



# Sustainable Solutions to the Problems of Inter Local Government Boundary Disputes in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, ways of minimizing the scourge of Inter Local Government boundary disputes in Adamawa State of Nigeria are discussed. Snowball sampling technique was used for data collection and the data collected were the responses/information from the people (i.e. traditional rulers and aged individuals) interviewed. Snowball sampling technique is a technique whereby anybody interviewed is asked to suggest additional people to be interviewed. The outcome of the interview provided facts on the historical developments, evolution and emergence of the boundary disputes. These facts were analyzed making reference to the events of the recent years as established by available evidences which make competing histories more probable. Findings from the research revealed that boundary disputes might not be unconnected to the lack of accurate maps used for the definition of boundaries, use of only natural features to demarcate boundaries, factions wanting to maintain the past and present interests, increase in population of people competing for exploitation of resources and the fear of domination of minority by majority tribes. The study further revealed that the border communities are not granted full participation during boundary dispute resolution. Therefore, more proactive approaches for the definition of local government boundaries are suggested. Also, solutions to other problems which usually lead to boundary disputes in Adamawa States are recommended.

**Keywords:** *Inter Local Government, Boundary dispute, Dispute resolution, Snowball Sampling technique, Adamawa state of Nigeria.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As the European colonialists gave Africa arbitrary international boundaries so the British provided Nigeria internal boundaries (Asiwaju, 2001). The division of Nigeria into protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria, provinces, divisions, districts, native authorities and federated communities, which was done primarily for British colonial administrative convenience, provided reference data relating to internal boundary management in Nigeria (Brownlie, 1979). The internal boundaries of the states kept on changing especially as from 1914 when the protectorates of the Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated. The records of the reorganization of the provincial, divisional and native authority boundaries have been kept in gazettes and other official documents of the state. For example, the boundaries of the then Eastern, Northern and Western regions were described by the proclamation contained in legal Notice No. 126 of 1954 (Harri, 1975).

Successive post independent Nigeria constitutions from 1960 to date clearly allowed the creation of more administrative units in the country. In 1963, the Mid-Western region was created out of the then Western region. Four years later, a more drastic restructuring of the nation was undertaken by the military administration of General Yakubu Gowon. This led to twelve states structure of Nigeria. Thereafter, another exercise of states creation was carried out in 1976 when General Murtala Ramat Mohammed administration installed a nineteen states structure for Nigeria. In 1987 and 1991, two and nine additional states were created respectively by

General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's administration. The regime of General Sani Abacha created another six new states in 1996, bringing to thirty six the number of states in the country excluding the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, Abuja. All the states creation exercises except that of 1963 were carried out side by side with the creation of more local government areas, chiefdoms, emirates etc. (Ekoko, 2000). What emerged from the restructuring of Nigeria are thirty six states, seven hundred and forty four local government areas, several districts, villages and community areas. As states and local administrative units continued to be created, there is growing conscious and dangerous inclination by Nigerians towards statism at the expense of nationalism and patriotism leading to inter community, inter local government conflicts and expansionists tendencies all in the quest for land and resources. Preliminary investigations revealed that there are boundary disputes in eight out of the twenty one local government areas of Adamawa State. Therefore, this study is limited to the affected (eight local governments) areas.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Generally, creation of local governments has been as a result of the increasing agitation by communities for greater autonomy. The situation in Adamawa state can be assumed to be a complex one with over fifty ethnic groups having different socio-cultures and religions. To an extent, the various ethnic groups are located in deferent defined geographical sections of the state. However, the internal boundaries of the geographical sections have, in some instances, grouped two or more ethnic and religious groups together in one geographical section or split one ethnic and/or

religious group into two or more geographical sections. The boundaries of the various geographical sections were made for the purpose of administrative convenience (Chukwurah, 2000). These have led to situations whereby ethnic groups engage in unhealthy competitions for supremacy or self-determination resulting into conflicts and disputes among local governments in Adamawa state of Nigeria over the exact delimitation of their boundaries. Yet, the few studies carried out to reveal the root causes of these disputes have not proffer acceptable solutions (Chubado, 2004).

### III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions, which this study attempted to answer, are as follows:

1. What led to the causes and the consequences of inter local government boundary disputes in Adamawa State?
2. What roles have the traditional institutions, State Government and other stake holders played in resolving boundary disputes?
3. What are the suggestions for reducing the boundary disputes to the barest minimum?

### IV. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to ascertain the existence and fashion out ways that will eliminate or reduce to barest minimum, the

scourge of inter local government boundary disputes in Adamawa State using the following objectives:

- a. To identify the incidence, causes and consequences of boundary disputes in the local government areas of Adamawa state.
- b. To examine the procedure and outcome of previous attempts for disputes settlement.
- c. To make recommendations for the reduction of boundary disputes to the barest minimum based on research findings.

### Study Area

Adamawa state is located at the north-eastern part of Nigeria around the area where the river Benue enters Nigeria from Cameroon Republic. It falls between longitude 11.5°E and 13.75°E and latitude 8°N and 11°N. It shares boundaries with Taraba state in the south and west, Bauchi state to its North-West, Yobe and Borno states to the North. Also, Adamawa state shares international boundary with Cameroon Republic along its eastern side. The state covers land area of about 39,742.13km<sup>2</sup> (Mohammed, 1999). It has twenty-one local government areas. However, the local government areas used as case study in this study are Demsa, Numan, Shelleng, Mayo-belwa, Guyuk, Fufore, Mubi-North and Mubi-South. The state and the local government areas are graphically shown in figures 1 and 2.

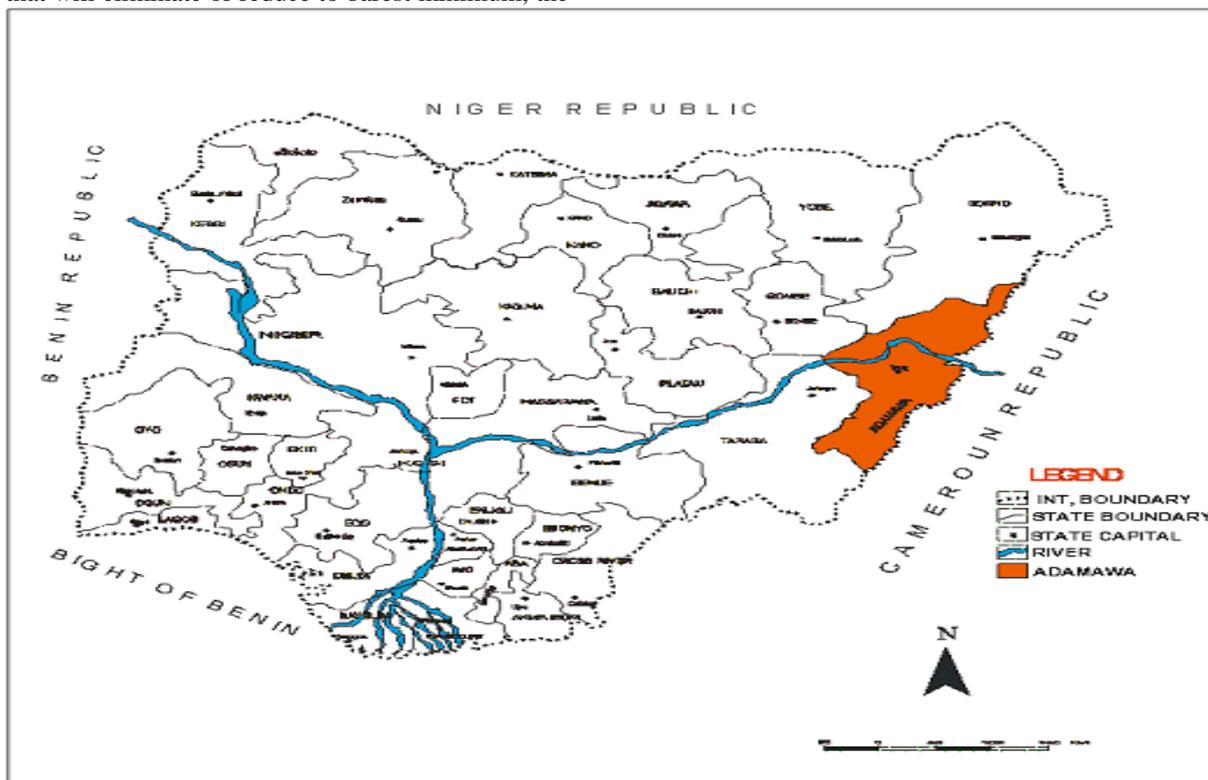
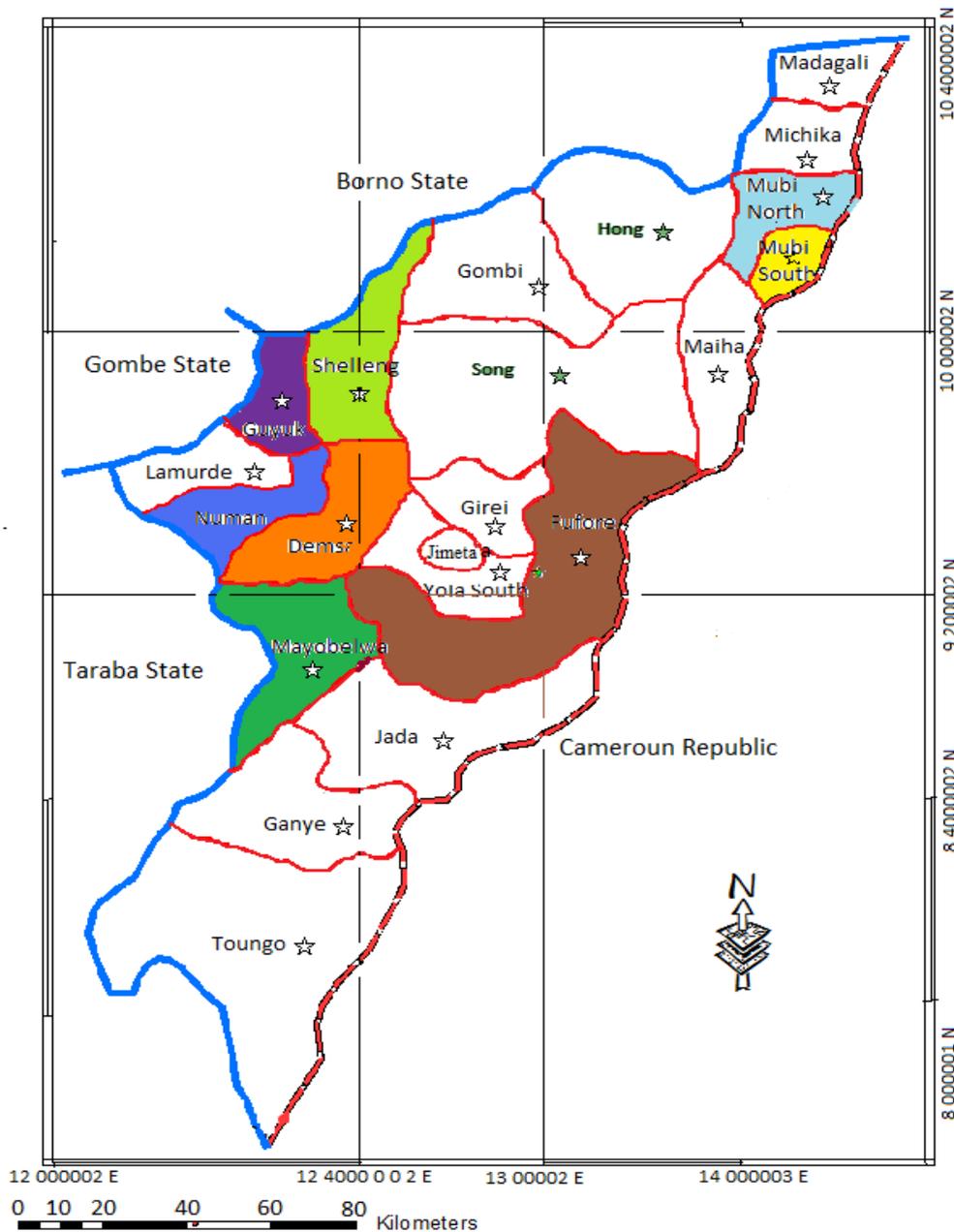


Fig 2: Map of Nigeria showing Adamawa State in shaded color  
Source: Adamawa State Ministry of Land and Survey (2010a)



**Fig 2: Map of Adamawa State showing the study Area in shaded colors**  
**Source:** Adamawa State Ministry of Land and Survey (2010b)

**V. METHODOLOGY**

This section documents the approaches employed in carry out the study. These include detailed account of data type, source and acquisition. Also, analysis of data and results obtained were carried out while inferences and recommendations were drawn based on the out of the study. The study was carried out in phases. The first phase was the reconnaissance visit, followed by the main field

investigations. The second phase was made up of generation of historical facts and other relevant information from the traditional rulers and aged individuals through oral interview. The choice of respondent for the interview was based on their wealth of experience. Snowball sampling technique was used where persons interviewed were asked to suggest additional knowledgeable people for the interview.



## **Evolution, emergence and settlement of the boundary disputes**

The evolution, emergence and the settlement of boundary disputes in the eight local government areas are highlighted below. The approach is to present the cases and thereafter try to offer synthesis to draw out the key issues involved.

### **i. Numan and Demsa Local Government Areas**

It appears that consensus of opinion does not exist in Bachama community as some are of the opinion that the two kingdoms of Bachama and Bata are sub-division of a single tribe called Bwatiye which splited into Demsa and Numan kingdoms. Others feel that the real founder of Bachama and Batta kingdoms were the children of one king called Taginaya. The king was said to have twin children called Zaro-Kpalme and Zaro-Dunge. These children had succession conflicts over kinship culminating in the splits. However, they accepted a common boundary using River Benue. Before the colonial administration, various communities constituted Numan division. The British used physical features to demarcate Batta and Bachama.

It was an arbitrary demarcation but later formalized by erecting the telegraphic lines in 1926. This boundary was respected and used for the purpose of tax collection. The eventual development and the expansion of Numan caused the disappearance of the telegraphic lines. This initiated the first boundary dispute between the two districts. Thus, revenue collectors from Numan and Demsa exceeded their territorial boundaries. Thereafter, the Sole Administrators reported the matter to the state government in 1984 and this led to temporary solution of the dispute.

### **Shelleng and Guyuk Local Government Areas**

The dominant ethnic groups in Shelleng are Lunguda and Kanakuru tribes. In 19<sup>th</sup> century, the two tribes fought. Lunguda tribe conquered the Kanakuru and drove them across River Gongola. Since then, the Chiefs of the two tribes have been

living unfriendly. In 1904, the British colonialist mediated between the two tribes and the two Chiefs were given staff of office by the British. In 1976, the two districts were constituted to become Guyuk local government. Also, in 1983, Shelleng became a full-fledge local government. In 1984, the two local governments were merged but later separated again in 1991 as Guyuk and Shelleng local government areas. The cause of the dispute might be attributed to the loss of farmland during flooding period. The second dispute was as a result of the construction of Numan-Biu road which was used as the dividing line. Until this day, no action has been taken by the state government to resolve the dispute.

### **ii. Mubi North and Mubi South Local Government Areas**

The dispute between the two local government areas was as a result of inclusion of some Lamurde, Kwacham, Sebore and Yewa wards into Mubi South local government. These communities objected because they were not consulted before the action was taken. Yet, nothing has been done by the state government to resolve the issue since the birth of the local governments in 1991.

### **iii. Mayo-Belwa and Fufore Local Government Areas**

The boundary dispute started in 1987 when some communities were split by the boundary line used to separate the two local governments. These communities looked for merger with their kinsmen on the other side of the boundary line but without success. For instance, the creation Mayo-Belwa local government led to splitting Mayo-Belwa town into two. One half of the town lies in Fufore local government area while the other half is in Mayo-Belwa local government. Yet, there has been no action taken by the state government till this day to settle the dispute.

### **Synthesis**

After a thorough analysis of the evolution and emergence of the boundary disputes in the study



areas, syntheses were drawn out from the key issues involved as follows:

- (i) The separation of the twin brothers (Zaro-Dunge and Zaro-Kpalme) at River Benue marked the beginning of the boundary dispute between Bata and Bachama chiefdoms which eventually became Demsa and Numan local government areas.
- (ii) The movement of the then Chief of Bachama from their traditional headquarters Lamurde to Numan marked the second cause of the boundary dispute between Numan and Demsa local government areas.
- (iii) About the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Lunguda tribe successfully conquered the Kanakuru tribe and drove them across river Gongola. This marked the beginning of the boundary dispute between the two tribes that later became Districts.
- (iv) The second boundary dispute came into being after the Colonialists liberated the Kanakuru tribes in 1948 and constituted Shelleng district.
- (v) Generally speaking, boundary disputes were found to have been caused by lack of accurate maps when boundaries are demarcated. This is because existing maps do not indicate the salient features relevant to a given boundary line as was the case between Fufore and Mayo-Belwa local government areas.
- (vi) The existence of factions of the community wanting to maintain past or present interests was observed to have contributed to the dispute. This issue may be as a result of fear of political domination. This was evident where the people of Wuro-Sama, Boman, Karewa Wallaga and Wuro-Juda were looking forward to be merged with their kin and kith in the present Fufore local government area. In this case, the failure of paper resolution to correspond with the ground realities compounded the problems.
- (vii) The expansion of Numan town, an administrative headquarter of Numan local government area as well as a junction town for roads leading to Taraba and Gombe states respectively made the town attractive for commercial activities. The influx of people into the town in search of jobs caused increase in the population of the town. In addition, the telegraphic line that served as the boundary line between Numan and Demsa which was respected by the two communities had been obliterated and so it appears that there is no boundary line between the two local government areas thereby creating disputes between the local government areas.
- (viii) Lack of participation/involvement of the local communities in the process of creation and demarcation of new local governments has been one of the immediate causes of disputes.
- (ix) In addition to the above, the collection of revenue by the revenue collectors from Demsa and Numan Chiefdoms aggravated the dispute. This is because collectors from Numan entered Demsa and Demsa collectors entered Numan at random to collect revenue.
- (x) Perhaps, the immediate cause of the boundary dispute between Fufore and Mayo-Belwa local government areas was as a result of the failure of paper resolution to correspond with the ground realities. This was evident where Wurosama, Boman, Karewa, Wallaga, Wuro-juda and even the local government secretariat were split into two.
- (xi) The issue of the boundary dispute between Mubi North and Mubi South may be judged against the background that Lamurde, Kwacham, Sebore and Yewa communities



found themselves in the new local government against their will. This is because the some communities have not been in agreement before being moved from Mubi North to Mubi South.

- (xii) Before the inception of local government areas in Adamawa State, Numan and Demsa were under Numan Federation. Their traditional rulers have attempted settlement of boundary disputes but without success. Also, attempts were made by the state and local government by way of setting mediation committees to resolve the boundary disputes. All the same, solutions were not achieved as the communities in these local governments rejected the committee's recommendations.

## VI. SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Based on the findings of the evolution, emergence and earlier attempts on the resolutions of the boundary disputes in the study areas as summarized above, the following solutions are suggested:

1. The description of a boundary should be made after negotiation among parties (stake holders) separated by the boundary. That is, after they have agreed in principles on criteria for the description and delimitation of the boundary. Boundary delimitation should take place soon after the description and any ambiguity observed in the interpretation of the earlier agreement should be referred to the stake holders for better clarification.
2. There is need for boundary maps produced on suitable scales that can permit the convenient plotting of the boundaries. Such maps should be capable of indicating all the silent features relevant to the boundary line. In addition, coordinates of all major turning points, crossing points or any other feature of particular significance should be described in detailed in the delimitation instrument. This will help in the interpretation of the boundary description and recovery of displaced beacons during settlement of possible future boundary dispute.
3. In some cases, communities demand for boundary adjustment without clear idea of what the boundary they are requesting should be. To eliminate this, local government authority should from time to time educate the communities on the issue. A situation where parties are convinced of demanding adjustment of boundaries and/or merger of communities, they should be requested to delineate their boundary claim on revised large or medium scale maps and attach such maps to their memoranda to support their claims.
4. In extreme cases of disagreement between the contending parties, plebiscite or referendum may be conducted by the government to obtain the popular wishes of the affected people. Care should be taken so as not to be misguided by the leaders of the communities whose views may be personal rather than public interest. Also, there is the need to explore more factors as causes underlying a given dispute may not necessarily be boundary or even land related. For example, issues of Chieftaincy, political domination, resource control, cultural practices, religion, social recognition may be the underlying factor in a given boundary dispute.
5. The concept of ground to paper approach is good for boundary dispute resolution. In this approach, the boundary is first described on the ground to the satisfaction of the concerned communities, all areas of disagreement or location conflicts is identified right on the field and then resolved through dialogue, compromise and consensus before mapping takes place and the final documents approved and gazetted. Stake holders' participation in decision making would be a better approach than government fiat. This is where the government shares the problem with the people in group meetings and decisions are reached collectively through discussion to consensus. Government should start dialogue with aggrieved parties in the local government



separately before bringing them together for further deliberation towards amicable settlement of dispute.

6. Wherever boundary dispute emerges, the National Boundary Commission (NBC) should liaise with the traditional rulers and other opinion leaders in the local government areas concerned to find out the exact traditional position on ground rather than absolutely adhering to the old treaties and gazettes which are often defective and vague.
7. While creating new local government areas, due cognizance should be taken of the traditional boundaries of the units that form such administrative area. The instrument creating such units must state clearly the traditional boundaries that constitute the various units. There should be joint public enlighten by state and the affected local government before, during and after the creation of new local government area.
8. As soon as a dispute is resolved, all machineries should be put in place to complete the administrative processes to actualize such agreements. That is, proper demarcation of the boundary with survey beacons and production of maps/plan at appropriate scale should be carried out. Also, copies of all the documents should be made available to the parties concerned.
9. Provision of adequate funding and necessary logistics that would enhance the performance of the national boundary commission or the state boundary dispute committees should be given accorded priority by the government.
10. The politicians, in the interest of the nation and indeed the affected communities, should be made to desist from politicking boundary issues as such actions will aggravate the problems.
11. Traditional institutions have an important role to play in land dispute resolutions. They are the

custodians of the peoples' culture and hence they know the exact limits of their domain down to individual farm limits. In the event of delimiting a new boundary, elders from adjoining communities should be invited to identify and take note of the monuments that define the boundaries. In the event of disagreement or consensus not reached, the two traditional rulers of the Chiefdoms should meet to take a decision on behalf of their communities in the spirit of give and take.

12. There is need for the establishment of Geographic Information System (GIS) in the state. GIS is a technology capable of acquiring spatially indexed data from a variety of sources, changing the data into useful formats, storing, retrieving and manipulating the data for analysis and generating the required output for the user. GIS, if properly applied will be very useful in achieving a successful boundary claims and resolutions of boundary disputes.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The paper has attempted to suggest solutions to the problems of local government boundary disputes in Adamawa State of Nigeria. Snowball sampling technique was used to collect information on the history, evolution, emergence and attempted resolutions of the disputes from traditional rulers and other aged individuals. Analyzing the data obtained, it was observed that boundary disputes were caused by lack of accurate maps of the local government, factions wanting to maintain past and present interests such as exploitation of resources irrespective of the new development in the local government and fear of supremacy and domination of minority tribe by majority tribes. Also, the research revealed that traditional methods of settling boundary disputes do not allow experts in the field of Surveying and Geoinformatics to participate in the boundary dispute resolution. The research further revealed that settled disputes erupt in later days because the areas in disputes are not properly demarcated on the ground, hence most



of the local government boundaries on maps do not reflect accurately with what exist on the ground. Based on these, various solutions to the problems of boundary dispute in Adamawa State were suggested.

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