Success Stories
From the Mbororo-Fulani Community 
in Cameroon

Dr. Yauba SAIDU
Aii Shatu ALI
Michaela PELICAN
You guys should be proud of what you are doing. Thumbs up! I have been reading your magazine for a long time. I am impressed with the quality, professionalism and usefulness of its content. Recently, I was on a trade fair to Luxembourg and during the coffee break, I walked up to talk to one of our sisters, who is the owner of a giant real estate firm in Luxembourg. Behold, on her palm computer, she was reading the latest issue of E-Magazine. That was the issue with Barrister Agbor Nkongho Felix, who was a friend and classmate in Sasse College.

We had a short chat about your Magazine, and she said it’s one of the best ideas of the younger generation to get united and I believe that with this unity, we can easily work together and achieve the desired development, we are all talking about.
Hello Readers, Cameroonians joined the rest of the world on August 8 2009 to celebrate the Second Edition of the International Day of the Indigenous People under the theme ‘The Marginalised Population, Cultural Diversity and Riches, Gifts for Development within the context of Globalisation’.

Celebrations sponsored by the Ministry of Social Affairs in association with other key development actors, drew our attention to the Mbororo-Fulani community and their remarkable efforts to break through challenges and obstacles retarding their involvement as full citizens and actors in Cameroon’s development process. A new generation of success stories is emerging in spheres of activity other than cattle ownership or herdmanship, for which the Mbororo people are so well known.

In this Twenty First issue of your E-Magazine, we selected two success stories and one ocular witness to the Mbororo cultural evolution in recent years.

Dr. Yauba SAIDU is the first Medical Doctor from the Mbororo-Fulani Community in Cameroon, now taking a specialized training in Clinical Vaccinology and Pharmaceutical Development at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, University of Siena in Italy. We approached him to get a feel of the new wave of professional ambition that sweeps through this young generation and tease his knowledge on a wide range of topical medical issues that require our understanding.

Mrs Aii Shatu ALI is indisputably, a female role model for young Mbororo women and a source of pride for the entire Mbororo-Fulani Communities in the North West Region. She was the first female to successfully receive training as a Veterinary Nurse. While providing her professional knowhow in guiding livestock owners towards securing improved health and yield for their animals, Aii Shatu Ali is omnipresent as an influential Empowerment Advocate for the Mbororo people. She is a veritable globetrotter whose participation in international human rights fora makes her an ambassador for the Mbororo people on the international scene and provides her with opportunities to share the efforts made by MBOSCUDA to beat the tides of marginalization against the Mbororo people.

Dr. Michaela PEUCAN is a Researcher in Anthropology whose committed interest to the Mbororo civilization has earned her an enviable status of a Mbororo Woman within the Mbororo communities where she works. Her research findings have provided more explanations to help the world understand the Mbororo way of life.

Dear Reader, how could we end without a brief glance on an opinion of UNICEF’s Goodwill Ambassador, Mia FARROW, about Cameroon? She recently paid a visit to Mbororo refugees in the East and Adamawa Regions of Cameroon, who escaped intimidation, extortion, kidnappings and insecurity from armed groups in the Central African Republic. She advocated for more assistance to children of refugees who suffer from malnutrition.

Enjoy your reading, Reader, and watch out for the next issue of your E-Mag that will dwell on the contribution of Cameroonians in the Diaspora to Cameroon’s development and the ongoing Decentralisation process.

Take Care.
Cameroun is a peaceful country whose rich cultural diversity is symbolised by the coexistence of various peoples and ethnic groups who settled in Cameroon from different parts of Africa, as a result of great ongoing centuries’ old migratory processes. One of the latest groups to arrive Cameroun in the early 1900s were the Mbororo, a branch of the FULANI, one of West Africa’s largest ethnic groups.

Principally cattle owners and nomadic herdsmen, the Mbororos spread all over Cameroon to areas with rich vegetation for their cattle. In these areas, they have become real contributors to and agents of development. In fact, this economic importance of the Mbororo trade confirms Weeks’ (1978:133) remarks that “their herds of cattle and sheep are the major source of meat for hundreds of villagers, towns and cities from Wadai beyond the shore of Lake Chad to the Atlantic Coast of Senegal.”

However, more than most ethnic groups, the Mbororo-Fulani people have preserved several aspects of their culture throughout ages thus maintaining visible distinctiveness. For example, researchers establish that the Mbororo people feel very strongly about morality and constantly strive to be generous, honest and respectful. They are relatively reserved, shy and quite modest in public. Their lifestyles revolve around the breeding of cattle and other livestock. The cattle represents the greatest cultural symbol of the Mbororo people. Hence, they have been known for being wealthy cattle owners by neighbouring ethnic groups.

One of the areas in Cameroon where organized Mbororo communities have settled is the Western Grassfield stretching through the North West and West Regions. In these areas, they form a minority that makes up between 5 to 10 percent of the population. Even though Mbororo cattle enjoyed vast expanses of grassfields for a long period, recent rapid population growth over the decades created new pressures on land often resulting in conflicts with settled farmers. Other major problems faced by settled Mbororo communities are the marginalization from local and national development schemes as well as their victimization by some overzealous law enforcement and administrative officials who use of their positions to extort money from these hardworking cattle owners, with impunity.

Over so many generations, Mbororo communities endured until the early 1990s when a new generation of educated and elated Mbororo sons and daughters pooled their energies, ideas, groups and resources to create the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) in 1992 with a mission to empower the Mbororo people so as to achieve sustainable and equitable development while asserting their rights as Cameroonian citizens to participate and be included at all levels in the political, social and economic life of Cameroon. Since 1992, MBOSCUDA has strived to empower the Mbororo people through projects in education, health, civil status, livestock care and growth etc, with the assistance of Government as well national and international institutions. By realizing its mission with great commitment and results, MBOSCUDA has become one of the most influential ethnic elite associations in Cameroon in recent years.

The most visible initiative to draw Government’s attention to Mbororo problems was an audience granted to a delegation of leaders of the Mbororo community by the former Prime Minister and Head of Government, Chief Inoni Ephraim, on August 5 2005. Included in the delegation were the Lamidos (traditional leaders) of Sabga in the North West Region and that of Didango found in Koutaba in the West Region.

After appreciating Government’s efforts to improve conditions of the lives of Mbororos during the past two decades of their settlement in Cameroon, the delegation’s spokesperson, Madam Bouba HAWE presented a Memorandum that catalogued most of the problems still faced by the Mbororos in Cameroon. The Mbororo people, she said, though were many in number, an estimated one million, and dispersed all over the ten provinces, were still highly marginalized. The Mbororos were said to be highest producers of hides, skin and beef in Cameroon through their ownership of about 50 percent of the total livestock, thus contributing about 3 percent of the public investment budget. The Mbororos were also the highest contributors to taxes in the North West Region through the Jangali tax and the highest users of veterinary services in the regions where they were found. She regretted that as a minority group, coupled with their nomadic lifestyle, the Mbororos had always been marginalized and exploited by their host populations.

Furthermore the Mbororos were left out of the drafting of several important government developmental programmes. Their communities still lacked basic social amenities like health facilities, schools and road infrastructure. In political governance, the Mbororos requested Government to take some special measures on their behalf such as creating a constituency for them to compete for political posts in elections and, why not, use its prerogatives to appoint minority parliamentarians, following the example that had been experimented with success in Burundi and Rwanda.

In return, the Prime Minister gave assurances of Government’s determination to progressively address the concerns of the minority groups and encouraged them to consider themselves as 100 percent Cameroonians.

Since 2005, Government has undertaken initiatives to facilitate the empowerment of the Mbororo people and their integration as full citizens, even though the most visible actions on the field remain those of MBOSCUDA, PLAN Cameroon, Village AID UK, and other civil society organizations. Thus, the Mbororo people under MBOSCUDA’s leadership is engaged in an irreversible drive towards the empowerment of the Mbororo people nationwide.

By George E. M. M.
Leading a New Generation of Mbororos to Professional Achievements and Excellence

Dr. Saidu, in the minds of several Cameroonians, the Mbororo people are pastoralists and wealthy cattle owners. This, unfortunately, has given rise to stereotypes over the years. In recent years, however, a new generation of Mbororo sons and daughters have, admirably, entered other professions and spheres like Government, Corporations, National/International Civil Society Organisations etc. Their performances are just excellent. As a Medical Doctor, you are a shiny example. What explains this new trend?

Thanks Mabel. Quite frankly, the first thing that came to my mind when I received your invitation was to apologize because there are so many Mbororo whose feats and sacrifices make them worthier than me of this distinction. However, my confidence in the prudence and discern of your editorial Committee, have made me hesitate in taking that decision. With the guidance of God, I decided to accept the invitation, not for my person but on behalf of all Mbororo men and women who have served the community, away from publicity and without waiting to be rewarded.

I agree with you that this stereotype exists and that it has been circulating over the years. In recent years, Mbororo people are becoming sedentary because of declining cattle wealth that has left a great number of them impoverished. They are now facing a new way of life and rather than retreating, they are renewing their efforts to make accelerated progress towards meeting the challenges of this ‘global village’. The number among this new generation of Mbororos who have emerged and are making significant strides is limited. Currently, we have only 40 Mbororos employed by the government and more than a hundred in the private sector. We have just two Ph.D holders, and one Medical Doctor. In the academia, currently, we have 2 Ph.D candidates, 15 students at the Masters’ level and 60 at B.Sc. In the Diaspora, there are 12 Mbororos in the USA, 6 in the UK, 1 in Germany and 7 in South Africa. Most of those in the Diaspora are in academics or business.

Tell us about your birth and early childhood, if you can remember.

The story of my life began with a typical pastoral lifestyle on a hill. As I was told, I was born after a complicated delivery that was beyond the traditional birth attendants. After a long period of labour, my mother was rushed to a far away district hospital on a horse back and I was born with help of forceps. During this period, my father was in Nigeria studying Veterinary medicine. At the age of three, I went to live with my uncle. Like any other child, age of 4, I was assigned to flock of sheep that I had to graze each day from sun rise to sun set, wandering from one hill to the next, some times on a horse back. After two months, I was able to master all my sheep by appearance so much so that if a sheep was not present I would immediately know which. This was the usual way of assessing intelligence within the pastoralist community.
I will like to highlight that what makes me stand out today is the fact that I had the opportunity to go to school. This was the result of having an educated father, a thing that was rare within the Fulani community at that time.

Ahaa! That caught my attention, so your father also went to school?

Yeah, he was the first Fulani to obtain sound education at his time. He recounts that the thing made him to go to school was pressure by his father to address the chronic problems they were facing during the early days of independence. They were subjected to enormous tortures by the then administrative clerks, law enforcement and veterinary officers. He recalls that school was a difficult experience for him and he was considered by others as not being loved by the family. This sparked a lot of conflicts within the family, everyone was against his father. Although his father was a very influential and wealthy man owning more than ten thousand cows, uncountable horses and sheep, he was from time to time summoned to the traditional council to be disciplined because he was taking a different direction in bringing up his children. He says that, most of the time, the question that was asked was “why do you hate this child so much to the point of sending him to school to be beaten like a slave. You are denying him his right of riding horses and going after cattle, respecting and following the time-honoured culture.” Despite all these, his father was still determined to continue the great task.

Certainly, your grandfather must have seen the importance of school in the years to come.

Your guess is correct! My grandfather had some occult knowledge and could predict the future which he disclosed to my father on the eve before he died. As my father recounts, his father called him into his hut one afternoon and gave him a mixture of milk and some concoctions and told him to follow a good number of rules. During this occasion, my grandfather predicted several things amongst which were: “you are going to become like Pa Ngala Isaac (Pa Ngala Isaac was a veterinary officer at that time and finally became one of the richest man in Donga Mantung before his death some couple of years ago),” secondly, “cattle wealth is going to decline over time and most Mbororo people will no longer have cows.” thirdly, “there will come a time when only those who have money will have a say and determine the direction of things; those who do not have will be in a serious problems and most Mbororo people will be in that category.” All these predictions that turn out to be true today, my father says, were reserved for classes five, six and seven. The juniors had the classes of foretelling the future. When exactly did you start school?

Waow! I must say in my village too, some elderly persons have this gift of foretelling the future. When exactly did you start school?

When my father returned, he was employed by SODEPA - a newly created cattle ranch at the time. I then joined him at the cattle ranch at Dumbo where I had the opportunity to go to primary school. Joined by my elder sister and other children in the ranch, we covered 26 km each day to attend school in a nearby village. Only on some lucky days, were we transported by either a tractor or a lorry, but most of the time; we covered that distance on foot, some times under burning sun or heavy rains.

How did the primary school’s structures look like?

The school’s structures were rudimentary. Three bizarre classrooms were reserved for classes five, six and seven. The juniors had the classes under a mango tree. We used stones as seats and our teacher’s board was hung on the branch of a tree. We changed our position of orientation from time to time depending on the position of the sun. Corporal punishment was frequent and caused several pupils to withdraw from school. Even though my father had a high position in the ranch and was a respected as well as an influential man in the ranch and the neighbouring village, the treatment I received from the local native children and my teachers who were equally natives of the village made me consider withdrawing too like others. Pupils from the Fulani ethnic group were few. We received all forms of despise and we were beaten up and our belongings seized on a daily basis by local children who usually would team up against us, during break or after school. The teachers did not show justice to us, either. When ever I complained, I was beaten up because my parents thought I did not want to go school. The only thing that kept me going was the fear of my father. The problem of torture at the village school became so serious that the administrative authorities of the ranch decided to construct a primary school. This solved the problem, but by then, most Fulanis whose parents were sympathetic had withdrawn from school. Before leaving primary school in 1993, we were only two Fulanis in that batch, Ismail Musa and myself.

Quite interesting. Despite the challenges you continued to Secondary School, Dr. Saidu.

Yes, I continued to the Presbyterian Secondary School Nkambe for my secondary education in 1993. This period was also a difficult one due to the political tumult that was hovering over the Nation at that time. We spent more than 6 months without school. In secondary school, though I encountered some form of discrimination too, my excellent academic performance made me stand out as an exemplary student. Finally, I registered a pass in 11 subjects at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level Examination, the first brilliant performance to be registered in that school as well as the entire division. Then I proceeded to St Augustine’s College in NSO. There, I met students with sound reason that was balanced by good catholic discipline and who were motivated to learn and make a difference. The discipline that prevailed in St Augustine’s College made it an ideal environment for any student to study comfortably irrespective of his/her background. I was admitted later into the medical school in Yaounde. I kept on moving progressively from one difficult year to the next. I saw my interest in internal medicine developing until I was faced with unresolved challenges caused by HIV, Malaria, Cancers and other infectious diseases. Looking at the devastating nature of these illnesses, I saw the need to address these diseases before they ever occur. This resolution started boiling in my head and this was the start of a great scientific journey for me that fortunately, I am taking today. This journey, of course, was greased by my mentor Professor Wilfred Mbacham who motivated me by his understandings of these things and had been working towards the realisation of such noble ambitions. He showed all the roads to me, gave me all the contacts and worked out all the probabilities for me. Without him, I think the story of life would have been different and my potentials would have been limited. He made me to think globally at time when most of my classmates and other young scientists focused on national health issues. He has not done this only to me but for several other students. The ethnic diversity of his group, his inbuilt wisdom to identify and attract young talents, the equal
...the Fulani descended from one of the twelve sons of Jacob when he left Canaan and went to Egypt where Joseph was established. Following oppressions by the then Pharaoh, they emigrated from Egypt, some of them went back to Palestine and Syria...and later on re-entered the African continent from Cyrenaica about 200 A.D... the Fulani are the descendants of a hybrid between Jews and some local tribes in North Africa...they crossed the Nile with their cattle and headed West...

Now, tell us about the Origins of the Mbororo people?

Good, regarding the origin of the Mbororo-Fulani, I will take you into much of the literature that explain much about the Mbororo-Fulani people. Although similar speculative theories (Murdock, 1959; Palmer, 1967; Sa‘ad, 1977) have emerged over the years, like most African tribes, the question about the origin of the Mbororo-Fulani remains unanswered. According to the Semitic theory (www.jamtan.com), the Fulani descended from one of the twelve sons of Jacob when he left Canaan and went to Egypt where Joseph was established. Following oppressions by the then Pharaoh, they emigrated from Egypt, some of them went back to Palestine and Syria where current documented evidence states (Delafosse, 1912); and later on re-entered the African continent from Cyrenaica about 200 A.D. In similar terms, St Croix and Palmer (1967) recount that the Fulani are the descendants of a hybrid between Jews and some local tribes in North Africa and Palmer further claimed that mixing of these hybrids with another group of people (Duradu) between the 7th and 8th century was the source of the “Fulani proper”. The physique of the Fulani led Meek (1913) to link the Fulani with proto-Egyptians and an ancient Libyan tribe. A more recent fascinating evidence from this perspective comes from Verneau (www.jamtan.com) an eminent anthropologist who observed that the study of many Fulani cranial structures have indicated that they are intimately linked to the Beta Isreali of Ethiopia and that both are very similar to the Egyptian crane. Irrespective of the controversial stories about their origin, their migratory path proposed by several authors tends to agree with one another. Thus, they crossed the Nile with their cattle and headed west. They took the name of fouth or fouth meaning those who left. A group from the latter moved along the edges of the Sahara to Touat-Air and then to West-Africa. Some went to Masina (in present day Mali) and then spread to the neighboring regions where they were rejoined by migratory Fulani groups that went through Morocco. At about 700AD, these groups invaded the regions of Tagout, Adrar, Mauritania, and Fuuta Toooro and finally settled in the Senegal River valley that is actually the cradle of the Fulani group today. The Fulanis established kingdoms there until the beginning of the Nineteenth Century when some moved eastward to other parts of Africa notably to Futa Jalon, Mesina and subsequently to the Northern Nigeria. These eastward movements that represented the best options were fueled by a multitude of factors notably; the Atlantic ocean to the west; the Sahara desert to the north and, the thick forest to the south, which breeds the tse-tse fly (Muhammad 1976) and geometric increase in human as well as animal population and the degradation of environmental resources. Today, the Fulani number about 25 million and are found in 20 African countries making them the largest nomadic group in the world. In regions where they are found, they continue to play a crucial economic role. It has been noted that “their herds of cattle and sheep are the major source of meat for hundreds of villagers, towns and cities from Wadai, beyond the shore of lake Chad to the Atlantic coast of Senegal...
We observe that the Mbororos practise Islam.
The Fulani came into contact with Islam already before their emigration from Senegal. Conversion to Islam was especially widespread amongst the sedentary Fulani, while the Mbororo-Fulani were less receptive to Islam. Amongst the Mbororo, Islam never created profound changes of mentality, but laid as a thin shell above the traditional cultural heritage, and this is pretty much how the situation remains today in the remaining societies of pastoral Mbororos.

How would you describe the economy in the Mbororo-Fulani Community today? We know that cattle rearing plays a central role.
The economy of the Mbororo–Fulani in the early 19th century was exceedingly simple. Cattle had little economic significance and the number a man owned was an index of his wealth and importance. The women (often called Dada by natives) were responsible for milking and they carried the milk, with pats of butter floating in it, in large shallow gourds to local markets, where it was exchanged for food grown by cultivators. Expenditure was on food, salt, payment for ‘gainakos’ (herdsmen) and ‘jangeli’ (cattle tax), with occasional purchase of cloth, household goods and saddlery. Mbororo–Fulani sold cattle with the utmost reluctance; the number sold depended on the expenditures that could not be met by receipts from the sale of milk and butter by the women. The greater parts of such expenditure were on annual cattle tax paid to the local councils.

Although there is a fast wave of change in the socio-economic and political landscape, cattle rearing is still closely aligned to Mbororo identity (Azanya 1999).

MBOSCUDA has run a programme to educate indigenous peoples about their legal and constitutional rights. This has proved useful in rural courts where police and magistrates are also not well trained in national laws and human rights. Pastoralist communities have benefited from para-legal support, as it allows them to defend their rights and to reduce corruption and human rights abuses.

How do you appraise the contribution of the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) organisation to the socio-economic and cultural development of the Mbororo communities in Cameroon and what are some of these contributions?

One can appraise the contribution of this exemplary organization from the cradle of its existence. It was created by a generation of young talented university graduates in 1992 who recognized the absolute need to empower the Mbororos. Even though the architects of MBOSCUDA faced tremendous difficulties that ranged from severe torture to imprisonment, their sound vision balanced by an ingrained determination to preserve the rich cultural heritage that was fast disappearing and to save the future generations from an imminent catastrophe, fueled their mission and sustained their noble objectives. Since then, MBOSCUDA has been one of the most dynamic indigenous peoples’ organisations in Africa.
MBOSCUDA has also developed a strategy to support schools through constructions, supply of didactic materials and furniture. Thus, MBOSCUDA has constructed five schools in the North-West Region; two schools in the Western Region, one in the South Western Region and some in the Eastern Region.

The aim of empowering the Mbororo women to guarantee their influence on social, economic and political issues in key areas of their lives.

The MBOSCUDA micro-credit scheme was conceived in 1998 with the aim of empowering the Mbororo women to guarantee their influence on social, economic and political issues in key areas of their lives. The Mbororo woman has been identified as with the worst and intolerable life style. She faces problems related to limited access and control over productive resources including income, biased cultural environment, religious misinterpretations and gross gender discrimination. Despite the increasing international calls on the need to empower the woman, she is still being increasingly marginalized and subject to extremely high dependency on men in all aspects of their livelihood and relegated to the less vital economic activities like milking of cattle and milk processing into butter, while men patronize huge income generating activities like cattle rearing and marketing. The men continue to undermine the ability and status of women and therefore determine the local politics of the household and community.

In Finance, the MBOSCUDA micro-credit scheme that has several dimensions became operational in 2003 initially targeting some 20 Mbororo communities in the North West Province and has now been extended to include some 20 more communities. The balance sheet has been positive and can be measured in terms of increase participation in social and economic activities at the main administrative headquarters, increased access to health services and potable water, increased school enrolment of the female child and above all, a rapid decline of early and forceful marriages.

The Adult literacy rate among the Mbororos is acceptably very low, probably the lowest in the country. Living on far and unreachable hills and wondering from place to makes pastoralist life style and education to be incompatible. This high illiteracy rate has a profound, if not humiliating impact. I can remember a Mbororo woman with critically sick child sitting on queue and could not recognize her turn because she could not identify the number she was holding and she ended sitting there for almost a day. I can also remember one walking round the hospital looking for door number 4. To demystify challenges and to overcome the Mbororo belief that “knowledge is not far, it is hidden”, MBOSCUDA launched the ADULT LITERACY Component of MBOSCUDA with the following objectives: provide an opportunity for Mbororo who were not privileged to acquire formal education obtain a certain degree of literacy; who were not privileged to acquire formal education obtain a certain degree of literacy; systematize their existing knowledge and promote a detail analysis of local issues affecting their lives; provoke critical thinking among the Mbororo on daily issues surrounding their lives and to challenge cultural myths slowing their development; cause Mbororo to take control of their own development agenda in their own terms and effectively bring a positive change to their lives; develop self-confidence in Mbororo through empowerment acquired from learning.

These objectives were achieved thanks to the REFLECT (Re-generated Frierean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) approach pioneered by Paulo Freire, a seasoned Brazilian educator. This highly effective approach that was regenerated by Action Aid (a UK based organization) after it was piloted in El Salvador, India, Bangladesh and Uganda, with a high degree of impact, it was replicated in Cameroon by MBOSCUDA to some 30 Mbororo communities with the assistance of Village Aid U.K.

The women who constituted the majority during most of the trainings highlighted some fascinating results that can be summarized as follows: they are now able to write their names and identify both the documents of their children and theirs; they are now having a say in family issues like the marriage of their daughters; going to hospital and clinic is becoming easier for them as they can recognize numbers and prescriptions; many of them can now use telephones without much assistance as they know numbers; they can now use the weight of their children to assess the health situation; they can now supervise their children to do their homework when they come back from school; they have now improved personal hygiene and health through knowledge acquired; they now have business management skills through Reflect; they now challenge negative cultural practices that impede development.

In the Health domain, MBOSCUDA also focuses on the promotion of health in the Mbororo population. It has worked collaboration with partners like Provincial Technical Group for the control of HIV, Plan International and CARE-Cameroon. Amongst the several interventions, two merit to be highlighted here.

In collaboration with PLAN and the Hope for the African Children Initiative MBOSCUDA implemented an HIV/AIDS awareness creation project. During this project, 384 HIV orphans were identified and some 350 Mbororo women, men and youths were trained and enrolled as pair educators in the fight against HIV/AIDS in ten Mbororo communities. These orphans are currently receiving basic school needs and fees and have been enrolled into treatment programmes.

More recently, MBOSCUDA in collaboration with CARE engaged in another mobilisation, sensitisation and training on HIV/AIDS in ten other communities. The Mbororo settlements had the opportunity to be engaged in VCT activities ever since its inception. The positive cases received both moral and financial support to pursue treatment. They also received financial assistance and necessary training on income generating activities. Ophans were also identified and received diverse range of support from the project.

The MBOSCUDA micro-credit scheme was conceived in 1998 with the aim of empowering the Mbororo women to guarantee their influence on social, economic and political issues in key areas of their lives.
Passion, Calling, Opportunity or Parental Guidance and how do you assess these parameters as determinants for becoming a medical professional?

Thanks. I would like to think that the passion that I nursed during my childhood has contributed significantly and has provided me with the drive. When I watched over my father in the mid 80s clenching his teeth and rolling his read from one angle of the bed to the other and at the same time the comfort, concern and love that the nurses showed to my father, my mind formulated the wish that I become like those people in white gowns. When these nurses left, I went to my father I told him not to worry, when I grew up, I would become a doctor and treat his hand. I have always kept this in mind and was very fascinated in becoming a doctor to the point that as a child, if anyone wanted to annoy me he needed simply to tell me that I would not become a doctor. My mother and siblings used this often when ever I did something that was not right.

One thing I would like to say here is that even if the passion is well grounded, one cannot neglect the crucial role played by opportunity, especially in a country with limited medical institutions like ours. Generally, every science student in high school would like to become a medical doctor but this does not always turn out to be true owing to a good number of factors. In today’s world, the increasing demand for medical education has resulted to escalating costs for pursuing such an adventure. This rising cost coupled with insufficient family income is a bottleneck for achieving dreams related to passion. This makes opportunity, that can adopt several faces ranging from God’s will, to the family in which one is born into, the location/country where one finds oneself etc. to stand out as the major determinant of our time. Moreover, a good number of Doctors from developing countries claim that either passion or calling landed them into this field. Although this might be the case in some situations, the currently unacceptable waves of migration of health professionals from low and middle income to high income countries appears not to justify this claim. The paradox is clear; if one has the calling to save lives he should be where ten of thousands of lives are being lost daily. This tends to occur in rural areas in developing countries and most health professionals will not want to work there.

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What good and bad memories do you hold of your training at the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences? Which trainers inspired you?

Each time I am asked this question, a mixed wave of sadness and joy runs across my mind because the days of pain I have spent within its walls were really long, and also the nights of aloneness and hard work and great sacrifices. But nevertheless, these challenges were worth pursing and have actually grounded me with solid foundation that I am using to develop further. As most of the students, I was faced with tremendous difficulties during the first semester of the first year, probable due to a language barrier. I had an Anglophone orientation and for the first time, I had to attend lectures in French. But this difficulty was short lived as I was able to pick up during the second semester. From that time, I maintained a stable progress till completion. The clinical postings were also very challenging. Postings in the pediatric hematology and oncology as well as the Adult Infectious Disease (specifically HIV infections) were psychologically traumatizing to me due to large number of deaths registered daily. Each day, the spectrum of symptoms and signs presented by these patients were different. Some of these clinical pictures are often new to the physicians and are not even described in textbooks thus leaving him helpless in many situations. My experience in these units made me to develop a career interest in infectious disease research with the aim of contributing towards finding a long term solution to these diseases that constitute a veritable challenge to clinical practice especially in resource limited countries. I was fortunate to land into a team of seasoned researchers who gave me a view of medicine from a different angle. Also, some of the memories that come to mind are the limited infrastructures that we had. The amphitheatres were small and could not comfortably accommodate the growing number of students. The laboratories had limited equipment that were old. The libraries too were virtually aging in stock of books with limited IT-facilities and insufficient studying space. Lodging and transportation conditions were not better either. Unfortunately too, some lecturers derive pleasure in failing students deliberately. The long term effect of this can be great and may limit the students’ abilities to compete for international scholarships. These are attitudes that need to be urgently redressed. Irrespective of the challenges we faced, I think, we should hope for better, if not the best conditions for future generations of students and start striving towards making this possible. Recently, these conditions are being ameliorated and the faculty is undergoing infrastructural transformation, thanks to innovative works that were launched by the former rector Dr Dorothy Njeuma. During the recently celebrated the Biomedical Science faculty’s 40th anniversary, a new foundation – the Hippocratic Foundation was launched and it is expected to bring a wind of change to the multiple problems faced by students especially in the area of information technology.
Although training conditions were not that very modern, I think that the Faculty actually produced some of the best students in the world.

In Kampala, I underwent a rigorous scientific training on genes and genomes in the tropics. This course that was organised by the Biomedical Research Centre of the Makerere University brought 25 young scientists from all over the globe. We received advanced training on biotechnology and on how micro-organisms interact at the cellular level to produce disease. We then focused on how these interactions can be explored to design appropriate health intervention tools like drugs, vaccines and diagnostic kits. Some lead ideas were arrived at and are currently being investigated in Sweden.

In Cordoba-Spain, Three of us from Cameroon were trained on Evidence Based Medicine (EBM). EBM is becoming increasingly important in today’s world because the practice of medicine today is based on the best available evidence and health care professionals must have evidence to support their proposed course of treatment. Cameroonian physicians can access the best available evidence on http://cm.jbiconnect.org that is available free of charge to all health care professionals in Cameroon thanks to Professor Janita Chau of the Hong Kong Centre for evidence based medicine who is gracefully sponsoring this site.

Let’s talk Health. You have worked for several Malaria projects. What are Cameroon’s strategies to prevent, treat and control Malaria?

Cameroon has an integrated strategy for malaria control. In the domain of treatment, she advocates for early diagnosis and prompt treatment of suspected cases of malaria with effective, safe and affordable antimalarials before it become severe. The Government has subsidised these intervention making them more affordable. Cameroon is in line with current global recommendations for malaria management. She introduced Artemisinin-Based combination therapies (ACTs) in 2004. These effective interventions are currently subsidised and cost less 600frs CFA for adults and less than 150frs for paediatric doses. Of recent, Cameroon adopted the Community based approach where community health workers were trained on rapid evaluation of children using the integrated Management of Child-

In Kampala, I underwent a rigorous scientific training on genes and genomes in the tropics. ...We received advanced training on biotechnology and on how micro-organisms interact at the cellular level to produce disease. In Cordoba-Spain, Three of us from Cameroon were trained on Evidence Based Medicine (EBM). EBM is becoming increasingly important in today’s world because the practice of medicine today is based on the best available evidence and health care professionals must have evidence to support their proposed course of treatment.

Launched and it is expected to bring a wind of change to the multiple problems faced by students especially in the area of information technology. This, as I can say, is going to present a good opportunity for the former students as well as other individuals of goodwill to bring meaningful change to the faculty through various mechanisms such as donation of books, computers, medical equipments or even grants to conduct research.

Although training conditions were not that very modern, I think that the Faculty actually produced some of the best students in the world. This has been seen when they sit for exams like the USMLE or other board exams where they usually feature amongst the top students.

A lot of teachers have inspired me by their scholarships and commitments, notably Professors Victor Anomah Ngu, Peter Nduombe, Jean Claude Mbanya, Njanshi Alfred, Tietche Felix (even though of late), Kago Innocent, Rose Leke, Mbu Robinson, Mbanya Dora, Tetanye Ekoe, Robert Leke, Marie Therese Obama, Wallijom Muna and so many others. These teachers display a large spectrum of rare qualities from good sense of purpose to a profound degree of humility.

Besides these teachers, three heroes completely challenged the course of my life. Professor Dan Lantum, shaped my mind and gave me the rare opportunity to delve into the ocean of knowledge by establishing extra-curricular reading when I was in the third. I still have the numerous books he gave me on culture, history, philosophy etc. The ones that I found most interesting were those authored by the late Professor Bernard Fonlon. Secondly, Professor Roger Moyou introduced me to research and showed me the joy of this field. He has over the years, with little talk and much example, instilled hope where there had been despair. His love, discipline, and sense of responsibility instilled in me a desire, and perhaps even a need, to develop further and acquire this rare quality of altruistic ambitions. I will forever remain indebted to both Mbacham and Moyou, a debt that one acknowledges with both delight and pride.

Dr. Saidu, before we touch a few topical health topics, would you mind telling us about your training programmes in Kampala and Cordoba?
Adverse Drug Reactions (ADRs) have become a problem for professionals in the pharmaceutical industry. What are the causes of ADRs, what can be done to prevent these ADRs and why is pharmacovigilance needed to ensure the safe use of medicines?

An adverse drug reaction (ADR) is an expression that describes harm associated with the use of given medication at a normal dose. The meaning of this expression differs from the meaning of "side effect", as this last expression might also imply that the effects can be beneficial. No drug is without risk and all medicines have side effects, some of which can be fatal. People in every country of the world are affected by ADRs. In some countries ADR-related costs, such as hospitalization, surgery and lost productivity, exceed the cost of the medications. At least 60% of ADRs are preventable, and can be due to: wrong diagnosis wrong diagnosis of the patient's condition; prescription of the wrong drug or wrong dosage of the right drug; an undetected medical, genetic or allergic condition that might cause a patient reaction; self-medication with prescription medicines; not following the instructions for taking the medication; reactions with other drugs (including traditional medicines) and certain foods; use of a sub-standard medication whose composition and ingredients do not meet the correct scientific requirements, and can be ineffective and often dangerous; use of counterfeit medicines with no active ingredients or the wrong ingredients, which can be dangerous or fatal.

So, how can ADRs be prevented? Even when the above situations are avoided, all medicines have side effects and some can be damaging. The effects of any treatment with a medicine cannot be predicted with absolute certainty. All medicines have both benefits and the potential for harm. The risk of harm can be minimized by ensuring that prescribed medicines are of good quality, safe, effective and used by the right patient in the right dose at the right time. In order to prevent or reduce harm to patients and thus improve public health, mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring the safety of medicines in clinical use are vital. In practice this means having in place a well-organized pharmacovigilance system. Pharmacovigilance is a key component of effective drug regulation systems, clinical practice and public health programmes.

Experience has shown that many adverse effects, interactions (i.e. with foods or other medicines) and risk factors come to light only during the years after the release of a medicine. The principal aims of pharmacovigilance programmes are: to improve patient care and safety in relation to the use of medicines, and all medical and paramedical interventions; to improve public health and safety in relation to the use of medicines; to contribute to the assessment of benefit, harm, effectiveness and risk of medicines, encouraging their safe, rational and more effective use; to promote understanding, education and clinical training in pharmacovigilance and its effective communication to health professionals and the public.

The Mbororos have quite efficient herbal medicines that have been used over the years to cure ailments. Do you plan further research in these herbs for possible development of modern drugs following the path of your trainers like Professor Lantum?

The Mbororos have a long history of use of these medicines that is acknowledged to be safe and effective but not well established. In some communities about 80% of the population depend on traditional medicine to treat various infectious and chronic conditions.
Interestingly, these practices can be exploited to provide lead ideas towards the identification of rational drug candidates. I intend, in the near future, to partner with the traditional authorities or the so-called keepers of the hidden knowledge, phytochemists and people like Prof Lantum to see how we can make use of this indigenous knowledge. It is important to highlight that several useful drugs including some antimalarials, anti-obesity and anesthetic agents were derived through such co-operations. Most Pharmaceutical companies are now willing to support such adventures that can be seen from slogans like “if you have bright idea, let us know”.

Immunisation campaigns are organised regularly in our country. What is Immunisation and why is important in promoting public health?

Immunisation or vaccination is the administration of a foreign substance to a person with the objective of inducing an active protection against a disease response to the vaccine will be and the higher the protection afforded. According to WHO, vaccination is one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions. They save lives and protect individuals & communities against some deadly infectious diseases. The use of vaccines has led to the eradication of some deadly diseases like Smallpox and of recent, vaccines have brought some other diseases (Polio, diphtheria, measles, tetanus etc) to their knees. Vaccines can provide insurance against unpredictable diseases (flu pandemic, bioterrorism). They are the only lasting solution for most deadly diseases.

Several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa still suffer from epidemics of Meningitis. How far has research and development gone in developing effective vaccines against the various strains of the disease that is fatal to most of its victims?

Although several forms of meningitis occur in Sub-Saharan Africa, that one that occurs in epidemic is caused by a specific germ called Neisseria meningitides. This turns to occur in the so called meningitis belt that stretches from the Ethiopia to Senegal with an estimated total population of 300 million people. Sometimes outbreaks have occurred outside this belt. Most countries within the meningitis belt have suffered large outbreaks every 8 to 12 years during the past 50 years. Since the 1980s, the intervals between epidemics have become shorter and more irregular. In numerous other countries, no evident periodicity has been observed. In early 2000 out breaks occurred following the return of Hajj pilgrims. The uncertain nature of the disease, when outbreak will occur and the numerous serotypes makes the control of this disease through vaccination challenging. In the early 80s vaccines based on the polysaccharide capsule of the organisms, Polysaccharide vaccines use purified polysaccharides from specific Neisseria meningitidis serogroups as antigens to produce serum antibodies that activate complement-mediated bacteriolysis and phagocytosis. The first successful polysaccharide vaccines against meningococcal disease were developed for serogroups A and C approximately 30 years ago to stop epidemics in US military recruits and were tested extensively in Europe, Latin America, and Africa. The vaccine was shown to be safe and effective in preventing epidemics of serogroup C in the US military and in mass campaigns to control epidemics of serogroup A in Africa. In addition to a bivalent vaccine against serogroups A and C, a tetravalent vaccine that also includes antigens from serogroups W-135 and Y has been developed. Polysaccharide vaccines have a high degree of safety and good short-term efficacy in older children and adults. These vaccines however had some limitations. They were not effective in infants and they were unable to protect for long period of time. These limitations were overcome by the production of new vaccines based on conjugation technology. A primary advantage of conjugated meningococcal vaccines (versus polysaccharide vaccines) is that these vaccines produce immunity in younger age groups, which have the highest incidence of meningococcal disease. The first conjugated meningococcal vaccine for serogroup C was introduced in 1999 and in 2005, a tetravalent conjugate vaccine for serogroups A, C, W-135, and Y was approved. The limitation of these vaccines is that they are not combined which might make compliance to be difficult. Our institute is currently working on a vaccine derived through such co-operations. Most Pharmaceutical companies are now willing to support such adventures that can be seen from slogans like “if you have bright idea, let us know”.

In the vaccine industry today, several things are being put in place to address issues of safety of new vaccines. To minimize contamination, all manufacturing surfaces are coated with specific materials that facilitates cleaning and decontamination. Since outside air can also be a source of contamination, a system called HVAC supplies controlled filtered conditioned air to Clean Rooms under a given pressure. Gowning by the manufacturers is more robust and rigorous than that seen during surgical operations. To minimize human errors most of the filling and packaging is done by robots.
A huge step has just been made in Thailand towards developing an HIV vaccine. Could you enlighten us on that?

OK, the HIV/AIDS global community was pleased to announce the most significant advance in HIV vaccine research. The results of the Thai Phase III HIV vaccine clinical trial is a ray of hope for the more than 2.7 million women, men and children who become newly infected with HIV every year across the globe.

This research that evaluated the effect of a combination of two HIV vaccine candidates (ALVAC-HIV vaccine and AIDSVAC B/E) in more than 16,000 Thai women and men showed a 31.2% reduction in HIV infection risk making it the first vaccine research to reduce HIV infections in humans in the 26-year quest to develop an AIDS vaccine. It highlights that with more research, it will be possible to develop a vaccine that is fully protective against HIV.

This study also demonstrates the importance of global cooperation and collaboration in accelerating the search for a safe and effective HIV vaccine.

Today, the H1N1 (Swine flu) creates panic around the world. Could you give us a general overview on the pandemic, the drugs, vaccines and prevention?

The current flu Pandemic is caused by influenza A H1N1 (A/H1N1) virus, which first appeared in Mexico as a communicable human disease in late March and rapidly spread throughout the world in April 2009. Due to the rapid transport systems in modern times, the epidemic affected about 121 countries in less than 4 months. The cumulative number of confirmed new H1N1 cases reached close to one hundred thousands, with 429 deaths, till July 6th. Although the death rate caused by this new virus is lower than that by avian influenza virus H5N1 in the last epidemic the latent threat is unpredictable because this new virus is much more infectious to humans. Most importantly, most population has no immunity to the virus. In addition, it would usually take 4-6 months from the time when an appropriate strain is identified before the first dose of vaccine becomes available. The virus currently spreading is a mix of human, swine, and avian influenza viruses with a transmissible ability among human beings.

Currently, there are only two effective drugs that can be used for the treatment of this virus. These are oseltamivir (Tamiflu manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline, and Biota) and zanamivir (Relenza manufactured by Hoffmann La Roche, and Gilead Sciences). These drugs work by inhibiting the virus ability to bind to neighboring cells. Even though it has been shown that the virus has developed complete resistance to the so called M2 channel inhibitor drugs, these drugs remain very effective and therefore inder to preserve their efficacy, they should only be available on prescription.

Regarding vaccines for H1N1, 4 vaccines (made by CSL Limited, LLC MedImmune, Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics Limited, and Sanofi Pasteur Inc) have been approved in the US. According to the Food and Drug Administration, the vaccines will be distributed in the US after the initial lots become available, which is expected within the next four weeks. The US recommends a single dose.

In Europe, one two vaccines (made by Novartis AG and GlaxoSmithKline PLC) have been granted marketing authorization by the European Medicines Agency. Despite early data showing that one dose of both swine flu vaccines might work in most adults, the European Medicines Agency is recommending a two-dose regimen.

Novartis had already begun shipping the first batches of swine flu vaccine to countries across Europe. It also expects its swine flu vaccine for the U.S., which does not contain an adjuvant, to be shipped to the U.S. this October. Glaxo had not yet begun shipping its vaccine.

Take us to your Mum’s kitchen, if you don’t mind. You certainly remember some delicious meals she cooks for you and your brothers and sisters, which do you enjoy most?

This question brings sadness to someone in the Diaspora. After reading the question and setting my mind to wonder and to sort out the best dish, I was already salivating before I could get the answer. I can remember a special kind of soup prepared with fresh beef, fat, cow butter and some spices. I don’t know the name but I used to hear her call it Rawno. It is served hot. I can’t explain how it tastes, but what is clear is that it is more of an experience than an explanation.

Dr Saidu, what are your plans for Cameroonians when you return? Should we expect to see you lead more young Cameroonians towards Medicine?

After reflecting on the various blessings and opportunities I have had through people like Professor Mbacham, the possibilities of amplifying such opportunities and making them available to other Cameroonian students, I feel that returning to Cameroon and be engaged in a wide range of issues within the academia is a logical response. Guided by Fulani principle that “And we will give it unto our children, and they unto their children, and it shall not perish,” I have the moral obligation to contribute to nurturing and upbringing of young Cameroonian students and scientists. The task at first may seem daunting. But I am fortunate to be part of a team both here at Novartis and the Biotechnology Center in Yaoundé that have a strong desire to make a positive contribution to society. I am being trained to be involved in clinical development within the industry and at the end will be expected to establish sentinel research sites in our respective countries that will be supported financially by numerous bodies. This might present a good opportunity for me to lead several Cameroonian students into this important field.

Dr., you have just learnt of the SUCCESS STORY E-MAGAZINE, after reading through a few, what comes up into your mind about the E-Mag and about being a talented Cameroonian?

The wisdom of the editorial body of the e-magazine in searching and localising Cameroonians even in remote regions is a great and inspirng effort that must be saluted with reverence. The e-magazine displays an array of information that covers basically all fields of life; from science to arts, from politics to governance and from culture to philosophy. This can provide an incredible tool for learning to seek- ers of diverse range of information within the shortest possible time. Even though I am still at the nadir of my talents, what I can say is that all talented Cameroonians share one thing in common. A vision of an improved Cameroon and they are working individually towards this. Such dreams can only be achieved if people like you keep on doing this great job.

Thanks Dr Saidu and accept encouragements from our readers around the globe?

It is my honour and thank you too for giving me this opportunity. I must commend on your efforts and at the same time acknowledge the sources that I have made reference to.
Welcome to the Success Story E-Magazine Shatou. You are a symbol of the success scored by many youths in the Mbororo community in recent years. You studied Veterinary medicine at CNFZV in Jakiri. Infact you were the first Mbororo woman to study veterinary medicine from the North West Region and graduated as a Veterinary Nurse. Tell our readers more about yourself, if you don’t mind.

I am a Mbororo woman from a family of six made up of five females and one male. My father is a Veterinarian while my mother is a housewife. My father, being literate, educated me up to high school level and just at the time I had my GCE Advanced Level, MBOSCUDA was looking for four Mbororo girls with the GCE Advanced Level to train them in professional schools so that when they graduate, they should serve as role models in the Mbororo community.

It was in that light that I was enrolled in to the Zootechnical and Veterinary Training Centre in Jakiri. Being the first female Mbororo to study Veterinary Nursing, it was very exciting and challenging. After two years of intensive study I graduated with a Diploma in Veterinary nursing.

After which I was recruited in MBOSCUDA to serve as the Gender and Women Promotion Programme Coordinator for the North West Region and I handled this post for a period of four years and decided to join the Public Service. As a civil servant I still offer a lot to MBOSCUDA and the entire Mbororo community.

You could have chosen to study something else, but why Veterinary medicine?

Based on our lifestyle which is cattle herding, I found it very interesting to study veterinary nursing to enable me assist my fellow brothers and sisters in solving some of the problems we face as an insider.

Shatu, the Mbororo people are so attached to rearing animals. Which animals do the Mbororo rear?

Cattle herding is the sole source of livelihood to the Mbororo people; even though we keep smaller animals like sheep and poultry. Mbororo people have a long traditional knowledge and expertise on cattle herding.

What are the main criteria for selecting the different cattle breed?

Some of the criteria used in selecting cattle breed are: the size and shape of the animal, the size and number of teats of the udder, the size and shape of the legs and also the parent stock quality as well as cattle that are adaptable to the environmental and climatic conditions.

Do you crossbreed?

Cross breeding has been done between the Zebu and the white Fulani,
Mbororo people have a lot of traditional knowledge in ethno-veterinary practice in the treatment of some of the animal diseases. With conventional knowledge on Veterinary Nursing, I sensitize on where to seek advice in case of any problems related to the health of their animals, the importance of pasture improvement and the urgent need for diversification.

Some of the criteria used in selecting cattle breed are: the size and shape of the animal, the size and number of teats of the udder, the size and shape of the legs and also the parent stock quality as well as cattle that are adaptable to the environmental and climatic conditions...

Cross breeding has been done between the Zebu and the white Fulani, between the Zebu and the Brahma or Holstein Fresian etc.

Cattle herding faces a lot of challenges, with increased demographic pressure on land, grazing lands have constantly been reduced leading to farmer-grazier conflict. Increase spread of diseases like foot and mouth disease, black quarter, lumpy skin etc, thus leading to dwindling cattle wealth.

Mbororo people have a lot of traditional knowledge in ethno-veterinary practice in the treatment of some of the animal diseases.

What are the health threats and challenges that these animals often face and how does your knowledge help in preventing or managing them?

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Talking about human rights, could you outline and explain areas where the rights of the Mbororo people are seriously violated?

Mbororo people also suffer from human rights violations. They are always being exploited and extortion either by corrupt government officials or wealthy individuals thereby rendering them poorer. We also suffer from physical and psychological torture when it comes to handling of farmer-grazier conflicts. There is insecurity in the Mbororo community as we are always regarded as strangers wherever we are situated and are subjected to eviction by the neighbouring farmers and powerful individuals. Meanwhile everybody came from somewhere, it is just a matter of who settled first.

Have you set up any paralegal programme to educate people and protect their rights?

MBOSCUDA has opened up paralegal offices in the seven Divisions...
MBOSCUDA has also done a lot to empower Mbororo community in income generating activities especially women and youths which has gone a long way to increase their sources of income. Today you can see Mbororo women do gardening, cultivation of maize as an alternative source of family income, tailoring and petit trading while youths go in for driving, mechanics and trading in provision articles, textile, second-hand dresses and shoes.

Is there any difference between MBOSCUDA and BALLOTIRAL?

BALLOTIRAL is a Fulfulde word meaning “supporting each other”. BALLOTIRAL was a pilot program that was based in Donga Mantung Division. This was a coalition of NGOs made up of MBOSCUDA, AWICO, SIRDEP and a LAW firm with different expertise with MBOSCUDA being the main partner. The main objective of the coalition was to build the capacity of Mbororo people economically, socially and politically which can then be scaled to the rest of the Divisions in the region. The Programme ended after four years and MBOSCUDA which was the main partner took over the process and scaled it to the rest of the Divisions.

There is no main difference between the two because BALLOTIRAL is a programme within MBOSCUDA

MBOSCUDA is also very active on the international
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**MBOSCUDA has opened up paralegal offices in the seven Divisions of the North West Region with seven paralegal officers and a legal consultant with the main objective of sensitizing the Mbororo community on their civil and civic rights, and how to defend their rights and seek for legal redress.**

In conclusion I would like to say Mbororo people are very dynamic, hospitable, peace loving and you would know more about us when you come close to us. I will also say we welcome every organization and individuals who love Mbororo people and who wish to provide support or assistance for development of the Mbororo community.

*Thanks Shatu for answering our questions.*

*Thanks for inviting me to your magazine.*

Interviewed by Vanessa Mbong
Michaela Pelican, you are a researcher and anthropologist whose work with the Mbororo Community in Cameroon have earned you the status of a member of this community. What explains your interest in the Mbororo community?

My interest in the Mbororo community developed in the early 1990s when I spent 2 years in Cameroon as a teacher at CPC Bali (Cameroon Protestant College). During that period I became acquainted with some Mbororo neighbours who used to sell milk. Later, I returned to Cameroon to carry out research for my Masters in Anthropology, focusing on the socio-economic situation of Mbororo women. For my PhD, I did research on the co-existence of Mbororo, Hausa and Grassfields groups in the Misaje area in the Northwest Region of Cameroon.

Who are the Mbororo people?

The Mbororo are part of the Fulbe ethnic group (Peul in French, Fulani in Hausa/English) whose members are found in many countries from West to East Africa. They can be distinguished from other Fulbe groups – like, for example, the Town Fulani in northern Cameroon – by their occupation and identity as cattle pastoralists.

The history of the Mbororo in Cameroon is complex. A first group migrated from northern Nigeria (around Kano) in the early 19th century, slowly moving southwards and entering Cameroon via the Adamaoua Highlands. While some families settled in the Adamaoua region, others moved on to the Bamenda Highlands where they established themselves permanently. Other families moved to the Western Region and settled around Foumban. The Mbororo who followed this migration route are also known by the
While the Mbororo are widely known as cattle pastoralists and see cattle rearing as an integral part of their ethnic identity, many have diversified their economic activities, particularly in the North West region of Cameroon. You can find Mbororo who are both cattle rearers and farmers, while others have taken up occupations in towns, such as drivers, butchers or traders. There is also an increasing number of Mbororo with formal education, some of whom are occupying positions in public services, NGOs and business enterprises.

name Jaafun and, traditionally, rear brown zebu cattle. A second Mbororo group left a few decades later, also from the Kano area. They followed a different migration route, leading them to the Jos Plateau and from there to the Bamenda Highlands. These Mbororo are known by the name Aku and, traditionally, rear white zebu cattle. However, the distinction between the two Mbororo sub-groups on the basis of their cattle breeds has become difficult, as many Mbororo pastoralists have opted for interbreeding the red and white zebu and for introducing gudaali cattle from northern Cameroon as well as European and American breeds into their herds.

Both Jaafun and Aku speak the same language, Fulfulde, although slightly different dialects. Fulfulde is also the language of the Town Fulani of northern Cameroon, but their dialect varies from the Fulfulde spoken by the Mbororo. The Fulbe in West Africa, i.e. Senegal, Gambia, Mali and Burkina Faso, speak a type of Fulfulde that differs considerably from the Fulfulde spoken in Cameroon and Nigeria. It is called Pulaar, and it is difficult for speakers of the two dialects to understand each other.

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Could you describe to us some aspects of the Mbororo culture that you admire as a researcher?

Like many ethnic groups in Cameroon, the Mbororo have a rich cultural background which provides them with a unique ethnic identity. In my view there are two central components of contemporary Mbororo identity and culture, namely cattle pastoralism and Islam. As I earlier mentioned, many youths nowadays engage in economic activities other than cattle rearing, often out of necessity rather than choice. Nonetheless, the Mbororo understand themselves primarily as cattle rearers and attach a lot of symbolic value to their zebu cows and to their pastoralist heritage.

Most families still prefer to live remote locations for the sake of their cows, and to forgo urban comfort such as electricity, running water and road accessibility. They hardly attach any importance to conspicuous consumption, such as flashy cars, fancy dresses and tasty foods, but prefer to invest in the growth of their herds as the basis of their children’s future.

Secondly, the Mbororo are generally practicing Muslims and comply with Islamic principles, such as daily prayers, almsgiving and observing the month of fasting (Ramadan). Historical analysis shows that the Mbororo’s enduring settlement in the North West Region went along with the strengthening of their Muslim identity and with stronger adherence to Islamic rules, in particular with regard to female mobility. The earlier practice of Mbororo women going round to sell milk became seen as conflicting with Islamic rules. Many families decided to abandon this practice, and to use the milk for the
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calves’ growth and for home consumption rather than as a means of generating income. In consequence, Mbororo women lost their primary source of income and became more dependent on their husbands. This situation pertains until today, although Mbororo women have been trying to find other ways of generating income by organising themselves in women’s groups and undertaking farming and animal husbandry projects.

Over the past fifty years, Mbororo women have experienced drastic changes in their socio-economic lives. Yet it would be short-sighted to interpret these transformations solely in negative terms. While Islamic rules may have curtailed Mbororo women’s economic activities, they have provided rewards in other domains, such social recognition of their household and family duties as well as access to Islamic education and religious prowess.

Among the cultural features that I admire most is Mbororo hospitality and the tranquility of Mbororo compounds. Throughout the many years of research in the northwest region, I have always felt highly welcome and at home in Mbororo compounds. Mbororo families will do everything possible to accommodate you as their guest, and highly appreciate your effort of visiting them in their remote locations. While doing fieldwork in Misaje, I occasionally used to escape to the compound of my adopted Mbororo parents in order to rest and contemplate, and to enjoy the calm atmosphere so different from the hustling and bustling in urban settings.

So, Mbororo women are very enterprising. We like to know more about the socio-economic situation of the Mbororo women in the communities that you observed?

When talking about Mbororo women’s socio-economic development, one cannot omit mentioning the non-governmental organization MBOSCUDA (Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association) which, since the early 1990s, has made it one of its priorities to improve the situation of Mbororo women by running income-generating and educational programs. In this context, Mbororo women have developed alternative economic activities considered compatible with Islamic rules, and which tie in with general trends in rural development. For example, in Sabga, the major Mbororo settlement in the northwest region, Mbororo women have opened a Cooperative where they produce and sell yogurt and cheese made of Mbororo milk. Other Mbororo women’s groups were able to acquire loans to operate a grinding mill or to run a small provision store. Some groups have invested in farming, others in raising small livestock. Both groups and individuals have been encouraged to operate saving accounts in credit unions. With these activities Mbororo women are able to contribute to the household economy and to reduce their financial dependency on their husbands.

Women’s and girls’ education is another field of significant social transformation. With its programmes on adult literacy and children’s education, MBOSCUDA has altered Mbororo views of formal education. For long, Mbororo were reluctant to send their children to school, perceiving it as a potential threat to their culture and identity. In recent years, however, they have come to...
understand the advantages and necessity of formal education, and most parents now make it a point to send their children to school, including their girls. In the long term, this will have significant impacts on women’s lives, as girls will be reluctant to get married while still schooling. Also, many will like to follow the example of Aiishatou Ali who has successfully combined family life and professional career.

Michaela, you also investigated interethnic relations between Mbororo and neighbouring communities. How would you describe these relations?

In my PhD research I focused on interethnic relations and identity politics in the Misaje area in the northwest region of Cameroon. Misaje is a small town inhabited by members of different ethnic groups, including Nchaney, Bessa, Mbororo, Hausa and migrants from many different Grassfields chiefdoms. My research was mainly concerned with modalities of conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence between members of these groups. In this context I looked, among other things, at interethnic friendship, intermarriage and farmer-grazier conflicts. The title of my PhD thesis is “Getting along in the Grassfields”, implying that members of the different ethnic groups have to put up with cultural and religious differences, while focusing on their livelihoods. Many families have been living side-by-side over several decades and have developed friendship ties. Interethnic marriages, however, are rare. Until recently, Mbororo preferred to marry not only within their ethnic group, but within their own family. Moreover, many were discouraged from intermarriage by religious considerations, as according to Islamic rule, a Muslim should marry but a Muslim partner. In the past few years, however, I have observed an increasing number of Mbororo men and women getting married to non-Mbororo, thus creating new links with their neighbouring groups. In the long run, these developments may lead to a new generation of Mbororo with a novel understanding of their culture and identity.
In general, interethnic relations between the Mbororo and their neighbours are amicable and peaceful. Problems may arise, however, when economic or political interests collide; widespread incidents are farmer-grazier conflicts. With growing human and animal population and land degradation, farmers and graziers increasingly compete for the same lands. Moreover, while farm produce and cattle are complementary with regard to human consumption, the economic practices of extensive farming and grazing are seasonally incompatible. Finally, incidents of farmer-grazier conflicts have a long history, dating back to the colonial period, and matters have been compounded by changing government policies as well as personal interests of state representatives.

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Do you intend to continue research with the Mbororo Community?
Yes, I am currently working on a new topic, namely Mbororo “bush falling” or in Fulfulde/Hausa “yimbe dandi”. While among Grassfields groups, international migration has been common for many decades, it is a relatively recent feature among Mbororo whose family relations have linked them mainly to Nigeria. Nowadays, however, Mbororo migrants can be found in many countries, including neighbouring Gabon and South Africa, as well as in Europe, the US, the Middle East and Asia. The research is still on-going and we will see where it will take me…

Thanks Michaela for talking to us and accept our encouragements. You are welcome.

Interviewed by Joyce Enjema Lefang
"Cameroon is an oasis of peace surrounded by some violent neighbours that include Congo, Chad and Central African Republic. For this reason I have long been curious about Cameroon. How is it that they have managed to maintain peace while surrounded by war? People here offered some answers: ‘Peace for Cameroon is the top priority. There are 250 ethnic groups here. Cameroonians pride themselves on their acceptance of all ethnicities’."

This collection consists of 49 insightful essays by leading Cameroonian blogger Dibussi Tande, which originally appeared on his award-winning blog Scribbles from the Den. These essays tackle some of the most pressing and complex issues facing Cameroon.

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...rest assured that as a Cameroonian I am lobbying for direct cooperation between municipalities abroad and our local municipalities. By this I am not only talking of Russian local governments but to most of the European cities that I visit on my business trips.

Cameroon will take the right turn on economic growth if the road infrastructure is given a big boost, if a port worth its name is constructed and run efficiently. Here I am talking about the Limbe Deep Seaport. We also need to improve our air transport system.
The Cameroon I left in 2002 and the one I came back to in 2008 has gone through very positive developments and these developments are not limited to infrastructural but also extend to human developments/advancement. Cameroon, just like any other society in the world, cannot be void of problems but I believe that it is up to us, Cameroonianians, to work together to improve our country.
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