspects related to stakeholders' network as well as environmental challenges which hinder project realization in Bafut Sub-division.

According to Mah (2015), examined the groups and organizations which make up the major stakeholders together with the extent to which they address complex society issues, share common boundary problems as well as opportunities. The author concluded on the need of participation in community base projects and some recommendations for better functioning. The author pointed on conflicts of interest as the major setback to the community base development efforts in the North West region of Cameroon. This article examines the degree to which these conflicts stifle development in Bafut Sub-division over the last decade.

Othman (2011) and Bravi et al. (2013) observed that the low sustainability of community development projects in rural communities is largely due to conflicts between development stakeholders. The conflicts according to the authors stems from the projection of personal interest and gains above community benefits. They observed that appropriate processes such as local campaigns through effective communication, procedures for consultation, sharing of responsibilities and the engagement of community stakeholders will avoid these conflicts and providing a base for the development of community projects. The authors added that the effectiveness of inter organizational relationships between government agencies, community based organizations, NGOs, municipal and traditional council determines the level of sustainability of community projects. The work is limited because it failed to examine the causes of the conflicts between stakeholders and did not proposed measures for an effective network. This study handles all of these aspects in Bafut Sub-division.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a hypothetic-deductive method. The data was collected through interviews with development stakeholders, elite, local and government officials both in and out of Bafut sub division. Questionnaires were also administered using the 4% sample size. With 3035 households in Bafut sub division, 122 questionnaires were taken to the field with 109 effectively responded. The "in vivo codes" were used in treatment of interview data while data from questionnaire was treated through the micro-soft excel to generate tables and graphs according to the village community.

### **Results and discussion**

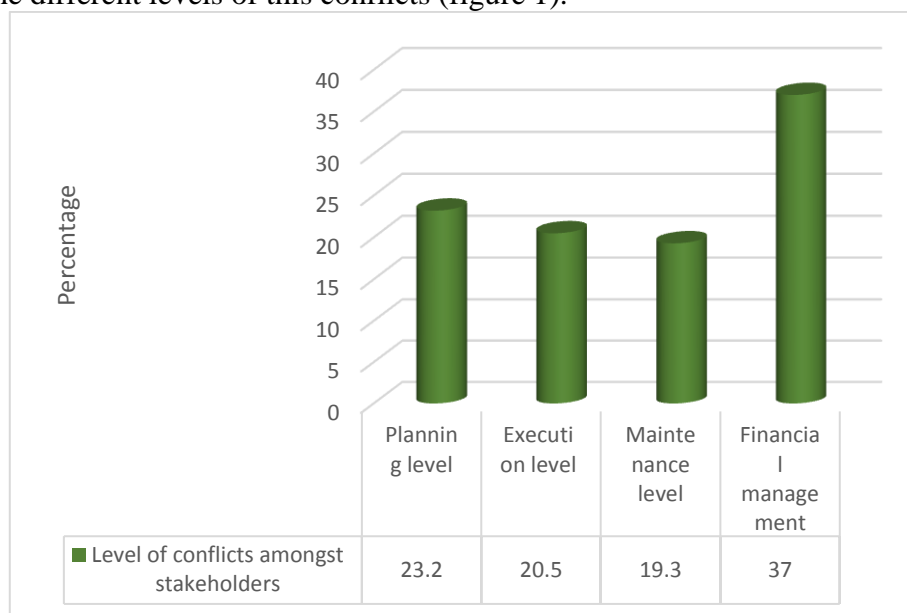
Conflicts are a common challenge amongst stakeholders in Bafut Sub-division. With the development projects in view, there are active disagreements between stakeholders who have opposing opinions or principles. Quarrels and even fighting between two or more groups of people or stakeholders is a common feature whose impacts are often reflected on the evolution of the development projects. Where conflicts exist, the spirit of togetherness is no longer present, and people tend to neglect their own participation or tasks. Others even become skeptical as the future outcome of projects is uncertain. Conflicts are of various forms and are evident beginning from the level of prioritizing projects, planning and throughout the execution level till the maintenance level. Table 1 shows the perception of respondents to occurrence of conflicts amongst development stakeholders involved in the development of Bafut Sub-division.

**Table 1: Level of conflicts amongst stakeholders involved in the development of Bafut Sub-division**

Village community	Number of respondents	Are there some conflicts between stakeholders over development of projects?		
		Yes	No	Not sure
Agyati	27	11	13	3
Akonfunguba	17	15	2	0
Bujong	5	5	0	0
Mambu	17	16	1	0
Mbakong	12	9	2	1
Mforya	18	18	0	0
Nchum	2	0	2	0
Tingo	11	5	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>72.5</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>5.5</b>

Source: Field work, 2019

From table 1, it is observed that 72.5% of respondents affirmed to the fact that serious conflicts exist amongst the development stakeholders against 22% who did not see any instance of conflicts amongst the stakeholders while 5.5% were not sure whether conflicts exist between stakeholders. Informant from the BDM office revealed that the conflicts between stakeholders are a common feature which is a major drawback to stakeholders’ participation and development efforts. These conflicts emanate from personal interest and self-pride. According to this informant, these conflicts of interest have adverse effects on community development projects and it is for this reason that community development approaches are becoming advanced to include transparency, accountability and rational use of resources (Bank, 2008). Regarding the high percentage of the yes-respondents, the study went further to investigate the different levels of this conflicts (figure 1).



**Figure 2: The different levels of conflicts amongst stakeholders in community projects**

Source: Field work, 2019.

The greatest conflicts amongst stakeholders is at the level of financial management (37%) followed by the planning level (23.2%). At the execution level, conflicts are at 20.5% while the least is at the maintenance level (19.3%). The conflict at the level of financial management is because many individuals’ interest is tilted towards financial gains. People usually strive and even bribe to be members of the financial department since they have access to community funds. Once the opportunity comes, it is often exploited. The planning level is also problematic with individuals who try to push through their choice of project at the expense of the entire community. During an interview with the

mayor of BRC on the major challenges facing the development stakeholders, the same view was shared. The study rightly concludes that conflicts of interest amongst the stakeholders are a major drawback to development in Bafut Sub-division. Causes for the lack of stakeholders' participation and lack of trust is due to lack of transparency and accountability as well as lack of regulation by institutions in charge (Sianipar, 2013)

The traditional council in an interview on the conflicts of interest amongst stakeholders and their impacts revealed that almost all the stakeholders encounter conflicts within and with other stakeholders where personal interest is put higher. They added that their main role is to handle these conflicts and shape the organs towards community development. It was concluded that conflicts at any level cannot bare fruits and so effective collaboration remains a prerequisite for meaningful development in the community (Maina, 2013).

The conflicts at the financial management level are generated by mismanagement of project funds, embezzlement of project funds and corruption in management of funds which adversely affects project realisation. The financial credibility of stakeholders in development projects does not really matter as much as the proper management of the financial resources (Ababa, 2013, Peter et al, 2015). It is for this reason that billions have been spend in community projects in many parts of the world, but they have still failed (Njoh, 2014).

The study sampled one of these projects to illustrate the adverse effect of financial conflicts in project realization.

#### **The Mforya water supply project**

The Mforya water supply project witnessed a lot of conflicts at the level of financial management. The support from the VCP towards this project at the tune of 5028500FCFA was saved in the community account together with the contributions made by the community amounting to 2831500FCFA. While time was given for the contributions to be made towards the project, the executive members embezzled 3000000FCFA and shared amongst themselves and nursed a secret to destabilize the project. The quarter heads were brought into this deal by the corrupt executive members with the intension to convince the community to make additional financial contributions. These contributions were made for three years with a mixed feeling and since no progress was recorded, the youths decided to take the executive hostage for the future of the community to be clarified. When the truth was revealed about their embezzlement deal, they were taken to the palace alongside with the quarter heads who were judged and sanctioned accordingly. This could not however bring back the money and the project was bound to fail. Those who were find, and their relations were in oppositions with the youths. It took two additional years for the quarrels to be resolved by the BDM before development initiatives could start again. The water project failed alongside the zeal for community development. At the level of execution the Nibe electricity supply project was sampled

#### **The Nibe electricity supply project**

The project which was selected and planned started in 2011 and it has been characterized by a lot of conflicts between members of the community against the executive and the external BDM. The conflicts started when the president of NICUDA wanted to impose a contractor who had charged a higher cost for the project than others. This is because he was promised a percentage of the project benefit. So, he was working for his personal interest but attempted to convince the community that the other contractors were less experienced. When the proposal was rejected by the community, the president pulls out with some of his collaborators and refused to hand over responsibility.

For over two years with a halt in the project, rumors and quarrels spread about the mismanagement and this made the financial contributions ineffective. With this slow down, the project committee made the next step to meet the BRC who agreed to come in with a contractor. The coming of the new contractor gave lots of hopes which immediately disappeared as he was unscrupulous. He collected 3000000FCFA and after buying a few cables and electric poles, he disappeared leaving another group of disappointed people who accused the executive of complicity in embezzlement. Numerous quarrels and disagreement have been the order of the day where individuals as well as elite are dissatisfied with

the running of affairs. A new president was elected but the old executive members mobilized the community against them and so, they had little authority and influence in the development process of the project. The common manifestations are suspicion and lack of trust which is generated by lack of good leadership in the project execution. This project which was planned for five years have not been completed by 2020 as personal interest keeps mounting above the overall interest. The fate of this electricity supply project is still uncertain as the stakeholders involved still hold to different opinions.

The various conflicts of interest examined so far have been caused by a number of reasons which all center on personal interest. These conflicts have some impacts on the integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-division (table 2).

Table 2: Causes and Impacts of conflicts on development projects

Village community	Number of respondent	Challenges faced in project realization			Impact of conflicts in development projects.			
		Level of education	Personal interest	Environmental constrains	Delay project	Mismanagement	Failure in project	Abandonment of projects
Agyati	27	6	13	8	9	10	5	3
Akonfunguba	17	4	7	6	4	9	3	1
Bujong	5	1	3	1	1	2	2	0
Mambu	17	6	7	4	5	5	5	2
Mbakong	12	4	5	3	2	6	3	1
Mforya	18	4	7	7	2	6	2	8
Nchum	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	0
Tingo	11	5	6	0	2	7	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	30	50	29	25	47	21	16
Percentage	100	27.4	46	26.6	22.9	43.1	19.3	14.7

Source: Field work, 2019

From table 2, it is seen that personal interest (46%) highly provokes conflicts and followed by level of education (27.4%) and lastly are the environmental constrains (26.6%). The self-centered nature of man puts him in a position where any human efforts is motivated by self-benefits. There is also ignorance as far as some of the conflicts are concerned meaning that the project objectives are not understood by all especially those with a low level of educational background. Some people especially the elite bring in projects through their personal efforts so as to be respected and looked upon by everyone in the society. All these have adverse effects on the development projects in Bafut Sub-division (figure 2).

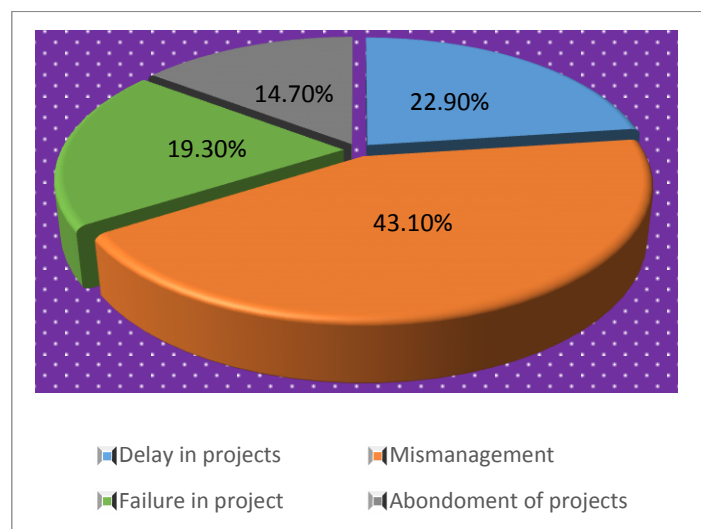


Figure 19: Impacts of conflicts of interest on project realization  
Source: Computed from table 2

The impacts of conflicts on the integrated projects are evident as 43.1% of the respondents affirmed that projects are mismanaged, 22.9% are delayed, 19,3% witnessed failure against 14.1% which are abandoned. In the various VCs, these conflicts are inevitable and have generally brought in adverse effects on the integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-division. Informants from the BRC revealed that much is being invested in the development of Bafut by many stakeholders but the level of development is not appreciable. With the conflicts encountered, projects no longer meet their objectives. Empirical evidence remains with the effectiveness of community managed projects in targeting conflicting groups of stakeholders. The impacts of such conflicts are of adverse effect on the community development projects.

The testing of each hypothesis was based on the theory of perception in action that was drawn from respondents' views quantified through questionnaire administered. The idea that perception is a requisite property of animate action; that without perception, action would be unguided, and without action, perception would serve no purpose constituted the departure base for the series of validations. Knowledge is the foundation of a process in which attitudes, norms and perceptions of possibilities to act are carefully monitored to clarify and decide between behavioral alternatives. To verify these hypotheses, a statistical tool was used notably the Chi square to analyze the data obtained.

The objective of this study was based on the assessment of the conflicts of interest on integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-division. During field investigations, data was collected in view of this objective and presented in table 3

**Table 3: Causes and Impacts of conflicts on development projects**

Village community	Number of respondent	Challenges faced in projects realization		
		Level of education	Personal interest	Environmental constrains
Agyati	27	6	12	8
Akonfunguba	17	4	7	6
Bujong	5	1	3	1
Mambu	17	6	7	4
Mbakong	12	4	5	3
Mforya	18	4	7	7
Nchum	2	0	2	0
Tingo	11	5	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>29</b>
Percentage	100	27.4	46	26.6

Source: Field work, 2019

**Table 4 : Contingency table**

Observed values	Expected values	O-E	O-E <sup>2</sup>	O-E <sup>2</sup> /E
6	5	1	1	0.2
12	5	7	49	9.8
8	5	3	9	1.8
4	5	-1	1	0.2
7	5	2	4	0.8
6	5	1	1	0.2
1	5	-4	16	3.2
3	5	-2	4	0.8
1	5	-4	16	3.2
6	5	1	1	0.2
7	5	2	4	0.8
4	5	-1	1	0.2
4	5	-1	1	0.2



5	5	0	0	0
3	5	-2	4	0.8
4	5	-1	1	0.2
7	5	2	4	0.8
7	5	2	4	0.8
0	5	-5	25	5
2	5	-2	4	0.8
0	5	-5	25	5
5	5	0	0	0
6	5	1	1	0.2
0	5	-5	25	5
Total				$\sum = 40.2$

Source: computed from table 3

The Chi square value was gotten through this formula;

$$x^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

The Chi square calculated value = 40.2

Degree of Freedom (df) = (c - 1) (r - 1) = (3-1) (8-1) = 2x7 = 14.

**Null hypothesis (Ho):** Conflicts of interest and environmental challenges do not affect integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-division.

**Alternative hypothesis (Ha):** Conflicts of interest and environmental challenges affects integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-division.

Inserting our Chi square statistic ( $x^2 = 40.2$ ), which is the calculated value, our predetermined alpha level of significance (0.05), and our degrees of freedom (df =14). Inferring from the Chi square distribution table at 14 degrees of freedom and reading along the row we find that our calculated value of  $x^2$  (40.2) is above the critical value 23.685. Since our calculated value of  $x^2 = (40.2)$ , is far above the critical value of 23.685, we then rejected the null hypothesis which states that; Conflicts of interest and environmental challenges do not affect integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-division and retained the alternative which states that; Conflicts of interest and environmental challenges affects integrated development projects in Bafut Sub-division.

**The way forward**

To properly handle the challenges confronting stakeholders in Bafut Sub-division to the development process, the following suggestions can be implemented.

The local population should be effectively mobilized so as to effectively contribute towards development projects since they are the beneficiary. This handles the problem of escapees in the contribution of development levies. In line with the ineffective participation of the local stakeholders, they should be dynamic enough to bring in development partners such as Plan Cameroon and even lobby for funds through other development NGOs who are willing to assist in the development process of rural communities.

Faced with the problem of subjective involvement and ineffective participation, they should formulate a platform for effective participation and communication amongst them and the external stakeholders. This may be done through annual development congresses or jointly working out the development plan to be adopted by all of them. Through this, the voices of all will be heard with a common objective to attain meaningful development in Bafut Sub-division.

## Conclusion

The challenges faced by the stakeholders in the development of Bafut are numerous and diverse. Conflicts of interest are the most pronounced amongst the challenges encountered in the integrated development projects of Bafut Sub-division. The conflicts which are manifested in various forms are caused by the fact that the people concerned put their personal interest ahead of that of the community. In such a situation, development projects are hindered because the concerned are not working towards a common goal. Many development projects in Bafut have been delayed due to subjective participation of the stakeholders. That is, some stakeholders participate differently or have different degrees of engagement such that some of the projects even fail.

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