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Modern State Law: Regulating Tradition or Protecting the Environment in the Mankon Kingdom of Northwest Cameroon?

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Abstract

Most African countries including Cameroon find themselves in a situation of legal pluralism and at crossroads with implications for the sustainable management of natural resources. Traditional institutions and knowledge systems have been hailed as invaluable mechanisms for the conservation of flora and fauna. This chapter examines the conflict between traditional institutions and State law in the hierarchically stratified Mankon Kingdom of the Grassfield region of Northwest Cameroon where the latter prohibits the harvesting of culturally valuable plant and animal species for myriad ritual ceremonies and for therapeutic purposes. It demonstrates that the lack of cultural sensitivity can be antithetical to conservation initiatives. In other words, there is the need to align current legislative regulations for the management of natural species with the traditional use of territory and gender roles as well as to raise the cultural and educational level of the population through sensitization on the need to conserve the natural environment on which their culture depends for its survival.

Keywords: legal pluralism, sociocultural factors, ritual, conservation, traditional society, environmental education

1. Introduction

Globally, the hunting of bushmeat¹ for food, ornamental, and medicinal products has put 301 terrestrial mammal species at the verge of extinction. The risk of extinction is higher in developing countries where rapid deforestation, the expansion of agriculture, human encroachment, and competition with livestock are accentuating the situation [1]. In Southeast Asia, 113 species of mammals are threatened by hunting. An estimated “13% of all threatened mammals are east of India and south of China, 91 in Africa (8%), 61 in the rest of Asia (7%), 38 in Latin America (3%) and 32 in Oceania (7%)” [1]. In Central and West Africa, the exploitation of bushmeat has reached alarming proportions. Although bushmeat is an all-time significant resource, in bushmeat-dependent communities,

¹ The term applies to all wildlife species including guinea fowl, monitor lizard, forest antelope (duiker), chimpanzee, gorilla, elephant, monkey, and other primates.

“traditional subsistence use of game is vulnerable to commercial and social changes” [1, 2]. The factors driving these transformations may include recent immigration, urbanization and the market economy’s increasing demand and improvement in infrastructure allowing easier transportation of meat to markets far away [1, 2].

The Republic of Cameroon boasts of an estimated 9000 plant species. At least 156 of these plants are endemic. Of 409 species of mammals, 14 are endemic. The country also counts 2084 insects including more than 1500 butterflies. The country further has 542 species of fish, of which 96 are endemic. Other animal species include 330 reptiles and 200 amphibians [3]. Additionally, the country further has some 925 species of birds, of which 22 are endemic, while 249 plants are critically endangered [4]. The region where the Mankon Kingdom is found constitutes part of the World Wildlife Fund’s (WWF) 200 worldwide ecoregions. The ecoregion of the Western Grassfields contains 35 restricted range endemic bird species, (third richest region for birds in mainland Africa). The region’s habitat supports a number of endemic reptiles (10), endemic amphibians (55), endemic mammals (6), and an estimated 100 rare/endemic plant species [3, 5]. The Northwest Region is losing biodiversity at a rapid pace—37% of forest cover in 1958 shrank to 3.5% in 2000 [5]. Some species are generally thought to be at risk from the bushmeat trade or are currently rare or vulnerable or facing the threat of extinction. This means that they could easily succumb to the traditional pressures of hunting, thereby exacerbating their further decline and eventual extinction. In the Mankon Kingdom, the following wildlife species are at the verge of extinction: leopard (*Panthera pardus*), golden cat (*Profelis aurata*), forest elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), black colobus (*Cercopithecus preussi*), giant pangolin (*Manis gigantea*), and zebra duiker (*Cephalophus zebra*) [5]. The natural habitat of the Grassfield region is seriously threatened by a population increase of 3.4% per annum that has led to the creation of farms, unsustainable harvesting of barks of trees (for medicine), fires by grazers and farmers, unsustainable collection of wood for fuel, and construction as well as bushmeat hunting [3, 5, 6].

Despite the threat and likely extinction of certain wildlife species, Cameroon, however, remains the second richest country in Africa in terms of the diversity of its primates [7]. To strike a balance between conservation and development, the government of Cameroon enacted a forestry policy and its decree of implementation in 1994 and 1995, respectively. The country further adopted a policy relating to environmental management as well as an accompanying legal framework in 1996—Decree on Environmental Impact Assessment [2, 5]. The effective implementation of these policies by Cameroon’s Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife and of the Environment and Nature Protection is, however, dogged by inadequate diffusion among local frontline staff at the grassroots and ill-informed community members who unknowingly harvest protected plant and animal species as status symbols and for other sociocultural purposes. The exploitation of rare plant and animal species shows the chasm between the adoption and the implementation of culture-insensitive laws for biodiversity conservation. For example, by outlawing the hunting of certain species of animals, Cameroon’s 1994 Forestry Law has created a leeway for community members to be arrested by the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection during the celebration of culturally significant events when products from protected wildlife species are on display.

Mankon is one of several Western Grassfield chiefdoms that shares most of its basic ideological and social repertoire with other chiefdoms of the region. This includes sacred kingships, the belief in misfortune and pollution, and the special status of certain animals like the leopards, among others [8]. We were surprised during previous research visits to the Western Grassfield region when

we observed that interviewees in authority including the Mankon Fon (King), notables, clan heads, quarter heads, and other influential persons were exhibiting either some animal skin or some of their parts. The Fon, for instance, does not generally sit anywhere without animal signs on his outfit or animal skin used as foot mat or chair cover. The increasing scarcity of most of these animal species that are used as status and ornamental symbols and Cameroon's conservation laws addressing the protection of certain threatened culturally significant species will certainly put the people in a double-bind situation. Why have people despite the ban by the Cameroon government continued to display certain in-/tangible wildlife species? This ban has put the people of Mankon and other traditional societies in a dilemma when it comes to the use of parts of plants and animals in their environment. It also raises questions about the effectiveness of traditional mechanisms of conservation/management of natural resources. Natural resource "management" has to do with how species are controlled or directed as a resource, while "use" refers to the functions these species serve or the uses to which they are put. The distinction between "use" and "management" of wild animal species is critical for assessing their integration into community forestry activities. For community forestry to incorporate wild animals, provision must be made for their effective management, not merely their use. In a context where State laws supersede local cultural norms and practices, what is the relationship between gendered wildlife use and the socioeconomic, political, and religious life of the Mankon community?

This chapter examines the conflict between State law prohibiting the use of certain culturally significant flora and fauna species as status symbols and for sociocultural purposes in the hierarchical Kingdom of Mankon in the Western Grassfield region of Cameroon. Unsustainable exploitation has virtually eliminated wildlife, and vulnerable species are threatened with extinction. Concurrently, most of the symbolic values associated with the use of royal wildlife are persisting. The chapter demonstrates that the lack of a gender lens and cultural awareness in the formulation of conservation legislation can be antithetical to the protection of the environment and the management of natural resources. The chapter argues that tightening the rule in the name of protecting the use of wildlife species can entail severe restrictions in traditional rights. The chapter calls for a synergy between current conservation regulations for the management of flora and fauna with traditional gendered use of territory, especially the use of certain symbolic animal species. It suggests that raising the cultural and educational levels of the population could lead to behavior change, but there is also the need to adapt legislation to local gender roles and cultural norms to ensure the protection of the environment and sustainable development.

Educational attainment is considered a quintessential tool for environmental protection as well as a determinant of environmental preference. We argue that an individual's level of education strengthens his ability to "receive, decode and to understand information processing and interpretation have an impact on learning and behavior change towards the natural environment" [8, 9]. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, education consists of the "systematic training and instruction designed to impart knowledge and develop skill" [10]. In every society, it is the catalyst for economic and social changes [11] as well as for changes in attitudes and behavior. It goes beyond the simple "acquisition of knowledge and includes the ability to evaluate that knowledge" [9, 12]. As succinctly put by the World Conservation Union, environmental education encompasses changes in behavior and the idea that knowledge will induce personal, societal, and global changes [13]. Learners will be afforded an "opportunity to gain an awareness or sensitivity to the environment, knowledge and experience of the problems

surrounding the environment, to acquire a set of values and positive attitudes, to obtain the skills required to identify and solve environmental problems and, the motivation and ability to participate” [9, 12].

2. Method of study

This chapter examines the conflict between modern State law and the cultural use of prohibited wildlife species in the cultural universe of the Mankon people of Northwest Cameroon. Multilocal ethnographic fieldwork [14, 15] took place in all clans and neighboring villages of Mankon in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. It lasted for 6 months (January to June 2010). We used semi-structured and open-ended interviews as well as observations. Qualitative methods were deemed suitable because of their ability to explore the meaning and understanding that people attach to phenomenon [16]. Firstly, they provide a “thick description” or depth of understanding to complement the breadth of understanding afforded by quantitative methods. Secondly, “they elicit the perspective of those being studied, explore issues that have not been well-studied, test hypotheses, or evaluate the process of a phenomenon” [1, 17].

“Open-ended” questions enabled us to explore different perspectives and methods to generate breadth of knowledge and depth of experience in order to understand and appreciate the phenomenon under study [17]. Lastly, it provides excellent understanding into people’s opinions, experiences, and perceptions from their own point of view—including subjective experience [18–23] such as perceptions of forest and wildlife.

The exploratory phase combined qualitative and quantitative ethnographic methods aimed at describing the cultural model of wildlife use. We elicited the cultural significance of wildlife use as a determinant of some cultural values in the community. During the initial phase of fieldwork, passive observation with minimum interaction between us and the object of study was helpful. As passive observers, we established residence in Mankon, made new acquaintances, took part in community activities, worked to establish rapport, and attempted to understand how considerations of wildlife use play into everyday life. Our main task was to make a systematic record of day-to-day interactions, observations, and informal preservation by writing field notes on a daily basis ([23], pp. 180–207). As part of an iterative process, writing field notes was helpful to us because we could identify important questions and domains of life that needed to be explored in detail. Passive observation was an appropriate method for addressing sensitive questions such as hunting following the ban on certain animal species. It extended the internal and external validity of the study by helping us understand the meaning of observations, and it helped us to formulate sensible questions for later stages of the research ([23], p. 141).

We obtained research authorization from the Head of the Department for Anthropology in the University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon. Participants were debriefed. They signed a consent form but were also free on when and how to withdraw from the study if a need arises.

In the next sections, we first present the dynamic socioeconomic and political context in which State law takes precedence over customary land ownership, including ownership of the forest and wildlife species inhabiting it. The second part situates the research area and the local sociopolitical organization and examines traditional mechanisms of conservation in Mankon. The third part examines cultural representations of wildlife, especially royal wildlife in the sociocultural universe of the people. The last part is the conclusion.

2.1 Legal pluralism and the management of natural resources

This section demonstrates that in Cameroon, the coexistence of State law and customary law regulating land and the resources on them pits the government against local communities and tends to undermine community rights over their natural resources.

Cameroon stands at a crossroad between modern State laws and traditional authority. This legal dualism has led to a conflict of laws, especially when it comes to the conservation of natural resources. In most parts of Cameroon, the enduring power of traditional authorities still holds sway. Consequently, the word of the local Fon, chief, or sultan/lamido still holds more weight than that of the government. In all the countries of the Congo Basin, wildlife remains important to all the chiefs. Local communities and the state, however, view wildlife differently. At the local level, it is used for food and for medicinal and cultural purposes (especially in rituals and as emblems by traditional dignitaries), and it is traded through barter or commerce [24]. Through various ritual actions executed by elders, they transmit this knowledge from one generation to the other. Apart from changing environmental conditions, State laws that prohibit the killing of particular species of animals may transform these ritual actions. The legal ban on certain species of animals suggests the loss of cultural traits.

The State of Cameroon claims monopoly over all land and the natural resources therein, while traditional authorities like the Fon of Mankon are custodians of land and natural resources at the local level for their people. Access to land, usually through lineages, is a “communal” right, while colonial and presently postcolonial rules are experienced through the network of power relations known as the “customary” [25]. Mahmood Mamdani has baptized this system of indirect rule that uses chiefs/Fons as auxiliaries of the administration (citizens and subjects) as institutionalized despotism [25]. This implies that although bestowed with traditional authority, the Fon remains subservient and an auxiliary to the modern administration.

Prior to the Franco-British partition of Cameroon and subsequently the colonial encounter that tremendously transformed property rights, traditional institutions headed by traditional rulers and members of their councils managed natural resources including the forest. This was done in tandem with customary norms, practices, and beliefs [26, 27]. This resonates with calls for the integration of traditional ecological knowledge into modern natural resource and environmental management systems. Serra Jeanette Hoagland [28] has, for instance, pointed to the need for a dualistic perspective where traditional ecological knowledge and western science are integrated into natural resource management. This implies the integration of different ways of knowing (different knowledge systems) into natural resource management decision-making and strategies. Like in other kingdoms in Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe), uncultivated land was communally owned [24, 26, 27]. There was minimal forest resource exploitation, and it was mainly done for subsistence purposes. Traditionally, the forest served as a source of food, medicine, fuel wood, water, construction materials, and place of worship (spiritual sanctuary) [29]. The traditional ruler granted permission for hunting after determining where and when the hunting expedition will take place as well as the type of animals to be hunted. Those who entered the forest without his permission could be severely punished and, in extreme cases, excommunicated from the community [30, 31]. Low population pressure made the impact on the environment to be low [32]. Today, resources such as wildlife have progressively been subjected to government control at the expense of traditional landholders/local communities [30–32].

The overlapping power structure between the modern state and traditional authorities has led to a conflict of laws. When it comes to the management of the environment and natural resources, these mutually contested rights that characterize land tenure in present-day Cameroon have been dubbed by Phil René Oyono as a “deep *conflit de langage* (in French) [32]. According to him “the *conflit de langage* (conflict of language or of discourse)” is specifically “between the state and local communities on land and forests ownership and on the regulation of access to natural resources” ([32], p. 115). This implies that there are conflicting discourses as well as claims and counterclaims between local authorities and the state about who really owns the land and the forest [29, 32, 33]. Following the complete confiscation of their resources by the state, members of local forest-dwelling communities are increasingly feeling a sense of alienation and deprivation [34–36]. This implies that Cameroon’s 1994 Forestry Law is not culturally sensitive. It is therefore a legislation against local people because it denies them access to their natural resources [36].

The 1994 Forestry Law does not identify the legal status of customary land interests. The Cameroon government has failed to acknowledge customary landholding. This is evidenced by the difficulty that customary landowners face in formally registering and securing their landholdings [27, 33]. This scenario has rendered rural Cameroonians deeply insecure in their land tenure. They are squatters on their own land. Land ownership continues to be reckoned in terms of “development” [27, 29, 30]. Cameroon’s land legislation has, therefore, fallen short in social and developmental respects concerning its treatment of customary tenure. By failing to recognize customary land rights, the provisions of the 1994 Forest, Wildlife and Fisheries Regulations in Cameroon “have added significantly to the wrongful demise of customary land rights through unnecessary and patently rent-seeking ways” as instantiated by its designation “of the most valuable forest resources of its citizens as its own private property. The outcome also shows that sustainable forest conservation and management of use are also being affected” [4, 36]. This highlights the enduring role of local conservation practices.

2.2 Traditional mechanisms of conservation

The Mankon people of Cameroon’s Western Grassfield region find themselves in a new economic and political dispensation. There is the intrusion of State laws regulating the hunting of particular large mammals including the lion and elephant that are symbolic of royalty. In this new context, State authority has taken precedence over indigenous land rights and the natural resources therein. This State authority is instantiated and concretized through the declaration and implementation of an environmental policy (The 1994 Forestry Law) that defines exclusionary rights [37]. It has imposed limitations on animal species that can be legally hunted as well as the tools that can be used during hunting (**Table 1**).

There is power inequality between the state and conservation organizations on the one hand and, on the other, between them and the Mankon community. This power inequality is about who exercises power, when, and how. This is evident in the competing knowledge systems at play in the framing of sustainability between the indigenous Mankon people who have for decades been stewards of their environment and the government and conservation organizations over the environment [37]. Against this backdrop, the role of indigenous peoples and of local cultural norms in conservation has been questioned [37–40]. Practices including resource rotation, food taboos, and restrictions on harvest limits are allegedly the outcome of optimal harvesting and not conscious conservation efforts. Scholars have taken

Animal category	Definition
Class A	Totally protected No hunting No trade or use as pets Authorization from Wildlife Service of MINFOF required for their capture
Class B	Protected Hunting allowed with hunting permit
Class C	Partially protected Wildlife Service of MINFOF regulates their exploitation
CI	Trade restricted in tandem with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Examples—elephant tusk, montium chameleon, African rock python, and <i>Prunus africana</i> (pygeum)

Compiled by author with information from Verina Ingram and Nsom A. Jam [5].

Table 1.
 Categories of protected species according to Cameroon Law No. 1996 relating to environmental management.

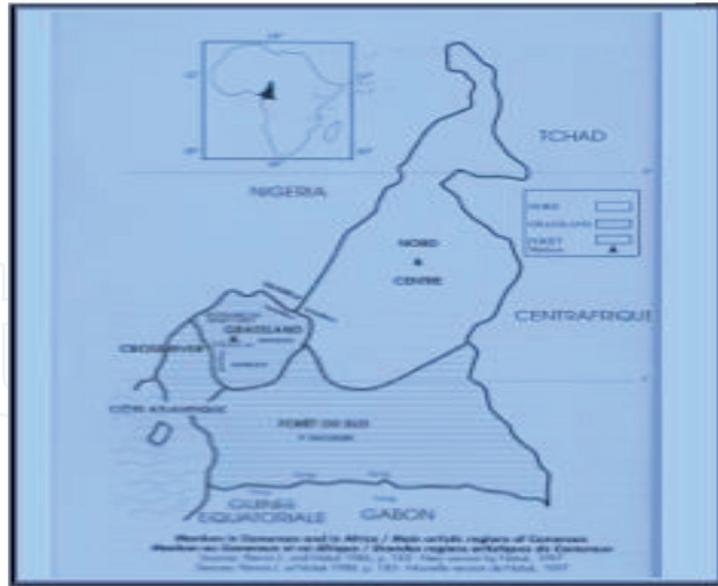
issue against the conflation of sustainability which results from small population sizes and therefore minimal pressure on natural resources with conservation, that is, the intentional restrictions of short-term goals for the achievement of better long-term gain [38]. The crux of this debate is about the role of indigenous peoples in conservation initiatives [38–42].

Despite the assumption that rural people traditionally harvest resources sustainably [41], the sustainability of subsistence economies, requiring internal controls on population and exploitation, has not been demonstrated to exist [40, 43]. Traditional subsistent participants who have entered commercial markets dominate much of the current bushmeat trade. One of the primary concerns of those working on the bushmeat issue is the very real threat that this poses to communities that are largely dependent upon wildlife for meeting their primary protein needs. Truly sustainable subsistence hunting communities like Mankon are difficult to identify, but recent research has shown that it may be feasible to maintain sustainable levels of exploitation for subsistence as long as significant controls on hunting access and methods exist along with controls on trade and demographics (i.e., immigration to local community) [42]. These may include prohibitions on the slaughtering of the leopard, lion (/sam-bang/), cheetah, and others. Do indigenous people (including the Mankon people) have mechanisms for conserving their environment? We set the context of study before examining traditional mechanisms of conservation and the Mankon people’s myriad perceptions of the forest.

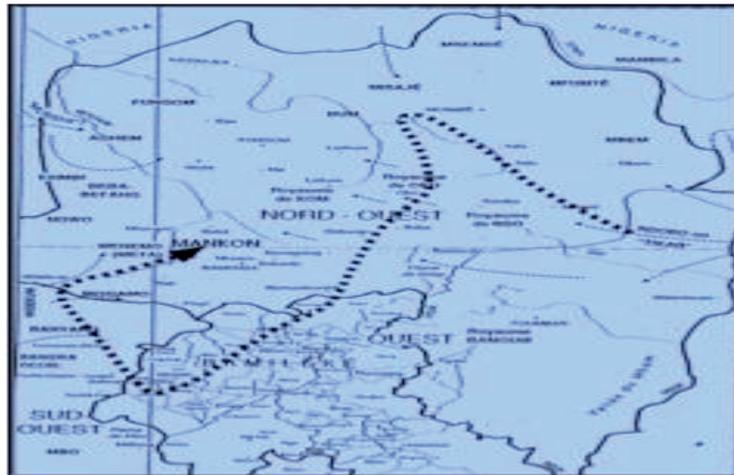
2.3 The study site

In this section, we describe the local sociopolitical organization and highlight the sociocultural significance of wildlife parts to the Mankon cultural universe. Located in the Northwest Region of Cameroon, Mankon is part of the Grassfield chiefdoms where the threat to tropical animal species has been reported [6]. It is found on an altitude of about 1000 m, above sea level. It shares boundaries with tribes including Bafut in the North. The Meta, Ngyembu, and Bali Nyonga Fondoms are situated in the east, and Nsongwa, Mbatu, and Akum are in the south.

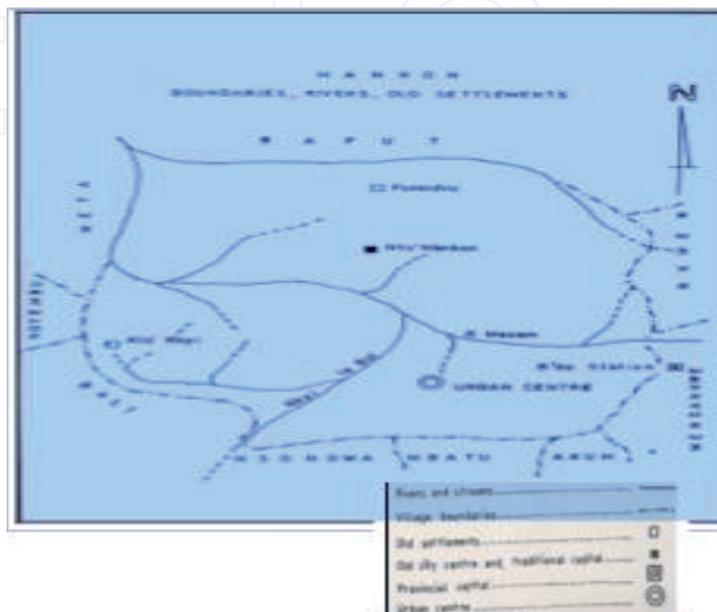
2.4 Mankon in the Western Grassfield region: Cameroon and Africa



Source: Notue [8, 25].



Source: Notue [8, 25].



Source: Eballa et al. ([44], 1984:1).

Mankon is bounded in the east by Mushugu and the villages of Mandankwe and Nkwen; in the North by Bafut; in the west by Meta, Ngyen-mbo, and Bali; and in the south by the villages of Mbatu and Nsongwa. Mankon has an estimated land area of about 315 square kilometers and an estimated population of about 50,000 inhabitants (estimate made in 1984). On the average, therefore, the population density is about 158 persons per square km [45].

Despite the impact of multiple raids in the nineteenth century, Mankon retained its cohesion. It also preserved its social organization that is based on nine clans. After the Ba'ni raids, the people settled in a dense defensive settlement on the north bank of the river Mezam. It is reputed for having retained its basic clan structure [45]. It was originally an amalgamation of three villages (Mbatu, Nsongwa, and Chomba), and it is one of the principal ethnic groups that constitute the larger Tikar group of people.

Mankon has a demarcated territory, a population of diverse origins, well-defined traditional institutions for the regulation of conflicts, and a military force under the leadership of a sacred sovereign personality, the Fon. The *ntoh* (capital) is the royal palace and is the main cultural, administrative, and religious center of the community [6, 45]. Aspects of the belief system of the people are perceptible in the cultural events they perform before, during, and after important traditional ceremonies. Prominent among these ceremonies is the annual cultural dance event (*Abüng a Fo*), which is a replica of its political, economic, and social structures.

Because of its hilly topography, the climate is generally cold and windy. The alternating dry and rainy seasons of the year give room for subsistent farming leading to crop yields, which are mainly sold on traditional market days and Saturdays. These traditional market days attract people from other neighboring villages who converge to buy or sell food items.

Mankon is surrounded by lowland forest on the western and southern sides. The savannah, shrubs, and other tree types grow on the hilltops and slopes, while the elephant stalk (*nküinka/atasong*) and watershed trees are visible in the valleys and the lowlands. Rain forest trees can be found in the hinterlands. This is evidence of the fact that high equatorial forest trees once grew there. The ecosystem has reportedly witnessed depletion. This is the result of human activities like regular burning to create farms and exploitation by hunters, herdsman, and farmers.

As a measure to reverse the threat of watersheds drying up, the Ministry of Wildlife and Nature Protection has embarked on numerous reforestation projects. There is, however, a concern for the tree types planted for this purpose. Most people grow *Eucalyptus* trees for various needs like fuel wood, roofing, poles, and other uses. Contrary to the importance of *Eucalyptus* trees, it is more sustainably useful in wetland areas since it is known for its huge water nourishments for growth. Therefore, a semiarid region like the Northwest Region will probably need other friendly tree species to rejuvenate its ecological system as already noted by officials of the ministry concerned. A further shortcoming with these projects is the conflation of community ownership with sustainability. As Victor Agah-ah Mah states, "The implementation of these projects disregarded the traditional beliefs and practices of end-users and engendered loss of access to shrines, groves and forest-based or water-based resources without providing alternatives. ...Increasing temperature and reducing amount of rainfall result in a greater incidence of bushfires, which threaten the sustainability of some community-managed projects" ([46], p. 5).

2.5 Traditional social organization

The Fon of Mankon is also the clan head of the *ntoh* clan—the royal clan of the village. The Fon presides over rituals, the war council, and the council of notables whose members are chosen according to lineage. The Fon has lots of power and is

an authority above all other governing institutions in the land. He mediates in all litigations but for those involving murder and treason [6, 45]. The former cases fall under the jurisdiction of administrative courts. Apart from that, the Fon also heads all traditional societies that rule community life.



Source: Anye [6].

He is also part of an authority known as *Kwifo*, which represents the whole land in spiritual matters. Members of *Kwifo* decide and the Fon executes. In case the Fon passes on, they enthrone a new one. The *Kwifo* is endowed with lots of spiritual powers. They perform most of the sacrifices and are believed to be in direct communication with the ancestors of the land.

Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religion are practiced in Mankon. Most of the people are syncretic Muslims and Christians. Like most African peoples, they hold that the gods of the land exist everywhere and that the achievements of people are based on the protection they get from their gods and ancestors. Hence, in order to maintain a cordial relationship with these supernatural forces, they offer sacrifices and pour libations amid prayers or incantations [47]. The traditional religion still has an important role in the protection of their activities, environment, and themselves. Sacred sites as well as ritualistic objects accompany ceremonies and celebrations ([6, 8], p. 36).

2.6 Traditional mechanisms of conservation and perceptions of the forest

Traditional authorities in the Western Grassfield communities in Cameroon often rewarded people who captured certain animal species with traditional titles. The hunting down of wildlife species and the use of most wildlife parts are contrary to modern norms of conservation. It highlights the need to protect species threatened with extinction. If the species concerned are not protected, even the culture of the people is under threat once these species have become extinct. Other consequences include the progressive alteration of the traditional cultural pattern resulting in changes in habits and capabilities acquired by people as members of the society or lead to widespread environmental damage. People need education on the unfettered consequences of environmental degradation and the ruthless hunting down of wild animals.

Traditional institutions, knowledge, and practices are believed to have positively impacted on the sustainable management of the sacred forest in Mankon. The *Fo'* (King) and the secret society, *Kwifo*, and the Mankon traditional council are the major actors protecting the environment of Mankon in general and the sacred forest in particular. Traditional institutions, knowledge, and practices as well as religious values have been recognized to influence people's behavior and to significantly contribute in the conservation of forest [47].

2.7 Totemism

In the past, totemism served as one of the major traditional conservation tools for conserving myriad plant and animal species. Similarly, cultural beliefs in totemism, taboos, and sacred forest around villages adjacent to the Korup National Park in Cameroon have, for instance, been hailed for protecting the national park. Local bylaws that are binding on local inhabitants inordinately contribute to the rational use of natural resources [40]. This suggests that community norms remain sacrosanct to conservation initiatives. To ensure the sustainable use of both flora and fauna, there are taboos in place against the use of certain animal and plant species. Although material and symbolic approaches have widely divergent interpretations of people's behavior toward animals, both schools agree that individuals are often not conscious of the "true" reason behind their conduct. Indeed, as Mary Douglas [49] notes, followers of a cultural tradition often seize on secondary rationalizations, such as health concerns, to explain their tabooed beliefs and behaviors. Her distinction between the sacred and the profane/clean and unclean and the overall notion of contamination that are used to maintain the social order and to shape human behavior [49] can be useful for understanding taboos and their power in conserving the environment in local communities.

Project planners and managers need to examine carefully all taboos and related beliefs and to avoid making assumptions that ignore cultural variation within an area. To assume that one group's taboo on a particular type of fauna is shared by neighboring peoples, or even among members of the same family, may cause community forestry planners to shun species of wild animals that might otherwise be excellent candidates for development projects. This point is particularly relevant when outside influences have combined to make previously forbidden foods acceptable, as with deer in the tropics [50] or when previously acceptable foods have been discarded, as with mice and rats among the Maraca of Colombia. In addition, some wildlife species were adopted in the Mankon community and treated like family members. They often lived and, at times, ate with humans. For instance, dogs were often accorded burial and mourning rites. In many Indian tribes, people might be known as the father, mother, brother, or sister of such and such a dog.

2.8 The sacred forest

A sacred forest is a forest reserved by traditional authorities. Sacred forests are governed by unwritten by unwritten cultural norms and are used as sites for the performance of communal rites meant to honor the ancestors. They are believed to serve as a protective shield against any harm or calamity [47]. They contain varied plant and animal species. Most sacred forests are located around the palace and within protected areas. Community efforts at natural resource management in Mankon started with the creation of a forest close to the royal palace by the Fon in the early 1950s. This forest covers about five (5) hectares of land. For sacrifices, the Fon also uses another sacred forest called kekfure. It is also used for the Fon's recreation when he concentrates and communes with the ancestors. This forest is reputed for unique wildlife species not found elsewhere in Africa, notably some rare species of birds. Sacred forests are areas of valuable importance to the community in terms of ancestral burial grounds, valuable tree and animal species, etc. It is highly protected in the belief that immortal and omnipresent forces surround the forest area. As stated by various village elders, in the past this forest served as a security cordon against a possible attack by surrounding villages or invaders. People are prohibited from exploiting flora and fauna from this forest. It is believed that an individual could be affected by the anger of the spirits of the ancestors in case of violation of the rules and regulations [47–50] governing this forest.

2.9 Harvesting of medicinal plants

Cultural norms also surrounded the harvesting of medicinal plants by both traditional healers and non-healers alike. The parts of herbs required for therapy such as barks, leaves, roots, and quantity had to be harvested at particular periods of the day, usually in the morning/evening or on particular days of the week [50–52]. The aim was to ensure their rapid regeneration. Cultural prohibitions around harvesting are advertent measures of conservation.

Once the medicine had been found, rituals for harvesting—such as prayer and thanks to the ancestors—were performed. In most cases, the person would only harvest the part of the tree or plant (such as bark, leaves, roots etc.) that he or she needed. The rest of the tree would be saved for future use. Medicines were harvested at particular times during the year, mostly during the time when harvesting would do less damage to the tree or plant. The ‘just in time’ nature of use meant that people only harvested the medicines they needed [32, 52].

2.10 Symbols of royalty

In the Mankon Kingdom and most Western Grassfield kingdoms, certain animals—leopards, buffaloes, tiger, and elephant—are considered as symbols of royalty. Accordingly, whoever captures or kills one of these is decorated and elevated in status. According to Lewellen, [...] symbols must serve a dual purpose: they must be at once particularistic, serving to unite the group and maintaining its unique identity, and universalistic, legitimizing it as an agency of power to the great majority of outsiders [53]. According to David I. Kertzer, true symbols have three properties, “[...] condensations of meaning, symbols are multivocal, finally, true symbols possess ambiguity, so that they can never be fully defined; they have no precised meaning” [9, 53, 54].

2.11 The leopard (*Panthera pardus*)

It is a large elegant and powerful feline, with elongated forms. Because of its cunning attitude, power, and ferocity, it is one of the most feared animals and, as such, one of the most respected in the African jungle [8]. The Mankon attributes to this creature many powers. It is associated with political and judicial authority and perceived as symbolizing strength, the power of the Fon, prestige, and the greatness of royalty. The Fon is indeed called “leopard” and his children “those” of this animal [8, 67].



Source: The authors.

In representing the feline as portrayed on works of art, the artist is said to bring out (using formal means) the qualities and virtues of the wild animal (strength, ferocity, and rapidity, among others). He seeks to simplify, stylize, and emphasize what he considers meaningful: emphasis is on the simple thickness of its body and head. The decorative design or pattern of the leopard are found on various articles and used in the celebration of enthronement and succession rites or during ancestral and fertility cults, for the prestige of the Fon: in a nutshell, for everything related to maintaining political authority and social cohesion [52]. Not only does the panther appear in the form of figurative motifs, but its hide and teeth are used for symbolic objects or ornamentation.

2.12 The elephant

It is also associated with power, command, and plenty [8]. The elephant like the leopard is said to be a symbol of royalty. The body parts of these animals are used in many rituals and cults of powerful secret societies within the Fondom of Mankon. The beast appears on various objects used by members of this society—receptacles, pipes, drums, masks, and seats, among others. When this animal is represented on masks and pipes, it incarnates the indomitable force of nature that can be harnessed and used for various profitable purposes by an individual or the community [8]. Moreover, in Mankon as elsewhere in the Western Grassfields, men (and especially the Fon) are said to form alliances with animals in order to have a double, triple, or multiple existence. This is in addition to having all the qualities, strengths, as well as weaknesses of the chosen animals to act in life efficiently. The elephant is not only a source of inspiration, as a plastic theme for Mankon and Grassland artists, but also a source of ivory and hair, which are used to make various works of art. Ivory is of great economic value and a sign of wealth. The marketing of this strategic product is perceived as the monopoly of the Fon of Mankon. Ivory products, luxury articles, or articles for prestige have for long remained the prerogative of the Fon and important personalities of the Fondom. Apart from the elephant, the buffalo is said to evoke strength, courage, and vitality. Like the elephant, it is a royal animal. This explains why the Fon has the right over a killed buffalo. He rewards the hunter who brings it back home and to the palace as booty.

2.13 Symbolism and the multiple uses of wildlife in Mankon

Wildlife is harvested daily across Africa using legal and illegal means as well as sustainable and unsustainable ones. In this section, we examine the views and opinions of respondents on how they treat wildlife—wild animals and royal animals alike. This includes the patronage of royal animals, the uses of royal wildlife, the royal animal and environmental sustainability, the use and trade of wild animals in traditional medicine, and other purposes.

2.14 Perceptions of wildlife

According to wildlife officials in Cameroon's Ministry of Forestry and Nature Protection, most animals in Mankon, including the African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) and the chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), are endangered species. According to respondents, the community loves wildlife because it is a good source of protein; wildlife activity is useful for the ecological chain. In the past, it was used to symbolically determine the prowess of the traditional military force of Mankon. They were consequently treated with great respect.

In the course of migrating to settle in their present site more than a century ago, successive leaders distinguished themselves through bravery on the battlefield and hunting ground. Hunting demonstrated to an extent their resistance at the war front. In dynastic Mankon, wildlife hunting was a great social phenomenon. Today many human activities have encroached on the natural habitat of wildlife. Most trees have been cut down, and sometimes there is scarcity of food and water. Because of this human habitat encroachment, for instance, *Ngwabah* (an animal said to be in the family of tigers), that existed for a while in the neighborhood of Mbinfibieh in Mankon in the 1950s and caused aggression and terror to the community is now only in historical memory:

... when we cite the example of Sacred Heart College Mankon [...] the college area use to be the hunting ground of the Fon of Mankon [...] in those days when I was growing up as a young man, we had giraffes, antelopes, deer, and other wild animals that existed in the Mankon village [...] when you moved along the road you could see some of them inside that bush [...] but from the time they used that place to build the school, with electricity in the whole place [...] you cannot even see a rat mol there; so the children growing in Mankon today will never know that before this time giraffes, antelopes, dares and all the other types of wild animals existed in Mankon [...] so there is need for preservation to let the upcoming generation see and know the different types of animals.... (Aborengong John)

The Fon of Mankon is believed to be a patron of all wildlife within his area of jurisdiction. This reflects the royal highness' personal interests. While sometimes represented clearly as some human ruler, at other times, he is believed to appear more like a leopard, which is valued as very brave, ferocious, aggressive, intrepid, great watcher, courageous, and active. The most common representation is the one in which the Fon is identified in his palace same as in public places with certain wildlife parts like the horns of an elephant, its teeth, the skin of a leopard, and other parts like the feather and the hair of other royal wildlife. Other members of the Fon's entourage also have wildlife with which are identified. For instance, notables drink from buffalo horn cups. The designs of fabrics worn by notables carry the image of leopards to highlight authority and belonging to the class of power. The animal skin shown in the photo illustrated above depicts the use of some wildlife products. Traditional regalia and bags like the ones depicted below are valued in traditional ceremonial settings (**Figures 1–4**).

The bags depicted in the pictures above showcase wildlife products used not only as cultural items but also for decoration and ornamentation.

Any wildlife captured by Mankon citizens is taken to the palace as a gift to the highest authority of the land. Apart from the possession of some wildlife by the Fon, other species harvested as wild meat are for subsistence and noncommercial purposes. Some of these are animals under the category of non-protected species. They are hunted with the use of traditional snares, nets, registered guns, traps, etc. and for this purpose. However, individuals who have the right of access to the forest also hunt wildlife, including protected species for subsistence [43].

Estimated values for the wild meat trade in the formal literature are limited, perhaps due to the small number of harvest and trade activities in Africa that are considered legitimate and for subsistence. The importance of wildlife as a source of protein, religious significance, cultural value, medicinal use, and income to rural African communities remains true in the present day as it was during pre-colonial times [55, 56]. State regulation and the undermining of traditional user rights have however modified traditional values [55]. This has resulted in the perception of wildlife as an open-access resource and, as expected, overexploitation [56]. Where large-scale commercial markets have developed, the focus of hunting activities has



Figure 1.
Fabric in images featuring wildlife inscriptions. Source: The authors.



Figure 2.
Fabric in images featuring wildlife inscriptions. Source: The authors.



Figure 3.
Bags made out of wild cat skin (African civet). Source: The authors.



Figure 4.
Bags made out of wild cat skin (African civet). Source: The authors.

tended to concentrate on specific species [55]. In some communities, traditional law dictates that wildlife once killed becomes the property of the hunter or the proprietor of the hunting implement (gun, snare, and crossbow) [56]. This provides the necessary motivation for killing as many animals as possible to secure property in unregulated systems [57]. Several projects in East and Southern Africa have sought to mitigate this type of problem by granting specific rights of wildlife use to local communities [58]. The overall impact shows that in Southern Africa community wildlife use “has had significant impacts on the development of natural resource management regimes at national levels and added significantly to the sustainable use debate at the international level” [26, 59]. The impacts go beyond “conservation issues into the realm of human rights, democracy and constitutional reform” [59]. As stated by one community member:

We are now citizens who own or at least have control over our land and the benefits that come from using it. Government is becoming a partner in our development and officials in our area are starting to feel that they should work for our benefit. The company that hunts in our area is also becoming our partner. And all this means that in the eyes of our neighbors in Zimbabwe and Zambia we are no

longer refugees, poor cousins whose land is no-mans land where anyone can do as they want. We are also now people in our own right ([59], p. 26).

Respect for community norms and values will lead to the transformation of villagers from poachers to protectors of wildlife and plant species as a viable solution to participatory environmental conservation that give user rights and take the concerns of local forest-dwelling communities seriously [35, 59]. Some communities have, however, perceived the benefits from wildlife meat and products to be minimal. This demonstrates that there are always winners and losers in conservation initiatives [35].

2.15 Royalty as custodian of wildlife

Over the years, the royal family embraced a couple of wildlife as favored symbols of authority. Formal portraits from the eighteenth century onward have reportedly shown successive Fons and other notables posing or appearing with the aforementioned royal animal parts. From Fon Angwafo II (1866–1919) till date, most of the royal wildlife merit their own portraits as their parts are either portrayed and drawn or used almost permanently in the palace and public places wherever the authority of the land is represented. For instance,

...The animal skin which the predecessor of the Fon used, the Fon still has to use because if a citizen of Mankon catches a leopard, tiger, buffalo and other wild animals, they carry it to the palace and when it is slaughtered they preserve its skin...and they remain there forever and can be destroyed only by fire and other similar disasters.... (Pa Tumanjong Paul)

During occasions where traditional dances are exhibited in Mankon, most of the traditional attires worn by either the dancers or other participants are adorned with the portraits of wild animals and other wildlife parts. These animal parts include the tail, horn, and skin. Similarly, during communal ritual performances including the annual traditional dance (*Abüng a Fo*), the Fon wears a cap made of elephant (*/usen/*) hair and tail. This cap was reportedly inherited from his predecessors who obtained it upon their successive accession to the throne. It is believed that in the past, all captured royal animals had their parts preserved by royalty for posterity and as symbols of authority. As one of our key respondents pointed out:

...The animal skin which the predecessor of the Fon used, the Fon still has to use because if a citizen of Mankon catches a leopard, tiger, buffalo and other wild animals, they carry it to the palace and when it is slaughtered they preserve its skin...and they remain there forever and can be destroyed only by fire and other similar disasters.... (Pa Tumanjong Paul)

The most unusual of these are parts of animals, which fall under the category of protected wildlife. This is happening at a time when many people have hardly ever seen a live elephant (but on TV or in the zoo). These rare and exotic exhibitions are highly prized and do enable successive rulers to display their wealth and status.

2.16 The uses of wildlife/royal wildlife

The people believe that royalty owns royal wildlife. Royalty protects the land and needs to be informed of (honored) any wildlife killed; else, defaulters will suffer sanctions including at times excommunication from the village. Persons who

distinguish themselves by capturing wildlife and taking it to the palace are decorated and given awards. One respondent stated that:

Of course when you have a red feather, given to you by the authority in the palace... you have some privileges which the common villager does not have because ... so that makes you different from the common man in the society...if you are a notable, let us say you have been given a red feather by the fondom...it is just like the chancellery having all the people who have had medal awards.... (Aborengong F., John; Food Market Mankon, November 2010)

2.17 Wildlife and traditional medicine

Most people combine western medicine alongside traditional healing practices. They will, for example, consult western and traditionally trained medical practitioners simultaneously. They may also visit a medium (who will summon the spirits to treat the patient) even while staying in a hospital. Additionally, local remedies are known and used without consulting a healer.

Parts of plants and animals are, however, central features of traditional medicine. This is the reason for the demand of plant and animal materials for medicinal purposes. A significant proportion of this community use traditional medicine on a daily basis. The rarity of certain animal species has reduced the ability of the majority of the people of Mankon to afford to keep or purchase animal products for medicinal purposes. Vendors are increasingly selling fake animal products. Many traditional healers cannot afford to purchase these animal parts to include in their remedies. Some are substituting plant for animal ingredients or recommending to their clients that they source or purchase the animal-based ingredients themselves rather than relying on the healer. Some animal products are openly sold at traditional medicine outlets. These species are considered to be of a lower financial value, since the Forestry Law dictates a system of fines according to the perceived financial value of the species. Wildlife regulation has encouraged trading activities to continue “out of sight,” and many wildlife products are now very expensive to buy from intermediaries. Traders prefer to buy them only when they have a ready customer (Table 2).

Some hunted wildlife species are highly valued for their medicinal properties. Examples are the elephant, tiger, and python, which are valued as therapy during labor and childbirth. Prior to the passing of the wildlife law, wildlife parts were readily available for sale in traditional medicine shops everywhere in the study region. Throughout the 1990s, Africa was widely considered to be a major source for tiger (*Panthera tigris*) parts for the international medicine markets [60–63]. Reports suggest that in the past the bones of tiger had only a limited domestic market and that the majority were shipped abroad for higher prices [60].

In the early 1990s, scarce elephant hooves were fetching USD10 per gram. When these same elephant parts became very scarce, they were being sold at USD700 [62]. Some informants however pointed out that the effects of market involvement on local wildlife populations and the humans who depend on them are varied and complex. The trade of wild animals generates income and employment, and it has the potential to help manage and regulate herd size and wildlife populations. These are useful by-products of wildlife marketing. On the other hand, poor management and overharvesting are two typical examples of how market forces exacerbated the trade in wildlife. Market involvement in the wildlife trade has created some problems, the opportunities, as well as incentives. The main problem is to find ways in which community forestry activities could maximize the positive aspects and minimize the negative impact of this involvement.

Animals	By-products used
Fowl	Blood, wings
Bee	Bee wax
Goat	Hoof
Cowries	Bone
White monkey	Spike
Porcupine	Bone
Leopard	Bone, hoof
Elephant	Bone
Black snake	Fat, bone
Python	Bone
Swallow	Bone
Fish	Bone
Owl	Bone
Duiker	Bone
Snail	Shell, flesh

Source: Fieldwork.

Table 2.
Wildlife and by-products used for medicinal purposes.

2.18 Wildlife as symbols in Mankon

Artists frequently use animals as a subject matter in their art. Animals are symbolic. Throughout the ages, many cultures have regarded specific animals as representing gods, power, and the supernatural. In Mankon, men (and especially the Fon) are believed to form alliances with animals in order to have a double, triple, or multiple existence and to have all the qualities, strengths, as well as weaknesses of the chosen animals to act in life efficiently. The Fon is often associated with the leopard, which is known for its ferocity, for its aggression, for being intrepid, as a great watcher, for being courageous, for being active, and for its speediness. He is also linked to the elephant, which is reputed for its strength, fidelity, memory, patience, wisdom, intelligence, and power [8]. As noted earlier, the Fon is mostly identified in public with the skin of a leopard and animal tusks which depicts this symbolic alliance with these animals projecting the qualities they are believed to incarnate:

All notables and clan heads use the horns of the buffalo as their drinking cups [...] it is a sign of superiority over the common villager [...] if you are not a notable you cannot be seen drinking from nothing more than a cow horn or a calabash cup [...] so the notables have the privilege of drinking with cups made from buffalos, the dwarf cows, and other strong animals as a sign of superiority among the villagers.... (PA Aboringong; food Market Mankon, November 2010)

Mathias Alubafi [64] concedes that buffalo cow horn drinking cups decorated with Bruce Lee's facial image have become status objects and objects of decoration. Successful youths who have acquired these drinking horns use the fascination associated with it as "embodiments of a new iconography and iconology for the western Grassfields." By reversing "to their advantage the traditional iconography

and iconology that was typical of the region and that was restricted to royals and elites” [64], they are questioning and reinterpreting cultural values.

Animals are regularly depicted on many packets, bottles, and sachets containing traditional medicine in the Mankon marketplace. According to medicine men, animal images and names do not indicate the ingredients in the medicine. They are, however, used as an attraction and for branding to indicate the effectiveness of the medicine. They believe that medicines containing animal derivatives are effective appear to be deeply entrenched in the local community. Similarly, a survey carried out in 1994 found that the popularity of a so-called Loris wine dropped when it was rumored to be mass produced without the use of Loris ingredients [65]. A medicine man in the heart of Mankon stated that he had given up using animal products on grounds that they were too expensive and too hard to find. Indeed, with the exception of one tonic containing an unspecified toad, no evidence of the use of animals in his retail premises or workshop was found. However, on the label of his plant based post-partum tonic could be read: “Works in the same way as porcupine stomach.” Another medicine man, who has shops in Mankon food market and sells in other periodic markets like in Momo and Bui Divisions, also uses animals as a marketing strategy. He stated that in advertising his products, he uses slogans like, “No synthetic substances are used in my remedies, only natural ingredients, such as plants and the skin and gallbladders of animals.” Respondents stated that the wildlife of the community is considered the people’s cultural heritage. However, through overhunting, timber harvesting, bush fires, the use of toxic chemicals and other forms of habitat destruction, a large number of animals, reptiles, and most bird species have become extinct (see **Table 3**).

2.19 Relationship between the Mankon community and wildlife

While animals do not have an exact incredible large influence on other species and the natural world like humans do, there is increasing fear of the extinction of innumerable wildlife species. If the present trend of global human population is large enough and the technologies that allow humans to manipulate the environment are potent enough, human-caused alterations to the biosphere could fasten extinction. Mankon is far from hunter-gatherer societies that obtain their food directly from natural ecosystems, by hunting wild animals and collecting wild plants. It is noteworthy that a hunter-gatherer lifestyle can support a relatively small number of people in most landscapes. So population densities of such societies tend to be low. Contrary to hunter-gatherer societies, Mankon has long mutated from an exclusive farming community to an agrarian society, which obtains food not just by foraging in natural ecosystems but also by planting species that are important food items and/or raising livestock. Contrary to most hunter-gatherer societies where people are migratory, traveling frequently in search of food rather than living in settlements, the Mankonians supplement the food they raise with hunting and foraging adapted to the species still prominent in their environment. Mankon has gradually evolved from a strictly agrarian and pastoralist society to incarnate the two forms of farming [65].

The poor soil of this region usually cannot support the permanent, large-scale, plowed farming style of more advanced agricultural societies. Hence, they practice small-scale slash and burn agriculture meant for family consumption purposefully with the rest sold for the purchase of other basic needs. However, in the olden days, animals were commonly associated with particular gods and goddesses and were often symbolic of a deity’s power. Encountering a particular species of wildlife may be considered as an omen from a god, but the power usually did not reside in the animal itself but rather in its relationship to a deity. However, horticultural and herding societies are generally confined to only certain climates and habitat types, and their population densities are still relatively low; so often with some societies,

Animal name		Mankon name	Type
1	Leopard	<i>afon</i>	Carnivores
2	Lion	<i>sa-mbang</i>	Carnivores
3	Hyena	<i>angwaba /takfura</i>	Carnivores
4	Elephant	<i>Usen</i>	Herbivores
5	Waterbuck	<i>anjwah</i>	Herbivores
6	Situntunga	<i>angyie</i>	Herbivores
7	Antelope	<i>angab</i>	Herbivores
8	Hare	<i>chwi</i>	Herbivores
9	Civit cat	<i>atsob</i>	Herbivores
10	Porcupine	<i>njibnū</i>	Herbivores
11	Monkey	<i>nkan</i>	Herbivores
13	Wild cat	<i>nimang</i>	Herbivores
14	Otter	<i>nyawunkyi</i>	Herbivores

Source: Field notes.

Table 3.
 List of identified rare or extinct in Mankon.

there are still considerable undisturbed areas that provide habitat for wildlife. This is the case with Mankon where vast extensive land areas are yet to be exploited for farming. The transition from hunter-gatherer to early agrarian societies often resulted in increased birth rates. Growing human populations place ever-increasing demands on the surrounding wildlife and natural ecosystems.

Furthermore, there are reports of the increasing scarcity for many medicinal wildlife species. This situation represents a concern not only from the conservation point of view but also because reduced availability of medicinal wildlife will have a negative effect on the health status of many people living in this community in particular and in Cameroon as a whole. There is certainly a threat to the medicinal importance of wildlife in that scarce wildlife population will not be able to ensure continuous supply of wildlife parts/products for medicines. Concurrently, there will not be a continuous use of wildlife in traditional drug development and the supply of wildlife for spiritual and ceremonial purposes.

2.20 Wildlife use in Mankon and hunting methods

They include legal and illegal as well as sustainable and unsustainable means. Three primary modes of wildlife hunting are currently taking place in Mankon and resulting

in three different products—bushmeat, game meat, and wild meat. Apart from the bushmeat trade, there are other forms of wildlife harvest that contribute to meeting the nutritional, economic, and other cultural needs of the Mankon community in particular and African communities in general. The wildlife trade across the Northwest Region and Mankon in particular has rapidly evolved over recent years to become a lucrative and culturally oriented phenomenon. Its dramatic expansion has been facilitated by numerous factors including increasing consumer demand, development of road networks and industrial infrastructure (logging, mining, oil), market declines in other sectors (e.g., agricultural), increasing human population, lack of incentive or resources to develop alternatives, social and political upheavals, inadequate monitoring and enforcement capacity, and decreases in household economic security. Reports indicate that there is a significant, illegal, commercial exploitation of wildlife occurring around the globe and that current levels of exploitation are unsustainable and threaten the future of numerous wildlife populations and the people dependent on them [66–70]. Game meat which describes legally obtained meat as part of a commercial (private or communally managed) operation that is regulated and controlled is also where monitoring of the wildlife populations and habitat is carried out and where trade is legally conducted with authorized agents and government controls [66–69]. The game meat trade results from a form of uniquely managed wildlife exploitation called game ranching involving both consumptive and nonconsumptive activities that are more developed in selected countries in East and Southern Africa. Its development was formally established in the 1960s in Southern Africa and has grown in recent years as a recommended alternative land-use strategy that provides increased ecological and economic benefits to cattle ranching or crop farming. Populations of wildlife are maintained within (un)fenced areas and often involve the interchange of genetic stock with unmanaged populations (i.e., wild). Production systems may be privately or communally managed and involve species of birds and mammals. The presence of predators is allowed in some ranching systems but not in all [65–67]. Though not well organized, this kind of game meat management is highly perceptible in Mankon. Game cropping is one consumptive use performed on game ranches for the purposes of producing meat, skins, and horns for sale in either domestic or international markets. It requires considerable management in both biological and economic terms for the maximization of efficiency [43, 67–70]. Elderly respondents informed us that small-scale game cropping had existed in the Mankon area. Additional activities found on game ranches may include sport hunting, wildlife viewing, and scientific research. The game ranching and game meat industry outside of savannah ecosystems are not being widely developed. Within these regions, the advantages and disadvantages of such efforts raise doubts as to the ecological, economic, and social viability of such operations. Many observers believe that game ranching operations are sustainable, but they require a significant management commitment and usually produce limited economic returns with only a few select species being viable for limited commercial exploitation. Wild meat in Mankon is for subsistent noncommercial purposes. For purposes of legal hunting, traditional snares, nets, registered guns, traps, etc. are used. It is undertaken by individuals with the legal rights to access the wildlife for purposes of subsistent and legal sport hunting. Wild meat includes only those species legally authorized for harvest and may be used for local trade of basic needs items—clothes, carbohydrates, and household products [43].

2.21 Gender and wildlife in Mankon

Gender permeates and is an important consideration in all development and conservation work. While a lot is known about the nature and extent of gender roles with respect to agricultural and forestry planning, participation, and decision-making,

much less is known about the gender roles of local peoples with respect to the management of wild animal species. The traditional gender division of labor identifies women as child bearers, responsible for nurturing and healing within household and in the community as well. In order to fulfill this socially defined function, women have a special dependence, which often differs from that of men, on the natural resources around them that they use and often manage [70]. Thus beyond their accepted traditional roles, women are also often the invisible managers and decision-makers within both the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of the community. To ensure that both women and men are active participants in and beneficiaries of sustainable wildlife use, it is imperative to consider them as equal partners from the outset. This becomes especially important when considering the incorporation of wild animal species into specific projects or activities. For example, in light of the food taboos identified in the community, one needs to ask whether the animals incorporated in such a project are also beneficial to women or not. Are the animals useful resources for men and women? Will they threaten the home gardens for which women have responsibility? Should areas containing identified extinct wildlife species be earmarked for community forests? As Hoskins [70] and others suggest, it is important to consider the role of women and men in planning, participating, and benefiting from forestry activities. Hoskins illustrates this point with an example of beekeepers in Kenya. It was found that a beekeeping project in that country was receiving no support from women, until the project director realized that it was culturally unacceptable for women to climb trees, and so they were not able to reach the beehives. Once beehives were placed close to the ground, women became willing participants.

Women and men in rural societies like Mankon interact with wildlife in other important ways. Observations showed that in Mankon women are gatherers of forest products (usually non-animal products or small animals such as insects). Men are the hunters of the larger wild animal species. Although men are the primary hunters of the large game, women are frequently involved in catching, butchering, and transportation of animals as well as in cooking and preservation of their meat. In Mankon, for example, it is usually women who snare or trap small animals, such as rabbits, for food and fur; it is they who clean, dry, and smoke meat and fish; and it is they who scrape, clean, and tan hides for clothing and rawhide. This contrasts to the Zambian experience where, although women rarely joined men in actual elephant hunts, they perform many vital activities as part of the overall elephant exploitation process.

3. Conclusions

This paper has explored the perceptions of the Mankon community members on wildlife use and its entanglement with their sociocultural practices and how the lack of cultural sensitivity in the formulation of Cameroon's 1994 Forestry Law exposes the people to legal sanctions and threatens their cultural well-being. The paper has demonstrated that parts of particular wildlife species are used for medicinal purposes and as symbols of authority because of their cultural association with certain intrinsic values. Certain behaviors including taboos that are linked with the hunting of particular wildlife species have implications for the culture of this community. This explains the community's myriad efforts at conservation. Other local mechanisms of conservation include totemism, and the meticulous timing of when, the quantity and the individual entitled to harvest particular plant species.

There is a need for legal change to guarantee the enjoyment of indigenous land rights including:

1. By moving Cameroonian legislations beyond its focus on the farm. This can be achieved through the granting of collective land rights for marshlands, pastures, rangelands, forests, and woodlands and not just the recognition of farms (*mis en valeur principe*) [26–29].
2. Recognizing customary land rights as legal rights of ownership and granting the same level of protection as for lands held under introduced nonindigenous systems [26, 33].

A more inclusive and effective forestry policy that protects species should link the conservation of culture and nature rather than a strategy that ignores traditional institutions, knowledge systems, and practices. Taking into consideration local cultural traditions are in line with enhancing Cameroon's compliance with various biodiversity-related international environmental conventions that the country has endorsed. We recommend the incorporation of sacred forests and shrines into the protected area system and the granting of the rights of local peoples in these spaces.

There is also the need for the education of the masses about sustainable environmental management practices. It has been demonstrated that an increase in people's education and therefore their awareness level is correlated with higher levels of environmental protection and that educated individuals "are more likely to generate an environmentally progressive civil service, and therefore have democratically minded public policymakers and organisations that are more receptive to public demands for environmental protection" ([70], p. 8). On the other hand, the lack of education is perceived as an obstacle to "public understanding and awareness of environmental issues" [4, 14, 71, 72].

Environmental education as succinctly put by the World Conservation Union encompasses the elements of behavior and the idea that knowledge will induce personal, societal, and global changes [11–13]. It will afford learners an "opportunity to gain an awareness or sensitivity to the environment, knowledge and experience of the problems surrounding the environment, to acquire a set of values and positive attitudes, to obtain the skills required to identify and solve environmental problems and, the motivation and ability to participate" ([14], p. 9). A gender lens will enhance women's participation in the management of natural resources and make them cooperate in sustainable development that will ensure the conservation of scarce fauna and flora species.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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