

DETERIORATING SOCIAL RELATIONS AROUND LAND DEMARCATION IN GNAMANGUI IN THE SOUTH-WEST OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Kourouma Moussa¹

*Member of Laboratoire d'Agroéconomie et Développement Rural (LADR)
Centre de Recherche pour le Développement (CRD) Alassane Ouattara University, Bouake
kibnmoussa@gmail.com / kouroumaibnmoussa@gmail.com*

Kouassi Kouadio Edouard²

*Sociologist, Senior Research Scientist
Researcher at Laboratoire d'Agroéconomie et Développement Rural (LADR)
Centre de Recherche pour le Développement (CRD)
Alassane Ouattara University, Bouake
edouardkouassi@uaou.edu.ci / kouassikedouard@yahoo.fr*

KONAN Kouakou Blaise³

*Sociologist, Research Associate
Researcher at Laboratoire d'Agroéconomie et Développement Rural (LADR)
Centre de Recherche pour le Développement (CRD)
Alassane Ouattara University, Bouake
ngonianblaise@uaou.edu.ci / ngonianblaise@gmail.com*

Abstract

This article focuses on the deterioration of social relations around land demarcation in Gnamangui, in the South-West of Côte d'Ivoire. Initiated since the adoption of the rural land law on December 23, 1998, this operation is struggling to get off the ground in Gnamangui. This paper analyzes the implications and changes in social relations fostered by land demarcation in the locality of Gnamangui. To this end, a mixed-type survey was conducted based on documentary research, semi-structured interviews (25 respondents) and a questionnaire (169 households surveyed).

Our findings, show that tensions and conflicts emerge over the issue of delimitation. Deteriorating relations have an impact on economic activities and threaten the implementation of development projects. Resolving conflicts and restoring social relations related to land delimitation demands a multidimensional approach.

Keywords: *deteriorating social relations, land delimitation, south-west Côte d'Ivoire.*

Résumé

Cet article porte sur la dégradation des rapports sociaux autour de la délimitation foncière à Gnamangui, dans le Sud-Ouest ivoirien. Enclenchée depuis l'adoption de la loi du foncier rural depuis le 23 décembre 1998, cette opération peine à se réaliser à Gnamangui. Cette contribution, analyse les implications et les changements des rapports sociaux induits par la délimitation foncière dans la localité

de Gnamangui. Pour atteindre cet objectif, une enquête de type mixte a été menée à partir de recherches documentaires, d'entretiens semi-directifs (25 enquêtés) et d'un questionnaire (169 ménages enquêtés).

Il ressort, à travers les résultats de notre travail que des tensions et conflits émergent autour de la délimitation. La dégradation des rapports impacte les activités économiques et menace la mise en œuvre des projets de développement. La résolution des conflits et la reconstruction des rapports sociaux autour de la délimitation foncière nécessitent une approche multidimensionnelle.

Mots clés : *dégradation des rapports sociaux, délimitation foncière, sud-ouest ivoirien.*

Introduction

In Cote d'Ivoire, the issue of land tenure has fueled public debate and threatened the country's economic and social stability since independence. The development of family farming, particularly coffee and cocoa, has concomitantly encouraged significant growth in population migration towards the country's forest areas (Kouassi and Oura 2015). This increasing demand for land in forest areas over the past few years puts pressure on available land, leading to a scarcity of land resources.

For many decades, inter-community relations over land have become extremely conflictual, against a backdrop of sharply reduced forest cover and generational turnover. In the southern forest region, land conflicts mainly pit indigenous communities against allochthones and non-indigenous peoples. Several attempts by the Ivorian government to address these conflicts over the years have not been successful. Prior to the adoption of the law of December 23, 1998, on rural land tenure, the government had attempted to regulate land management through legal means. A circular issued in 1961 called for "the study of a land and property reorganization project which would institute a genuine land code and define, in particular, collective and individual customary land rights" (Chauveau, 2005). In practice, this circular operated as a legal text that was intended to constitute the rural land code. The aim of adopting a law regulating rural land tenure is to secure all existing rights through registration. For natives, it will ensure recognition of their customary rights to land previously granted to "foreigners", and for the latter, that past transfers are definitively recognized.

The main aim of Law no. 750 of December 23, 1998, on rural land tenure is to register all rural land and issue individual private titles. Achieving this objective requires land delimitation. The importance of this process is obvious. It enables stakeholders not only to know their

boundaries, but also to have a map of their territory (FAO, 2017). However, despite their topicality in Côte d'Ivoire, the challenges of land delimitation remain poorly documented. The 1998 law aims at regulating rural land tenure in line with provisions and objectives designed to modernize the occupation and management of rural land (Chauveau and Zalo, 2006). This would strengthen social cohesion within villages and between neighbouring villages by re-establishing a climate of trust and reconciliation between rural communities, minimizing land disputes and facilitating their settlement.

Given the far-reaching scope of such a project, it is sad to note that the delimitation process is leading to inter-family, intra-family and inter-community land crises. The wilful destruction of crops in some cases and the blocking of the delimitation process are all indications of conflict in the Gnamangui sub-prefecture. This worrying situation is undermining the social cohesion that has long prevailed in the locality. What explains the deterioration in social relations over land delimitation in Gnamangui? This is the question our study aims to answer. The aim is therefore to analyze the implications and changes in social relations resulting from land delimitation.

Materials and methods

To achieve the set objective, a mixed-type survey was carried out in the sous-prefecture chief town of Gnamangui ("survey locality"), a key agricultural production zone. This choice stems from the fact that the sub-prefecture chief town is the first village to welcome foreigners to whom the natives have ceded their land. Currently, there is fierce opposition between the populations over the demarcation of land.

Several strategies have been developed for data collection and production. This involved direct observation, semi-structured interviews (25 respondents) and a questionnaire survey (169 households surveyed). In the case of this study, our interviewees were selected on the basis of their availability and expertise in the topics covered. The criteria used to select our sample are as follows: natives and non-natives occupying a plot of land in the Gnamangui localities; natives having ceded or participated in a land cession action; administrative authorities involved in the regulation of village affairs. Data analysis methods used to carry out the interviews included dialectics and data processing with SPSS for quantitative analysis.

Interviews were conducted with sub-prefecture administrative officials, traditional chiefs, elderly people with extensive knowledge of land management, commonly known as land chiefs or land custodians, and chiefs of non-natives and non-indigenous people.

The study also relied on direct, discontinuous observation of the social environment in the field, in order to understand the social relationships that develop between stakeholders around the land. This approach also enabled us to understand the interactions between stakeholders, the social changes fostered by land tenure as determined by the mode of access to the land, and the latent land conflicts that may arise out of this system. (non-natives and natives; natives and non-natives; non-natives and non-natives) around land delimitation. To better appreciate social relationships, we have compared the level of interaction and exchange between actors at the internal level (actors within the village) and at the external level (neighboring villages). A total of 24 people were interviewed, including administrative authorities, traditional chiefs, and land chiefs. In addition to these individual interviews, 4 focus groups of 10 people were carried out, with two categories of stakeholders: natives and migrants (allochthones and allogeous).

Results

I- Traditional land governance stakeholders and access to land in Bakwe society in Gnamangui.

1.1 Traditional land governance stakeholders

Land governance calls for a number of interactions. Indeed, a wide range of actors are involved in land management at Gnamangui, most importantly the land chief, lineage chiefs, customary chiefs, and family heads.

The land chief allocates land, demarcates field plots, and through his sacrifices, authorizes cultivation and ensures good harvests. The lineage is the "collective person" who owns the rights to use the land and its resources, which are distributed among the families. It is headed by a lineage chief (or head of the large family), as Mr. PK explains: "*It is from the lineage that the distribution of goods is organized. There are therefore different levels of conflict regulation involving these three authorities (village chief, land chief and lineage chief)*". As for the customary chiefs and heads of family, they are responsible for managing disputes over land.

I.2. Access to land in the bakwe's society at Gnamangui

In Gnamangui, there are two major types of land transfer: access by inheritance for indigenous Bakwe and non-definitive transfer of land to foreigners.

The mode of access to land for indigenous people is transmission by inheritance. In fact, the indigenous Bakwes ensure that they define the land ownership of their offspring, especially the boys, before they reach adulthood. Mr. ZF gives further details on this subject when he states:

" Here in our community, from the moment a child is born, he knows his land. He is given this land especially because when he grows up, he will cultivate this land to meet his needs (...) the fathers inform everyone in the family so that when the father dies before the child grows up, his uncles can show him his inheritance".

Alongside the inheritance system, another means of accessing land is more common in Gnamangui: Leasing land to foreigners. The allocation of land to migrants is not permanent, according to the natives. In the Bakwe community of Gnamangui, land is unsaleable and remains sacred, as one landowning son points out: *"Land is not for sale here. Our mission as landowners is to maintain and preserve it. Access to land is by inheritance and loan".*

These words show that the perfect means by which migrants can obtain land in Gnamangui is through loans. However, this mode of access has changed over the years. Today, the transfer of land to migrants is in some cases definitive, according to the latter. This assertion is made by TA, the representative of the allochthonous community, as follows:

" Initially, with our parents, the land we occupy was not ours, we were on tutorship and the land was not sold. But in recent years, our guardians have demanded that we either buy the land or give it back and return home. Having built our lives here, we decided to buy the land we now occupy."

These statements, which contradict those of the natives, show the differences that exist between the various protagonists on the procedures for accessing land.

II. Effects of land demarcation on social relations and the insecurity of development investments.

II.1 . Effects of land demarcation on social relations.

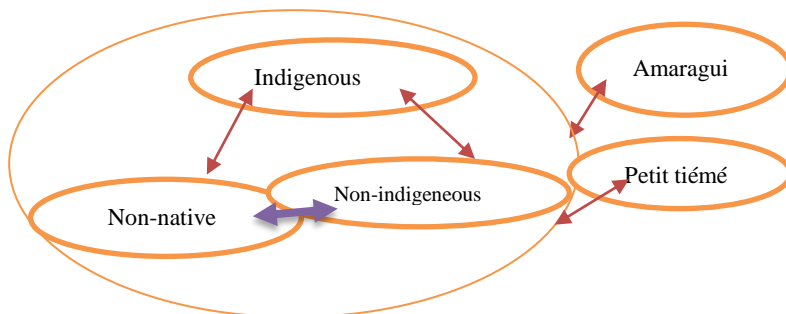
Land demarcation in Gnamangui leads to internal and external conflicts.

II.1.1. Deteriorating relations between local actors in Gnamangui and neighboring villages.

During the land demarcation phase between the village of Gnamangui and the bordering villages of Amaragui and Petit Tiémé, a number of disputes arose. The neighboring villages claimed that Gnamangui's customary authorities had overstepped the boundaries of their territory. Had it not been for the intervention of the administrative authorities, the disputes would have led to serious inter-village conflicts. Although a consensus was reached, the peaceful and brotherly relationship that existed between Gnamangui and the other two villages has greatly deteriorated.

Based on our Venn diagram, we have analyzed the quality of land relations in Gnamangui.

Diagram 2: Venn diagram showing the level of social relations.



Legend:

↔ : strong bilateral relationship
↔ : weak bilateral relationship

Source : Field Survey, 2022

The analysis of this diagram shows that migrants ("allogens" and "allochtones") have a bilaterally strong relationship with each other; they cooperate, and the level of interaction is correspondingly high. On the other hand, the relationship between migrants and natives is bilaterally weak, as indicated by the red arrow.

As for external relationships, the diagram shows poor collaboration between Gnamangui and the neighboring villages (Amaragui and Petit Tiémé). This low level of interaction is due to the dispute that arose between these villages over the demarcation of land.

II.1.2 . Dynamics of the social representation of land delimitation

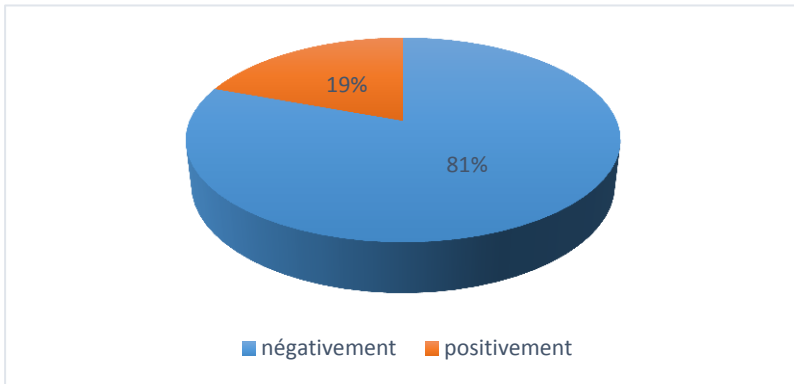
The social representation of land delimitation by the local population of Gnamangui is no longer what it used to be, i.e., a tool for reducing land conflicts. Instead, it is viewed as an instrument for the reappropriation or expropriation of land by a number of stakeholders. Indeed, interviewees reported that initiatives aiming at demarcating plots between heads of families, or between natives and migrants, had not been successful, because some people had taken advantage of the situation to increase the size of their plots, or even to take over the entirety of the plots they shared.

In the words of SA, a member of the allochthonous group: *"Demarcating land is currently the most reliable means for a native to reclaim his land. For he will indicate to the surveyors and investigators a part of the plot he has already sold as being in his ownership."*

These comments are supported by the assertions of another member of the non-native community: *"Here, demarcating plots means saying goodbye to your land. Because when you demarcate, the natives won't do you any favors. They'll even try to take your land away from you. These are things that lead to conflict."*

From these assertions, demarcation becomes a means of reclaiming land held by migrants.

Graph 2 : Respondents' perception of the impact of land delimitation



This graph indicates that 81% of respondents believe that land delimitation has a negative impact on social relations between stakeholders in the Gnamangui community. This perception confirms the statements made earlier. Meanwhile, the locals believe that migrants themselves are at the root of tensions and conflicts, as they appropriate the land granted to them, in line with GT's explanation: *"When you give a small portion of land to migrants and their families to feed themselves, over time they take all your land"*.

In Gnamangui, the longer migrants own land, the more their perception and practice of land ownership change; they adopt transfer practices that contradict custom and tradition. They take ownership of the land and in turn sell it off. This leads to serious tensions between stakeholders. These tensions over land delimitation impact economic activities and create insecurity around development actions in the village.

II.2 The insecurity of development investments.

In the village of Gnamangui, several projects are being carried out by NGOs and decentralized bodies as part of the local development effort. These include the building of rural health centers, schools, and village pumps, as well as reforestation projects to restore forest cover. However, these actions or investments are exposed to risks of insecurity, given the often-contentious nature of the plots on which they are implemented. According to the village chief's secretary, the

delimitation of individual plots is not well worked out, and sometimes the process is biased, thus impacting investments, especially the reforestation component. He does not fail to back up his words when he says through this anecdote:

"In 2018, volunteers had nourished the intention of practicing reforestation with ANADER, but when the plots were inspected, all these 4-ha plots were litigious because the boundaries of these plots were disputed. This led to the withdrawal of reforestation activities in the locality".

A closer look reveals that investments are exposed to the risk of insecurity when plots are not effectively demarcated. It brings the development process to a halt and impacts on all actions carried out in the region.

III. Discussion

3.1. Factors in the deterioration of social relations over land demarcation

Land issues are by no means insignificant within a country like Côte d'Ivoire. One needs only to be aware of the contribution of agriculture in the economy to understand the stakes that land represents on a macroeconomic level (AKA, 2019). At the microeconomic level, land provides access to financial resources, food, and housing. These three elements are fundamental to an individual's survival. As in most Ivorian cocoa-producing areas, the Gnamangui community is confronted with numerous challenges surrounding the delimitation of individual and collective plots. These challenges stem from factors such as the diversification of access to land and the multiplicity of stakeholders involved in its management. All these factors contribute to the deterioration of social relations and the emergence of conflicts. For Babo (2010), the deterioration in relations between natives and migrants in Côte d'Ivoire's forest areas is due to the evolution of "forest agriculture". According to Babo, in addition to cocoa, other space-consuming perennial crops such as rubber and palm oil are being cultivated in these areas, leading to land scarcity. However, the existential tensions between stakeholders in many cases of land management in West Africa arise from non-compliance with agreements between migrants and natives due to differing

interpretations of contracts. For example, old cessions are considered definitive gifts by migrants, while for natives they are mere loans, and therefore non-definitive rights (Zongo, 2010) cited by Kouassi and Oura (2018). In most cases of land governance, the first step is to demarcate plots after recognition of customary rights. But this is opposed by stakeholders, who believe that land demarcation is never fair or equitable. Koné (2005) supports this view, arguing that the tensions between formal law and informal practices in land delimitation in Côte d'Ivoire are linked to traditional land delimitation practices. This divergence in perception of land delimitation does have a significant impact on the rural economy and investment.

3.2. Land conservation strategies and their impact on social relations and Investment

In order to conserve land in rural areas, stakeholders' resort to growing perennial crops on their various plots. This land conservation strategy is generally adopted by migrants, who find that immediately occupying space with other perennial crops such as cocoa and coffee is a way of avoiding any opposition to their property rights (Kouassi and Oura 2018). These forms of land conservation have often been practiced in localities in western Cote d'Ivoire such as Guiglo and Blolequin, where migrants have occupied all their plots with perennial crops to avoid land registration (Kouamé, 2018). In practice, the portion of land ceded, loaned, or purchased is often not clearly demarcated by the former holder of customary rights to the plot. Yet there is no physical boundary between farms, nor is there any land registry that can be used as a topographical map to fix the boundaries of a plot. For this reason, natural markers such as a simple strip of land, a tree or a river are used to delimit plots. Unfortunately, these natural markers are now the subject of dispute. Misunderstandings around land delimitation lead to numerous conflicts. For Amani et al (2018), the challenges of land delimitation are generally conflicts related to land ownership, legal and institutional gaps, and the delimitation system. These difficulties in implementing delimitation hamper the development of rural localities. As for Kouamé (2018), the multiplication of land conflicts within a rural area leads to the withdrawal of investment and mistrust. For example, land conflicts in certain villages in Duekoué have slowed down subdivision and electrification.

Conclusion

Plot demarcation, which is guided by the new rural land law, is an approach that has not yet addressed land-related tensions on the territory of Gnamangui. Instead, it is a key factor in many land disputes and in the deterioration of social relations, given the dynamics it has undergone in terms of both stakeholder perceptions and land delimitation processes. In addition, the problem of land delimitation is not confined to the deterioration of social relations; it also has a direct impact on village development and investment security.

Appropriate resolutions must be taken to ensure more peaceful land relations in Gnamangui. In any case, conflict resolution and the restoration of social relations over land delimitation require a multi-dimensional approach.

Références

AKA, Aline Lamarche (2019), *L'accès à la terre en Côte d'Ivoire : diversité et variabilité des pluralismes*. La Revue des droits de l'homme, openedition journal

Amani Yao Célestin, Al (2018), « Accès au foncier relatif à la pisciculture familiale au Centre-Ouest et au Sud-Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire », *VertigO - la revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement*, Vol. 18. N°2 pp10-24

BABO Alfred (2010), *Conflits fonciers, ethnicité politique et guerre en Côte d'Ivoire* ALTERNATIVES SUD, Vol. 17, pp 95-118, openedition journal

CHAUVEAU, Jean -Pierre ; et al (1998), « Dynamiques et enjeux des conflits fonciers », in *Quelles politiques foncières pour l'Afrique rurale ? réconcilier pratiques, légitimité et légalité*, paris, Catherine Boone, Brice Bado, (Paris: Eds. Karthala, 1998), pp. 553-582.

CHAUVEAU, Jean-Pierre (2002), *Une lecture sociologique de la loi ivoirienne de 1998 sur le domaine foncier*, Montpellier, IRD

CHAUVEAU. Jean.-Pierre & DOZON. Jean.-Pierre (1985), *colonisation, économie de plantation et société civile en côte d'ivoire*. orstom, petit-bassam.

CHAUVEAU. Jean.-Pierre (1997), « Jeu foncier, institutions d'accès à la terre et usage de la ressource : une étude de cas dans la centre-ouest ivoirienne » in *crise, ajustements et recompositions en côte d'ivoire : la remise en cause d'un modèle*. Colloque international, orstom, pp 281- 302

CHAUVEAU. Jean.-Pierre (2000), « Question foncière et construction nationale en Côte d'Ivoire : Les enjeux silencieux d'un coup d'état » in *politique africaine* n°78, karthala pp94-125.

CHOUQUER, Gerard (2009) « Enjeux fonciers. Première partie : Afrique et Madagascar » *in études rurales*, n°184, openEdition Books

COLIN, Jean-Phillipe (2004), *Droits fonciers et dimension intrafamiliale de la gestion foncière*, Abidjan, IRD

COULIBALY, Amara (2006), *Gestion des conflits fonciers dans le nord ivoirien: droits, autorités et procédures de règlement des conflits, colloque internationale « les frontières de la question foncière - at the frontier of land issues »*, Montpellier: IRD

KONE Mariatou. et KOUAME, N'guessan (2005), *Socio anthropologie de la famille en Afrique : évolution des modèles en côte d'ivoire*. Abidjan, les éditions CERAP.

KONE, Karamoko (2007), *Rapports interethniques et différenciation identitaire en milieu rural : cas d'aboudé-mandéké dans le département d'Aghoville*, mémoire de DEA, université d'Abidjan, département de sociologie.

KOUAME, George (2018), « *Politique foncière rurale en Côte d'Ivoire : trajectoires historiques, réformes et perspectives* » saint-louis, CTFD.

KOUASSI, Edouard et OURA raphael (2018), « *Cacaoculture et dégradation des rapports sociaux autour du foncier à Sinfra (Centre-Ouest ivoirien)* », *la problématique du développement dans l'ouest de la cote d'ivoire, Eléments de diagnostic et de réflexion*, Valery akou loba et abel gbitry bolou, Abidjan, Gcréa, ,pp207-2027

KOUROUMA, Moussa (2022), *Application de la loi du domaine foncier rural en Côte d'Ivoire : Stratégies de conservation des terres et mutations dans les rapports sociaux dans la sous-préfecture de Gnamangui. « Mémoire » de master*, université Alassane Ouattara de Bouake, département de sociologie.

SORO, Marceline (2009), *dynamiques des systèmes de production, droits fonciers et gestion-intra-familiale de la terre chez des migrants senoufos dans le Sanwi (cote d'ivoire)*. « Thèse » de doctorat unique, université d'Abidjan, département de ethno-sociologie.

ZONGO, Mahamadou (2010), « *Foncier et Migration* », in des fiches pédagogiques pour comprendre, se poser de bonnes questions et agir sur le foncier en Afrique de l'Ouest. <https://www.foncier-developpement.fr/wp-content/uploads/foncier-et-migrsation-par-mahmadou-zongo.pdf>