



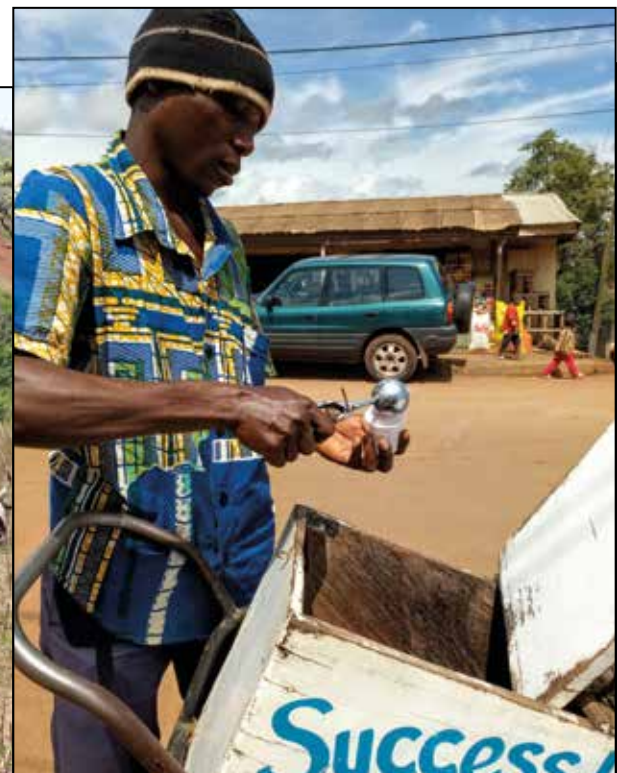
A cow farm built as per Heifer International Project guidelines.

Photo: Jennifer Provost



A herd of Mbororo cattle on a dry season transhumance pasture near Santa, Cameroon.

Photo: Tobias Feldt



Street vendor selling ice cream made from powdered milk.

Photo: Jennifer Provost

## A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR THE DAIRY AND MEAT MARKET – A CASE STUDY FROM CAMEROON

Growing human populations and rapid urbanisation are associated with a higher demand for fresh vegetables and animal-based products, which should theoretically be satisfied by local farmers from the surrounding regions. However, global and transregional trade as well as development initiatives often lead efforts in the wrong direction, rather hindering than strengthening rural-urban linkages. And so, in Cameroon, the dairy and meat market has been biased and requires systematic improvement.

By Tobias Feldt and Jennifer Provost

With almost 400,000 inhabitants as of 2018, Bamenda is the fast-growing capital of Cameroon's Northwest Region – an area that today has gradually become the focus of international attention due to on-going violence in the context of independence attempts by the country's two Anglophone regions. Irrespective of the current conflict, the area around Bamenda is one of the most densely populated parts of Cameroon and has become one of the country's most important regions both for crop and livestock production thanks to its fertile volcanic soils, cooler temperatures and its long, extensive rainy season which ensures rich vegetation almost year-round. However, the expansion of agricultural production promoted by national and international initiatives has not necessarily led to enhanced food security for local populations, in particular for producers.

Rural and peri-urban crop farmers are gradually using larger areas for growing cash crops such as maize, potatoes and other vegetables. While

most of the harvest is meant to supply urban markets inside and outside the region or even the country, very little is used for local consumption, if at all. Instead, many farmers still rely on their traditional, often nutrient-poor diets rather than foregoing revenues from the sale of their crops. Simultaneously, a substantial amount of the production destined for urban and supra-regional markets is lost on the way because of a particularly poor road infrastructure and a lack of storage facilities. Food insecurity thus remains prevalent. Likewise, the region's dairy and beef markets also present contradictory developments towards food security.

### THE TRADITIONAL AND THE MODERN MILK PRODUCTION SYSTEM

Milk production in and around Bamenda can today be broken down into two very distinct production systems as a result of both history and development initiatives that have been

trying for some time to establish a local milk market in order to supply the growing urban population with fresh and healthy dairy products and to create income opportunities in this field. The first system involves pastoral rural Mbororo populations who live with – and off – their large herds of predominant local cattle and a minimum production of milk (on average 2 L/cow\*day) mostly destined for household consumption. The second production system consists of urban inhabitants of non-Mbororo origin (henceforth referred to as the “natives”). These agropastoralists traditionally owned pigs, poultry and goats for meat production and historically had no affinity for the rearing of large livestock and the consumption of dairy products, but now own a few imported cows of improved breed supplying higher milk production (on average 12 L/cow\*day).

The use of exotic European breeds, such as Holstein-Friesian or Jersey cattle, remains a



Yogurt made with fresh milk, packaged in recycled soda bottles, and sold at the Santa market.

Photo: Jennifer Provost

relatively new phenomenon in Bamenda. Until recently, the NGO Heifer Project International had been active in the region since the 1990s. It imported hundreds of pure breed Holstein heifers and gave them to “native” farmers (one cow per household) after they had gone through an extensive and detailed training on pen-farming, cut-and-carry feeding and milk handling. This led to the multiplication of dairy co-operatives and dairy owning households, and then a substantial increase in milk supply in the region. Nowadays, pure Holstein cattle can be found in urban and peri-urban households. However, probably due to their often remote rural location, Mbororo communities were not included in this initiative.

### FRESH MILK VERSUS MILK POWDER

The Mbororo raise cattle mostly for meat and cultural value. During the rainy season (April to November), milk is typically collected once a day in the morning and then handed to the women. Usually, the milk is not pasteurised and is used for the household’s consumption as sweet tea, butter, or “pendi” (curdled milk similar to yogurt). However, some women decide to sell surplus milk by walking around their communities and visiting the closest markets sporadically. They are allowed to keep the milk money without reporting to their husbands. According to a study completed in 2017, a third of milk sellers in the region are Mbororo.

### THE MBORORO PEOPLE

For many decades, cattle breeding has been the traditional domain of formerly semi-nomadic Mbororo people, a subgroup of the Muslim Fulani ethnicity that entered the so-called “grasslands” in Cameroon’s Northwest Region in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They found an ideal environment for their cattle herds of typically Red and White Fulani breeds, with sufficient pasture and water for most of the year, and no tsetse flies (responsible for the spread of trypanosomiasis, also known as sleeping disease). Today, they mostly inhabit the rural areas around Bamenda. The region is still suffering from ethnic segregation, basically between the Mbororo and the “natives” (a general term for a wide range of Bantu groups mainly of Christian faith). Both of the ethnic groups are organised in interest groups and associations that mostly keep to themselves and usually do not co-operate with their counterparts in the respective other ethnic group. As a result, a prejudice-laden “us-against-them” attitude often prevails between pastoralists and crop farmers or traditional and “new” cattle breeders.

Even today, some Mbororo still keep large cattle with an average of around 90 head (not rarely in several herds per owner); the share of dairy cows within these herds varies considerably. Wealthy “natives” also increasingly acquire large herds of cattle and then have them “managed” by Mbororo – here however the focus is clearly on meat races.

Surprisingly, despite the two milk supply chains (i.e. of the Mbororo and the native farmers), no fresh milk can be found when one walks through the supermarkets and outdoor markets of the city (unless you are able to catch an Mbororo woman passing by!). All the yogurt and ice cream sold on the streets and in the grocery stores are made with milk powder. Bakeries, coffee houses and restaurants all use imported milk powder. No dairy facility, processing unit or collection centre has existed in or around Bamenda since mid-2016, when the last of the two processing plants in the region was closed down because it was unprofitable. Since then, there have no longer been any “professional” structures in the city and its direct (peri-urban) surroundings to which the cattle owners could sell their raw milk. In the meantime the thus remaining “informal” market has been restricted to private individuals and smaller societies and associations who, however, lack the financial resources, equipment and business know-how and links needed to process and distribute greater volumes of produce. The informal market is the only outlet of fresh milk or dairy products and is quite challenging for busy and overwhelmed milk producers to integrate. For consumers this informal market also represents sanitary risks and often requires longstanding relationships of trust with the producers.

This situation can be partly explained by cultural perceptions of milk as a food. It is often assumed that increasing urbanisation and income go along with increasing demand for

products like dairy and meat. While Heifer Project International had good intentions by introducing commercialised milk production in Bamenda, it assumed that there was a milk demand to begin with. In reality, fresh milk is not truly known and appreciated by the natives, and as a consequence the informal market is too small to accommodate the hundreds of milk farmers in the city. Natives reported that milk was regarded as a food for “bush people”, in reference to rural Mbororo, who are hardly integrated into the communities of native agro-pastoralists and urban dwellers. Fresh milk is considered “smelly”, “dirty” and a “poor people’s food”. Despite its cheap price, surplus milk regularly spoils, gets thrown away or is fed to pigs and dogs. Some milk producers have resorted to transforming their surplus into yogurt sold in washed, re-used plastic bottles, but the demand remains low, unstable and seasonal. However, in contrast to fresh milk, powdered milk is considered fancy, clean, and for “civilised” people. Unfortunately, this powder of varying quality is mainly imported from Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

The informal market is defined as activities that are unrecognised, unrecorded, unprotected and unregulated by public authorities.

International Labor Office, 1972

The demand for fresh milk is limited to bigger urban centres like Douala and Yaoundé, where the country’s wealthy middle and upper class has developed a taste for particular dairy products such as cheese and flavoured yogurts. Given its environmental advantages, the region of Bamenda could easily evolve into a “milk basket” for the country. However, the connecting routes to the large cities are neglected and

impractical: driving less than 400 kilometres takes roughly eight hours. Furthermore, no costly cold chain equipment could sustain the poor state of the roads and the security risks. Since dairy products are also highly sensitive and perishable, Bamenda is limited to supplying its immediate surrounding areas, where demand remains low, almost non-existent.

### INTERFACE OF CATTLE MARKETS, BEEF PRODUCTION AND TRADITION

In contrast to dairy, beef production remains predominately in the hands of the Mbororo, who still manage their cattle herds in a largely traditional and non-intensive way – although changes such as the mixing of stocks with improved, non-Zebu breeds is now noticeable to some extent. Through intermediaries, they serve a chain of cattle markets, from small rural and peri-urban villages to the weekly big cattle market in Bamenda. Part of the animals sold directly end up in the city's two official abattoirs, where about 30 to 35 cattle are slaughtered per day. Meanwhile, others are transported alive, either by truck or even on hoof, towards Douala, Cameroon's largest city and economic hotspot. From this angle, one might think that beef production and marketing in and around Bamenda provides a good example of a successful rural-urban relationship: while the growing population demands more and more meat which – despite health and ecological reservations – is nowadays seen as the essential ingredient of almost every African meal, this demand is largely served by regional producers who can make a good living from it.

The reality, however, looks slightly different. Although the results of a study we carried out between 2017 and 2018 show that about 40 per cent of Mbororo pastoralists consider the sale of live animals as the major purpose of cattle keeping, only a small share of their herds actually ends up in the markets. Instead, many cattle owners still follow the old custom of accumulating the largest possible herds for cultural reasons and prestige (identified as the major purpose by 36 per cent of the interviewees) and only selling animals when needed. Therefore, they risk investing in quantity rather than quality while creating a surplus of animals that is not actually meant or available to satisfy the meat demands of the consumers. By doing so, they inevitably enter into competition over land with rural crop farmers, which is becoming increasingly severe in that region due to growing human and livestock populations as well as progressive land-use change

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Business and entrepreneurship initiatives for livestock producers must be supported and financed in the region.
2. Cattle farmers should emphasise the high quality and special value of their local dairy and beef products to compete with global and transregional offers.
3. National and international efforts aimed at intensifying agriculture and livestock production should be based on a comprehensive understanding of the rural, peri-urban and urban actors as well as their preferences.
4. Traditional Mbororo and local livestock-keeping practices should be included rather than replaced with imported production approaches.
5. Prestige and social norms that still hinder commercialisation of cattle should be overcome.
6. Encouraging a multicultural dialogue would reduce the prejudices against dairy products and the "my people first" mentality (see Box on page 15).
7. Sensitisation and awareness raising of nutritional benefits of milk could increase the demand on the informal market.
8. Bamenda urgently needs a formal dairy processing unit to reduce fresh milk spoilage and to keep farmers in the dairy business.
9. National border controls should include regulation of the influx of foreign livestock in terms of their health and headcount to protect Cameroonian cattle markets.



Rural cattle market near Acha, Cameroon.

Photo: Tobias Feldt

from natural and traditional grazing areas to agricultural land. Simultaneously, Bamenda's market for live animals and beef is coming under pressure from a rising influx of cattle from neighbouring Nigeria. Often entering the region without traceable origin and veterinary certificates because of insufficient border controls, these import trades have contributed to a decline in market prices for Cameroonian cattle in recent years and, at the same time, have increased the risk of spreading bovine diseases. Thus, despite ideal conditions for rural-urban linkages for beef production, the process remains inadequate and weak due to the high cultural significance of cattle and uncontrolled transregional trade inflow flooding the domestic market.

The example of the Bamenda dairy and beef market shows the need for better strategies and regional approaches of livestock and commodity policies, adapted to the actual needs of both producers and consumers in a rural-urban context.

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For references and further reading, see online version of this article at: [www.rural21.com](http://www.rural21.com)