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About this journal

The *International Journal of African Reflections (IJAR)*, which is housed at iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, publishes multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary peer-reviewed articles that encourage and support researchers in all fields and disciplines, especially female, black and young researchers, by providing a platform to publish their work with the aim of eventually obtaining an NRF rating. The journal also intends to act as a facilitator in building a cohort of scholars from among the master's, doctoral and postdoctoral graduate students through the articles that are published in the journal. It is hoped that new epistemological ideas will emerge, and that this will contribute to improving the quality of teaching, research and learning.

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Preface

It is my privilege to present Volume 3 (2026) of the *International Journal of African Reflections* (*IJAR*), a scholarly platform that embodies iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu's commitment to disseminating knowledge that is intellectually rigorous, socially responsive and firmly rooted in African realities. This issue brings together researchers from the humanities, social sciences, law, health sciences and economics to examine some of the defining questions of our time: gender justice, historical memory, land governance, Indigenous knowledge, technological change, institutional accountability, public health and sustainable development. Its interdisciplinary reach reflects a fundamental truth: the challenges confronting Africa do not respect disciplinary boundaries and our responses cannot remain confined within them.

At iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu we understand that a university is not simply a place where existing knowledge is transmitted but a public institution with a duty to imagine, test and build better futures. Our Vision 2040+ is anchored in the aspiration to become a technology-infused African university that is locally responsive, continentally consequential and globally engaged. This vision calls upon us to draw intellectual strength from our location while refusing intellectual isolation; to use technology without surrendering human judgement, and to pursue academic excellence in ways that improve the lives of the communities we serve. The *IJAR* contributes directly to this purpose by creating a credible space in which African experiences generate concepts, evidence and solutions of wider significance.

Vision 2040+ is given practical direction through the university's three signature themes: Food Futures; One Health, and Leadership, Justice and Governance. These themes are not separate institutional compartments: together, they recognise that human flourishing depends on the relationship between sustainable livelihoods, healthy communities, ecological resilience, ethical institutions and responsible leadership. The contributions to this volume illuminate these relationships precisely. Research on external debt and agricultural development reveals the fiscal conditions that can advance or impede food security and rural transformation. Scientific enquiry into the bioactivity of medicinal plants brings indigenous and community-based knowledge into productive conversation with experimental research while opening up opportunities for health innovation. Studies of land boards, apartheid regulation, gendered violence and institutional power demonstrate that development cannot be separated from justice, legitimacy and accountable governance.

The volume also engages directly with the technological future of higher education. Artificial intelligence is already altering the way universities teach, learn, conduct research and administer their responsibilities. Yet technology is never transformative merely because it is new: its value depends on whether it advances equitable access, strengthens human capability and serves clearly defined educational purposes. The analysis of AI adoption in South African higher education, together with the dialogue on literary criticism, pedagogy and the digital humanities, underscores the importance of infrastructure, digital literacy, ethical governance and critical judgement. This is central to our Vision 2040+ ambition. A technology-infused African university must be technologically capable, but it must also remain intellectually independent, ethically grounded and attentive to any inequalities that may be reproduced through innovation.

Equally important is the volume's insistence that language and interpretation are forms of social action. The analysis of feminist speech acts in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele …* shows how language can challenge inherited assumptions and direct new practices. Historical research into the criminalisation of interracial relationships under apartheid reveals the opposite possibility: law and official language can classify, stigmatise and control human beings. These contributions remind us that knowledge is never detached from power. The terms through which society describes gender, race, authority, land, health and development influence what institutions permit, prohibit or neglect. Universities therefore carry a special responsibility to cultivate critical literacy: the capacity to identify the assumptions embedded in dominant categories and to formulate more just ways of understanding the world.

This responsibility is particularly urgent for an institution bearing the name of Walter Max Ulyate Sisulu. His legacy represents principled leadership, disciplined service, social justice and an enduring belief in people's capacity to transform their circumstances through collective action. To honour that name, the university must ensure that its scholarship is measured not only by quantity or visibility, but also by its integrity, relevance and impact. Research must confront the lived realities of rural and historically marginalised communities; strengthen democratic institutions; protect human dignity, and contribute to a more equitable distribution of knowledge and opportunity. *IJAR* serves this mandate by enabling scholars to respond to Africa's problems without reducing the continent to a catalogue of deficiencies. It foregrounds African agency, intellectual creativity and the capacity to produce solutions.

The geographical position of iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu gives this mission particular force. Our campuses are located within communities

that experience the opportunities and contradictions of contemporary development up close. Questions of rural livelihoods, public health, land, educational access, language, technology and governance are not distant research themes; they shape the everyday lives of our students, staff and surrounding communities. Vision 2040+ requires us to transform this proximity into a scholarly advantage. Community engagement must inform research questions; research must strengthen teaching; teaching must prepare graduates to act with competence and social responsibility, and innovation must yield benefits beyond the boundaries of the university.

The *IJAR* is therefore more than a publication outlet. It is part of the knowledge infrastructure through which our university advances research excellence, supports emerging and established scholars, strengthens interdisciplinary exchange and extends African scholarship into international conversations. A strong university journal safeguards rigorous peer review, promotes intellectual independence and preserves a public record of enquiry. It also enlarges the range of voices and contexts represented in global knowledge. For African universities, this work is essential to epistemic justice: not the rejection of global scholarship, but fuller and more equitable participation in its production, evaluation and circulation.

I commend the authors in this issue for having researched and placed on record difficult questions with methodological seriousness and a commitment to evidence-based knowledge dissemination. I thank the reviewers for the careful and often unseen intellectual labour through which the quality of scholarly publication is secured. I also acknowledge the Managing Editor, the Editorial Board, and the production team for sustaining *IJAR* and bringing this volume to completion. Their collective work demonstrates the institutional commitment required to convert research into an enduring scholarly resource.

As readers engage with this third volume of *IJAR*, I invite them to consider not only the individual findings in its articles but also the shared challenge they present. What kinds of universities, technologies, laws, economies and knowledge systems are needed for Africa's people to flourish? Vision 2040+ calls on iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu to help answer that question through courageous scholarship and purposeful action. The future we seek will not be produced by aspiration alone; it will be built on evidence, ethical leadership, interdisciplinary collaboration and sustained accountability to society.

This volume is a meaningful contribution to that undertaking. It affirms our confidence that African universities can generate the highest-quality knowledge while remaining responsive to place, community and history. It also renews our conviction that scholarly

reflection must lead to transformation. May the ideas gathered here stimulate further research, deepen institutional debate and inspire partnerships that advance healthy communities, sustainable livelihoods, justice and human dignity across the Eastern Cape, South Africa, the African continent, and beyond.

Prof Thandi Mgwebi
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu

Africa in transformation

Knowledge, power and institutional responsibility

Editorial for Volume 3 (2026)

This third volume of the *International Journal of African Reflections* (*IJAR*) brings together nine contributions that examine the ways in which knowledge, power and institutional responsibility shape African lives. Moving between history, gender studies, biomedical research, higher education, economics, land law, literary pragmatics, palliative care and the humanities, the volume asks what makes scholarship answerable to the societies it studies. Its coherence emerges from a shared concern with the conditions under which people acquire recognition, exercise agency, secure livelihoods and receive care. The contributions approach these concerns through different methods and at different scales, demonstrating why African scholarship needs both disciplinary precision and sustained conversation across fields.

The volume affirms Africa as a site of knowledge production, theoretical reflection and methodological enquiry. Its studies engage inherited inequalities together with contemporary pressures, attending to the institutions through which both are reproduced or challenged. Read in their published sequence, they move from the coercive regulation of intimate life and the vulnerabilities of university students to questions of scientific investigation, technological change, economic development and land governance. Feminist language, culturally responsive care and the renewal of literary criticism extend this enquiry into the meanings and practices through which social transformation becomes possible. Together, these contributions give substance to *IJAR*'s commitment to multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary scholarship grounded in African realities.

The opening article, AA Marwarwa and M Petse's '"The forbidden fruit": The consequences of interracial sexual relationships in apartheid South Africa', examines the 1952 case of Olaf Abraham Voster and Nomathemba Emily Nomatiti in Umtata. Through this case, the authors trace the operation of the Immorality Act 5 of 1927 and the consequences of racial regulation for those brought within its reach. Their historical analysis shows how racial domination entered intimate life through policing, prosecution and punishment. The case also directs attention to the unequal vulnerabilities of the people involved: racialised law operated within existing differences of status and power. By connecting a particular legal proceeding to a wider system of exclusion, the article demonstrates the value of archival

research to recovering the human consequences of institutionalised discrimination.

Questions of power and vulnerability continue in Keneilwe Wanthitha Mashishi, Mahlodi Monica Rebecca Makupula, Jabulani Gilford Kheswa and Mvuyisi Notole's study of sexual harassment and the mental well-being of female students at a South African tertiary institution. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with ten participants and guided by Power and Control Theory, the authors examine student experiences shaped by poverty, patriarchal norms, alcohol abuse and unequal relations of authority. The accounts reveal the consequences for psychological well-being and academic participation that institutional policy alone cannot adequately describe. The study recommends ongoing counselling, empowerment programmes and education on sexual harassment policies. Its place after the historical article establishes a consequential connection: the protection of dignity requires attention to be given the way power is exercised in everyday relationships, and also to the formal rules intended to govern them. For universities, student safety must surely be integral to the conditions that make learning possible.

The third contribution turns to the investigation of medicinal plants. Azola Zukisani Ntshobane, Elona Ngqayimbane, Suparna Chakraborty, Saif Khan and Talkmore Ngarivhume screen extracts of *Drimia altissima* and *Crinum macrophyllum* bulbs for anticancer, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activity. Their laboratory findings identify promising responses in selected extracts, including activity against cervical cancer cell lines and strong inhibition in an anti-inflammatory assay. These are results obtained from laboratory screenings; they establish grounds for further investigation rather than clinical effectiveness. The authors accordingly call for the isolation and characterisation of active compounds. Their article contributes to this volume by showing how medicinal plant use can inform research questions that are then examined through controlled experimentation. Its significance rests in the disciplined movement from biological resources and medicinal knowledge towards evidence that can support further scientific enquiry.

ST Pika's exploration of the adoption of artificial intelligence in South African higher education shifts our attention to the infra-structures through which knowledge is taught, assessed and administered. Using Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, the article considers relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability in interpreting the emerging trends and barriers. Personalised learning, student engagement and administrative efficiency feature among the potential benefits of adopting artificial intelligence, while infrastructure constraints,

digital literacy gaps, inequality and ethical concerns complicate its adoption. The analysis places institutional readiness central to the discussion: technologies acquire educational value through the conditions of their use. Investment, staff development and appropriate policies therefore belong in the same conversation as innovation. Following the biomedical study, Pika's contribution extends the volume's attention to responsible investigation and adoption, asking how promising developments can serve public purposes in unequal institutional settings.

Nnane Eric Sumelong's study of external debt sustainability and agricultural development in Cameroon broadens this institutional enquiry to national economic policy. Using data for the period 1996–2023, an Engle–Granger co-integration framework and an error-correction model, the article examines the relationships between external debt and agricultural value added. It reports a negative long-run association between long-term external debt and agricultural value added, together with a strong positive association with gross fixed capital formation. The analysis interprets debt pressures in relation to constrained fiscal space and the resources available for agricultural development. Its recommendations emphasise transparent debt governance, the protection of agricultural investment and the productive use of borrowing. By bringing rural livelihoods and agricultural capacity into the debates on debt, the article asks readers to assess macroeconomic choices balanced against their developmental consequences. The practical question is what public finance enables communities to produce, sustain and improve.

The next article, by Akame Winslow Melle and Akwe Ngole Ray Junior, examines four land management boards in Cameroon through the lens of legal pluralism. The Land Consultative Board, Site Board Commission, Inter-Village Boundary Settlement Commission and Farmer–Grazer Commission operate where statutory rules, customary authority and administrative practice intersect. Drawing on legal materials, interviews and comparative African experiences, the authors identify procedural ambiguity, bureaucratic delay and institutional constraints that limit dispute resolution. They argue for reforms that combine customary legitimacy with clearer safeguards, digitisation, gender inclusion and more effective administration. Its position after the agricultural development study renders the relationship between productive investment and land governance particularly visible. Land sustains livelihoods, but it also carries histories of belonging, authority and communal obligation; the institutions responsible for land management must respond appropriately to these overlapping claims if their decisions are to command confidence.

Gabriel Ndamzi Amadi's 'Doing feminism with words: a Searlean speech act analysis of Chimamanda Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele …*' then turns to the capacity of language to challenge inherited authority. Analysing 239 coded units from Adichie's manifesto, Amadi shows how assertives contest naturalised gender assumptions and directives translate feminist argument into practices of parenting and socialisation. Commissives and expressives establish ethical and affective positioning, while quasi-declaratives attempt to rename or reclassify familiar gendered categories. The recognition of hybrid forms also allows the article to test the usefulness and limits of its theoretical framework. This contribution returns the volume to gendered power at the level of ordinary speech and conduct. It demonstrates how feminist writing can intervene in the vocabularies through which inequality becomes familiar and in the practices through which it is passed from one generation to another.

The eighth contribution, K Zweni, A Mavembela and G Mkukuli's 'Decolonising South African palliative care psychosocial services for mental health benefit: eclectic context', brings the relationship between recognition and institutional responsibility into end-of-life care. Guided by an ecological perspective and an eclectic narrative review, the authors examine the ways patients' social, cultural and spiritual environments shape their experiences of care. They argue that the exclusion of African beliefs and knowledge systems can undermine culturally responsive psychosocial support, and they advocate their inclusion alongside allopathic approaches in healthcare training, policy and practice. The article offers a framework for reform rather than a clinical evaluation of a new intervention. Read alongside the earlier biomedical contribution, it widens the volume's understanding of health: research into biological activity and attention to the meanings through which patients experience suffering respond to different complementary dimensions of care. Respect for patient preferences and cultural diversity is central to that relationship.

The volume concludes with 'Beyond the Ibadan School', Mark Ighile's dialogue with Emeritus Professor Dan Izevbaye on literary criticism, pedagogy and digital humanities. Reflecting on six decades of scholarship, the conversation revisits the relationships between text, context, authorship, audience and interpretation. Its discussion of a declining tutorial culture and campus collegiality underscores the social conditions through which critical judgement develops. Its treatment of canon formation asks how intellectual inheritance can remain responsive to changing publics and media. Returning to the questions raised by Pika, the dialogue considers digital tools and artificial intelligence as supports for enquiry whose usefulness depends

on humanistic judgement and ethical interpretation. This is a fitting conclusion to the sequence: an issue concerned with institutional transformation ends by examining the ways in which scholars learn to interpret, evaluate and transmit knowledge responsibly.

Through these contributions, institutional legitimacy emerges as a demanding practical achievement. Courts, universities, land boards, healthcare services and fiscal systems exercise authority in ways that affect people's opportunities and vulnerabilities. Their legitimacy depends on how that authority is justified, scrutinised and experienced. The articles illuminate this problem through distinct forms of evidence, from a historical prosecution and students' accounts to legal analysis and economic modelling. Together, they encourage a conception of reform that is attentive to everyday consequences: access to education, security of livelihood, recognition of claims and dignity in care.

The volume also clarifies why the recognition of African knowledge must be accompanied by methodological care. Archival interpretation, laboratory screening, qualitative interviews, narrative synthesis, speech-act analysis and econometrics support different kinds of claim. Bringing them into conversation requires respect being shown for those differences. Medicinal knowledge can generate research questions; cultural understanding can inform care; literary criticism can examine the terms through which values are communicated. None of these contributions needs to assume the methods of another to acquire intellectual worth. Their collective strength lies in making evidence, interpretation and the limits of inference visible while responding to problems that exceed any single discipline.

We thank the authors for their contributions, the reviewers for their critical engagement, and the editorial and production teams for the sustained work that makes scholarly publication possible. Their efforts support a journal that is committed to widening participation in research while maintaining the rigour on which scholarly trust depends. For emerging and established researchers alike, that commitment entails the opportunity to contribute and the responsibility to formulate arguments that others can examine, question and develop.

Volume Three of *IJAR* invites readers to consider African scholarship through the quality of the understanding it produces and the opportunities it opens up. Its contributions recover histories of exclusion, scrutinise present institutions and propose directions for change without resolving their differences into a single account of Africa. Their shared achievement is to render the relationship between knowledge and responsibility concrete. *IJAR* advances that relationship

by providing a space in which African experiences inform enquiry, African intellectual resources shape interpretation and scholarship remains answerable to the people whose lives give its questions urgency.

Prof Enongene Mirabeau Sone
and
Dr Thoahlane Thoahlane
Editors, *International Journal of African Reflections*

The role of four land management boards in the resolution of land disputes in Cameroon: a legal pluralism analysis

Akwe Ngole Ray Junior*
Akame Winslow Melle†

Abstract

This study critically examined the role of four land management boards in Cameroon – the Land Consultative Board, the Site Board Commission, the InterVillage Boundary Settlement Commission and the Farmer–Grazer Commission – in the resolution of land disputes in a plural legal framework. Positioned at the intersection of statutory law and customary practice, these boards embody hybrid institutions whose legitimacy and effectiveness depend on their ability to reconcile competing normative orders. To ensure conceptual clarity, the study defined and situated the notions of Land Management Boards, land dispute-resolution and legal pluralism, in this way grounding the analysis in precise theoretical and institutional terms. Employing a doctrinal legal research methodology, the study relied on a qualitative analysis of both primary sources (first-hand interviews, statutes, decrees, judicial decisions, ministerial circulars) and secondary sources (scholarly works, reports of international organisations) to consider the adequacy of the existing frameworks. Analytical and comparative approaches were adopted to evaluate the ways in which statutory instruments and customary practices interact in Cameroon and to situate these findings in broader African experiences in Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Mozambique. The findings indicate that whereas the boards provide a necessary interface between the law and communities, their effectiveness is constrained by procedural ambiguities, bureaucratic bottlenecks and chronic delays in implementation. Through the lens of legal pluralism, the authors argue that strengthening hybrid institutions requires statutory safeguards that integrate customary legitimacy supported by digitisation, gender inclusion and streamlined

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administrative processes. The findings contribute to ongoing debates on land governance, institutional accountability and tenure security in Africa; moreover, the authors offer recommendations for reform that enhance both legitimacy and efficiency in dispute-resolution.

Keywords: land management boards, land dispute-resolution, legal pluralism, customary land tenure

1. Introduction

Land governance in Cameroon operates within a dual system in which statutory land laws coexist with deeply rooted customary norms. Since the promulgation of the 1974 Land Ordinances, the state has relied on four administrative bodies – the Land Consultative Board (LCB), the Site Board Commission (SBC), the InterVillage Boundary Settlement Commission (IVBSC) and the Farmer–Grazer Commission (FGC) – to manage land allocation, boundary disputes and rural conflicts.[1] These boards were designed to provide decentralised community-anchored mechanisms for resolving disputes before they escalate into litigation. Fieldwork conducted in the English-speaking regions indicates that their effectiveness is shaped not only by statutory mandates, but also by customary expectations, local legitimacy and administrative realities.[2]

Land disputes remain pervasive across Cameroon, driven by population pressure, agricultural expansion, competing customary claims and the increasing commodification of land.[3] Scholars have noted that the interaction between statutory and customary systems often produces overlapping claims and procedural uncertainty, particularly in rural areas where customary tenure remains dominant.[4] The persistence of boundary conflicts, farmer–grazer disputes and contested land sales underscores the need to examine the way these boards function in practice and how they mediate between state authority and customary landholding systems.

This article adopts legal pluralism as its theoretical foundation, recognising that Cameroon's land governance operates within multiple normative orders – state law, customary authority and community practice.[5] Using firsthand field interviews, statutory analysis and comparative African experiences, the study assesses the role, effectiveness and limitations of Cameroon's land management boards. It argues that whereas these boards remain indispensable

1 Ordinance No 741 of 6 July 1974 on Land Tenure (Cameroon).
2 Decree No 76/165 of 27 April 1976 on Land Certificates (Cameroon).
3 Decree No 76/166 of 27 April 1976 establishing the Land Consultative Board.
4 Decree No 76/167 of 27 April 1976 establishing the Site Board Commission.
5 Ordinance No 742 of 6 July 1974 on State Lands.

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to rural land governance, their performance is constrained by slow administrative procedures, weak land information systems, limited technical capacity and gender exclusion. Comparative insights from Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Mozambique indicate how reforms centred on digitisation, gender inclusion and streamlined procedures can strengthen local land institutions.

2. Conceptual clarification

2.1 Land management boards

Land management boards in Cameroon are statutory – customary hybrid institutions created under the 1974 Land Ordinances and subsequent decrees. They include the Land Consultative Board (LCB), the Site Board Commission (SBC), the Inter-Village Boundary Settlement Commission (IVBSC) and the Farmer–Grazer Commission (FGC). Their mandate covers land allocation, boundary verification, dispute-resolution and field enquiries. They embody hybridity by blending statutory authority with customary legitimacy, reflecting Cameroon's plural legal landscape.[6]

2.2 Land dispute-resolution

Land dispute-resolution refers to the mechanisms and processes through which conflicts over ownership, boundaries, inheritance, expropriation and land use are dealt with. In Cameroon, resolution occurs through statutory procedures (land certificates, expropriation decrees), customary mediation (chiefs, lineage heads) and hybrid boards that combine both. The persistence of disputes highlights the tension between statutory precision and customary legitimacy.[7]

2.3 Legal pluralism

Legal pluralism is the theoretical framework recognising the coexistence of multiple normative orders within a single social field. Griffiths defines it as 'the existence of more than one legal order within the same social field'.[8] In Cameroon, statutory land laws introduced in 1974 operate alongside the customary norms governing allocation, inheritance and dispute-settlement. The boards function at the intersection of these systems, drawing authority from statutory instruments while relying

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6 Griffiths, J 'What is legal pluralism?' (1986) 24(1) *Journal of Legal Pluralism*.

7 Moore, S 'Law and social change: The semiautonomous social field.' (1973) 7 *Law & Society Review* 719.

8 BendaBeckmann, F 'Legal pluralism and social justice in economic and political development.' (2001) 5 *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 1.

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on customary knowledge and community legitimacy. Comparative African experiences confirm that hybrid institutions perform best when statutory safeguards integrate customary practices within transparent frameworks, supported by digitisation, gender inclusion and streamlined administrative processes.[9]

3. Methodology

This study adopted a doctrinal legal research methodology to examine the role of land management boards in the resolution of land disputes in Cameroon within the framework of legal pluralism. Doctrinal research, also known as black-letter law research, involves the systematic analysis, interpretation and synthesis of legal rules, principles, doctrines and jurisprudence derived from primary and secondary legal sources. This methodology is particularly suited to the present study because it facilitates a critical examination of the statutory and customary legal frameworks governing land governance in Cameroon and enables institutional challenges and reform opportunities to be identified.[10]

The research relied primarily on a qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary legal materials. The primary sources include Cameroonian statutes and ordinances (notably Ordinance No 741 of 6 July 1974 on Land Tenure, Decree No 76165 of 27 April 1976 on Land Certificates and subsequent amendments), presidential decrees establishing land management boards, ministerial circulars and judicial decisions relating to land disputes.[11] These were complemented by reports and administrative guidelines issued by the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure. Secondary sources comprised scholarly books, peerreviewed journal articles, commentaries and the reports of international organisations such as the World Bank and the IIED, which deal with land governance, dispute-resolution and legal pluralism in Africa.[12] These materials are used to identify the prevailing doctrinal debates, evaluate competing scholarly perspectives and situate Cameroon's experience in broader comparative contexts.

The study also employed analytical and comparative approaches. The analytical approach was used to evaluate the extent to which statutory instruments and customary practices interact in the boards'

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9 Lund, C 'Twilight institutions: Public authority and local politics in Africa.' (2006) 37 *Development and Change* 685.

10 World Bank *Land Governance Assessment Framework: Cameroon country report* (World Bank 2012).

11 International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) *Legal tools for citizen empowerment: Cameroon case studies*. (IIED 2015).

12 Moyo, S *Land in the political economy of African development* (CODESRIA 2013).

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decision-making processes, highlighting matters such as legitimacy, inclusivity and efficiency. Comparative analysis is undertaken with reference to Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Mozambique, in order to identify similarities and divergences in institutional approaches to land dispute-resolution under plural legal systems.[13] This comparative dimension strengthened the study by situating Cameroon's challenges in continental trends and reform experiences.

The data collected from the various sources were subjected to critical legal analysis with the objective of determining the adequacy of existing legal frameworks and identifying any gaps that hinder effective dispute-resolution and tenure security. Through this doctrinal enquiry, the study sought to contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions regarding the legitimacy, accountability and responsiveness of hybrid land-governance institutions in Africa.[14]

The choice of a doctrinal methodology is justified by the normative nature of the research questions, which focus on the interpretation, application and development of legal principles rather than the collection of empirical data. Consequently, the study was concerned primarily with what the law is, how it has evolved and the ways in which comparative experiences may inform reforms to strengthen land governance and dispute-resolution in Cameroon.[15]

4. Theoretical framework: legal pluralism

Legal pluralism provides the conceptual foundation for understanding land governance in Cameroon. It refers to the coexistence of multiple legal and normative systems in a single social field, each claiming authority over the same subjects, resources or relationships.[16] The concept challenges the classical legal centralist assumption that the state is the sole source of law, recognising instead that individuals and communities routinely navigate overlapping legal orders – statutory, customary, religious, administrative and informal – depending on context, legitimacy and social expectations.[17]

John Griffiths' distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' legal pluralism remains central to contemporary scholarship.[18] Weak pluralism refers to situations where the state formally recognises multiple legal orders, such as customary courts or religious tribunals, but retains ultimate authority. Strong pluralism, in contrast, describes

13 CASWP/11/2002, High Court of Yaoundé (unreported).
14 Kenya, Community Land Act 2016.
15 Rwanda, Land Tenure Regularisation Programme (LTRP) Reports (2009–2013).
16 Uganda, Land Act 1998.
17 Tanzania, Village Land Act 1999.
18 Mozambique, Land Law 1997.

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contexts where non-state normative orders operate independently of state recognition and may even contradict statutory law. Cameroon exhibits characteristics of both forms: the state formally acknowledges customary tenure through the 1974 Land Ordinances, yet customary norms continue to govern land allocation, inheritance and boundary recognition in ways that often supersede statutory rules in practice.

Sally Falk Moore's concept of the 'semi-autonomous social field' illuminates further the dynamics of land governance in Cameroon.[19] Moore argues that social groups – such as villages, lineages, pastoral communities or land boards – generate their own rules, enforce norms and shape behaviour, even when embedded in a larger state legal system. This framework helps to explain why chiefs, notables and lineage heads continue to wield significant authority over land, despite the statutory reforms intended to centralise control under the state. The LCB, SBC, IVBSC and FGC operate precisely in such semi-autonomous fields in which statutory mandates intersect with customary expectations and local power structures.

Legal pluralism is also central to understanding the persistence of land disputes in Cameroon. Customary tenure systems are based on oral histories, ancestral claims, lineage rights and community recognition, whereas statutory land law emphasises written documentation, cadastral mapping and formal registration.[20] These divergent logics produce friction when land is commodified, when boundaries are contested or when individuals seek land certificates that formalise ownership. The boards must therefore mediate between two normative worlds: the formal requirements of the 1974 Land Ordinances and the customary norms that continue to structure landholding in rural communities.

The African experience indicates that legal pluralism is not merely a theoretical construct but a lived reality that shapes land governance. In Ghana, customary authorities retain control over approximately 80% of the land and Customary Land Secretariats have emerged as hybrid institutions that blend statutory oversight with customary legitimacy.[21] In Uganda, area land committees verify customary rights before registration, reflecting the state's recognition that statutory processes must be grounded in local norms.[22] Kenya's Community Land Act 2016 similarly integrates customary governance structures into statutory frameworks while mandating gender inclusion and digital mapping.[23]

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19 Niger, Rural Code 1993.

20 Cameroon, Ministry of State Property. Surveys and Land Tenure Circulars (various).

21 Ghana, Land Administration Project Reports (2003–2011).

22 Rwanda, Abunzi Mediation Committees (Statutory Framework).

23 Uganda, Area Land Committees (Statutory Framework).

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Rwanda's Land Tenure Regularisation Programme, although more statist in orientation, nevertheless relies on community-based Abunzi mediation committees to resolve disputes at the grassroots level.[24] These examples illustrate that hybrid institutions are most effective when they acknowledge the authority of customary systems while embedding them in transparent statutory procedures.

Legal pluralism also provides a lens through which to analyse power relations in land governance. Scholars such as BendaBeckmann and Lund argue that legal orders are not neutral but reflect competing claims to authority, legitimacy and control over resources.[25] In Cameroon, the state's assertion of guardianship over 'unoccupied' land under the 1974 Ordinances reproduces the colonial logics of dispossession, whereas customary authorities assert ancestral rights grounded in precolonial tenure systems. The boards sit at the centre of this contestation, tasked as they are with implementing statutory procedures while relying on customary actors – chiefs, notables and lineage heads – whose authority derives from non-state normative orders. Their decisions therefore reflect negotiated compromises between competing legalities rather than the straightforward application of statutory rules.

Lund's notion of 'twilight institutions' is particularly relevant to Cameroon's boards.[26] Twilight institutions operate in the ambiguous space between state and customary authority, exercising public power without being either fully state or fully customary. The LCB, SBC, IVBSC and FGC exemplify this hybridity. They are created by statute, chaired by administrative officials and embedded in the bureaucratic hierarchy, yet their legitimacy depends heavily on the participation of customary authorities and community acceptance. Their authority is therefore relational, negotiated and contingent, shaped by the interplay of statutory mandates, customary norms and local politics.

Legal pluralism also highlights the gendered dimensions of land governance. Customary tenure systems in Cameroon often privilege male lineage heads, exclude women from land ownership and prioritise patrilineal inheritance.[27] Although statutory law guarantees equal land rights, the boards frequently rely on customary norms when assessing claims, in this way reproducing gender inequality. Comparative experience from Niger, Kenya and Rwanda indicates that statutory mandates for gender inclusion can mitigate these biases, but Cameroon has yet to adopt similar reforms.

Ultimately, legal pluralism provides a robust theoretical framework for analysing Cameroon's land governance system because it captures

24 Uganda, District Land Boards (Statutory Framework).
25 Ghana, Customary Land Secretariats (Statutory Framework).
26 Tanzania, Village Land Councils (Statutory Framework).
27 Tanzania, Ward Tribunals (Statutory Framework).

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the complexity, hybridity and contested nature of land rights. It explains why statutory reforms alone cannot resolve land disputes, why customary norms continue to shape landholding practices and why hybrid institutions such as the boards remain central to dispute-resolution. It also underscores the need for reforms that recognise the legitimacy of customary systems while strengthening statutory safeguards, digitising land information systems and ensuring genderinclusive governance.

5. Land disputes: a perpetual problem in Cameroon

Land remains one of the most contested and politically sensitive resources in Cameroon. It is legally defined as an immovable, indestructible, three-dimensional space comprising the surface of the earth, the subsoil beneath it, the airspace above it and all things permanently attached to it.[28] Moyo emphasises that land is a vital socio-economic asset that is used for farming, settlement, collateral security and leasing.[29] As a result of land's centrality to survival and cultural continuity, disputes over land ownership have been a perennial problem across Africa, including Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania.[30]

The persistence of land disputes in Cameroon is rooted in the historical evolution of land tenure, the colonial legacy of state control and the tension between statutory and customary authority. The common-law principle of *nemo dat quod non habet* (no one can give what they do not have) underpins the state's claim to ultimate guardianship over land.[31] This principle was entrenched during the German colonial period through the 1896 Crown Land Act, which declared all 'unoccupied' land to be ownerless and therefore vested in the colonial administration.[32] Traditional rulers strongly resisted this expropriation, arguing that even unoccupied land formed part of ancestral territory under customary law.[33]

This historical conflict between state guardianship and customary ownership continues to shape contemporary land disputes in Cameroon. The state's continuing control over 'unoccupied' land under the 1974 Land Ordinances reproduces the colonial logic and remains a major source of tension between communities and administrative authorities.[34]

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28 Kenya, Giriama Land Dispute (case study).
29 Uganda, Madi–Acholi Land Conflict (case study).
30 Cameroon, Bali–Bawock Land Conflict (case study).
31 German Crown Land Act 1896 (Colonial Cameroon).
32 Law No 741 of 6 July 1974, Article 16 (Cameroon).
33 Presidential Decrees on Land Boards (Cameroon).
34 Cameroon, Ministry of State Property Reports (2000–2020).

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5.1 Typologies of land disputes in Cameroon

Land disputes in Cameroon can be categorised into several typologies, each reflecting the intersection of statutory and customary systems: over boundaries, farmer–grazer conflicts, inheritance and succession, double sales and fraudulent transactions, expropriation and compensation, customary versus statutory ownership, and communal land. These disputes are not isolated; they overlap and often escalate due to weak institutions and plural legal orders.

5.2 Boundary disputes

Boundary conflicts remain the most recurrent form of land dispute, particularly between villages, lineages and individuals. Oral histories and ancestral claims often clash with statutory cadastral surveys, producing contested demarcations. Chiefs and elders may invoke ancestral narratives to assert boundaries, while surveyors rely on technical mapping. The absence of a reliable digital cadastre exacerbates these disputes. Comparative evidence from Tanzania's Village Land Councils, though, shows that integrating oral testimony with GPS-based mapping reduces contestation and strengthens legitimacy.[35] In Cameroon, unresolved boundary disputes frequently escalate into violent clashes, undermining social cohesion and rural development.

5.3 Farmer–grazer conflicts

These disputes arise from the seasonal migration of pastoralists into farming zones, which leads to crop destruction and compensation claims. The Farmer–Grazer Commission (FGC) mediates such disputes, but the enforcement of compensation decisions is weak. Climate change and demographic pressures have served to intensify these conflicts, as pastoralists move further south in search of grazing land. Rwanda's Abunzi mediation committees provide evidence that decentralised community-based mediation can reduce tensions by embedding dispute-resolution in local structures.[36] In Cameroon, farmer–grazer disputes are not merely economic but also ethnic, often pitting sedentary farming communities against mobile pastoralists, which only heightens inter-communal tensions.

[35] Comparative Lessons from Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Mozambique (various reports).

[36] *Ntangsi v Pangop*, CASWP/11/2002 (Yaoundé).

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5.4 Inheritance and succession disputes

Customary patrilineal inheritance systems frequently exclude women, creating tension when statutory law guarantees equal rights. Widows and daughters often face dispossession by male relatives despite statutory protections. These disputes highlight the gendered dimensions of legal pluralism, where customary norms override statutory guarantees. Kenya's Community Land Act, which mandates female representation and joint titling, illustrates how statutory reforms can mitigate gender inequality.[37] In Cameroon, inheritance disputes are particularly acute in peri-urban areas, where rising land values incentivise male relatives to dispossess women.

5.5 Double sales and fraudulent transaction disputes

Weak land information systems enable the issuing of multiple certificates or sales over the same parcel. The case CASWP/11/2002 in Yaoundé exemplifies this problem, where poor record-keeping and ministerial oversight failures led to multiple certificates being issued for the same property, resulting in 15 years of litigation.[38] Such disputes erode public trust in land governance and highlight the urgent need for digitisation. Ghana's Customary Land Secretariats, which maintain digital parcel records, show that transparent the documentation of transactions can significantly reduce fraud.[39]

5.6 Expropriation and compensation disputes

The Site Board Commission (SBC) in Cameroon handles land identified for public purposes, but compensation is often delayed, politicised or inadequate. Urban expansion and infrastructure projects have intensified these disputes, particularly in Douala and Yaoundé. Communities frequently resist expropriation, arguing that compensation fails to reflect the market value or customary attachment to land. In contrast, Mozambique's Land Law 1997, which mandates community consultations before land allocation, illustrates how procedural safeguards can prevent expropriation disputes.[40] In Cameroon, the lack of transparent valuation mechanisms undermines trust in the SBC and fuels resistance to state projects.

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37 *Noungoua Kwendjeu v Ntangsi*, CASWP/11/2002 (Yaoundé).
38 Judgment of High Court of Yaoundé, CASWP/11/2002.
39 Ghana, Customary Land Secretariats Digital Records (2010).
40 Fieldwork data, North West and South West regions (Cameroon).

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5.7 Customary versus statutory ownership disputes

Perhaps the most fundamental typology involves conflicts between state claims over 'unoccupied' land and communities' assertion of their ancestral rights. The 1974 Land Ordinances reproduce colonial logics by vesting 'vacant' land in the state, whereas customary authorities insist that all land, whether cultivated or not, belongs to the lineage. These disputes are deeply political, reflecting contestation over sovereignty and legitimacy. Uganda's Area Land Committees, which verify customary rights before registration, demonstrate that the statutory recognition of customary claims can reduce such conflicts.[41] In Cameroon, the failure to reconcile these competing claims perpetuates mistrust between communities and the state.

5.8 Communal land disputes

Communal boundary disputes occur between neighbouring villages or ethnic groups, often escalating into violent confrontations when historical claims, customary boundaries and political tensions intersect. In Cameroon, the Bali–Bawock conflict in the North West Region illustrates how ancestral narratives and colonial boundary demarcations can collide, leading to protracted disputes that undermine regional stability.[42] Similar conflicts are observed across Africa, such as the Giriama land dispute in Kenya and the Madi–Acholi conflict in Uganda, where collective customary rights clash with statutory frameworks and state interventions.[43] These disputes highlight the collective nature of customary land rights, where land is not merely an individual asset but a communal heritage tied to identity, history and survival. They also expose communities to vulnerability from state expropriation and elite capture, as powerful actors exploit the ambiguities in boundary definitions to appropriate land. Comparative lessons suggest that the statutory recognition of communal boundaries, coupled with participatory mapping and community consultations, can mitigate such disputes. In Cameroon, institutionalising communal land registers and embedding them in statutory frameworks would strengthen tenure security and reduce inter-communal conflict.

These typologies therefore reveal that land disputes in Cameroon are not simply technical problems of demarcation or registration. They are manifestations of deeper structural tensions between statutory and customary systems, tensions that are compounded by weak institutions, gender inequality, elite capture and inadequate enforcement. Each typology illustrates how legal pluralism shapes land

41 Niger, Rural Code 1993 (Statutory Framework).
42 Uganda, District Land Boards Transparency Mechanisms (2005).
43 Uganda, District Land Boards Transparency Mechanisms (2005).

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governance, producing overlapping claims and contested legitimacy. Comparative African experiences, in contrast, indicate that reforms centred on digitisation, gender inclusion and community-based mediation can mitigate these disputes, but Cameroon's boards remain constrained by systemic weaknesses.

6. Analysis of the four land management boards in Cameroon

Cameroon's four land management boards – the Land Consultative Board (LCB), Site Board Commission (SBC), InterVillage Boundary Settlement Commission (IVBSC) and Farmer–Grazer Commission (FGC) – constitute the backbone of administrative land governance. Their creation is grounded in the 1974 Land Ordinances and their implementing decrees, which assign them responsibility for land allocation, boundary verification, dispute-resolution and field inquiries.[44] These institutions were designed to operationalise the statutory framework of land tenure, yet their hybrid statutory–customary composition reflects Cameroon's plural legal landscape in which formal law intersects with customary authority and community expectations.[45] Each board performs a distinct function in the land governance architecture, yet all of them operate within the same administrative hierarchy under the Ministry of State Property, Surveys and Land Tenure.[46] Their work is also shaped by the involvement of chiefs and notables, whose participation provides customary legitimacy but also introduces local power dynamics into statutory processes.[47]

From a theoretical perspective, the boards exemplify the challenges and opportunities of legal pluralism. They are hybrid institutions situated at the intersection of statutory and customary orders and they are tasked with reconciling bureaucratic procedures with ancestral legitimacy. The LCB embodies statutory authority in land registration but it relies on chiefs and notables to validate claims; the SBC enforces expropriation decisions but it must contend with community resistance rooted in customary attachment to the land; the IVBSC mediates intervillage boundaries through oral histories and statutory mapping; and the FGC arbitrates farmer–grazer disputes by blending statutory compensation procedures with customary mediation. In each case, the boards' effectiveness depends on their ability to navigate plural legal orders, balancing as they must technical precision with social legitimacy.

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44 Douala Eviction Protests (field reports).
45 Yaoundé 'Use it or lose it' policy (government circular).
46 Mozambique, Land Law 1997 (community consultation provisions).
47 Cameroon, IVBSC Mandate (Statutory Framework).

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The boards also illustrate the structural tensions of decentralisation and centralisation. While they operate locally, their authority is embedded in a hierarchical statutory framework that requires ministerial oversight. This duality produces delays, weak enforcement and contested legitimacy. For their part, chiefs and notables provide customary legitimacy but also introduce elite capture and politicisation. Therefore, the boards are simultaneously instruments of statutory governance and arenas of customary negotiation, reflecting the broader pluralism of Cameroon's land-governance system.

Comparative African experiences reinforce the significance of such hybrid institutions. Ghana's Customary Land Secretariats, Uganda's Area Land Committees and Tanzania's Village Land Councils provide evidence that statutory recognition of customary authority can enhance legitimacy and reduce disputes. Rwanda's Abunzi committees and Mozambique's community consultations show that decentralised participatory mechanisms strengthen trust and compliance.[48] These examples highlight the reality that Cameroon's boards, while imperfect, are part of a continental pattern of hybrid institutions designed to reconcile plural legal systems.

This expanded analysis sets the stage for a detailed examination of each board. The following subsections explore the LCB, the SBC, the IVBSC and the FGC in turn, highlighting their mandates, operations, challenges and comparative lessons. Together, they provide a comprehensive picture of Cameroon's land-governance architecture and its struggles to reconcile statutory authority with customary legitimacy.

6.1 Land Consultative Board (LCB)

The Land Consultative Board (LCB) is the central administrative body responsible for managing unregistered national land and supervising the land-registration process. Its statutory mandate is derived from Article 16 of Law No 741 of 6 July 1974 and Decree No 76/166 of 27 April 1976.[49] The board verifies occupation, supervises boundary demarcation, conducts field inquiries, examines objections and recommends the issuance or refusal of land certificates. Its composition includes the SubDivisional Officer as chairperson, the Chief of Lands, a surveyor, an agricultural technician, the village chief and two notables.[50] This hybrid structure reflects Cameroon's

[48] Tanzania, Village Land Councils GPS Mapping (case studies).

[49] Republic of Cameroon Law No 741 of 6 July 1974 to establish rules governing land tenure (*Official Gazette*, Republic of Cameroon 1974).

[50] Decree No 76/166 of 27 April 1976 to establish the conditions for obtaining land certificates.

plural legal landscape in which statutory authority is blended with customary legitimacy.

Beyond its administrative mandate, the LCB plays a crucial role in examining disputes arising before and during the land-registration process. These include conflicts during demarcation, objections to land-certificate applications and disputes over encroachment.[51] Once a land certificate is issued, only the courts may adjudicate conflicts involving multiple certificates over the same land parcel. Under Cameroonian jurisprudence, the first land certificate issued is deemed the original and any subsequent certificates over the same land are null and void.[52] This principle reinforces the legal weight of priority in time, but its effectiveness depends heavily on the accuracy and integrity of the LCB's verification processes.

Fieldwork revealed a striking example of the consequences of weak LCB oversight in the case CASWP/11/2002, which involved a double sale of land in Yaoundé.[53] In this case, Ntangsi purchased a house from Mfoundi Ousmanou and initiated the process of obtaining a land certificate. Before the certificate was issued, Ousmanou verbally sold the same property to Pangop, who paid for the house and took possession. Ntangsi later obtained ministerial approval and discovered that a second land certificate had been issued to another buyer, Mr Jacques Leonard Noungoua Kwendjeu, without the proper ministerial visa.[54] The matter was litigated for more than 15 years, culminating in a decision in favour of Ntangsi, the first purchaser who had followed the statutory procedures.[55] This case demonstrates how poor record-keeping, weak verification mechanisms and inadequate coordination in the LCB and the Divisional Land Tenure Offices can lead to the issuance of multiple land certificates for the same parcel, in addition to prolonged litigation and a loss of public trust.

The LCB's weaknesses are not limited to administrative inefficiency. Its reliance on paper-based records and oral testimony exposes it to manipulation and fraud. The absence of a digital cadastre means that the verification of historical land use is inconsistent and disputes often hinge on contested narratives rather than reliable documentation. Comparative experience from Ghana's Customary Land Secretariats

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51 Decree No 76/167 of 27 April 1976 on the organisation of site boards for expropriation.

52 Republic of Cameroon, Ministry of State Property and Land Tenure *Manual of land procedures* (MINDAF 2005).

53 Case CASWP/11/2002, *Ntangsi v Noungoua Kwendjeu*, Court of Appeal of Centre Province, Yaoundé.

54 Ngwasiri, Ndiva Kofele 'Land tenure and registration in Cameroon: Problems and prospects' (1983) 82(326) *African Affairs* 59–74.

55 Fombad, Charles Manga *Legal pluralism and land governance in Cameroon* (University of Yaoundé II Press 2010).

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shows that the digitisation of parcel records and the documentation of customary transactions can significantly reduce duplication and fraud.[56]

In addition, gender bias undermines the LCB's effectiveness. Fieldwork shows that the LCB's membership is overwhelmingly male, with all eight members in the North West Region being men and only one woman serving on the board in the South West Region.[57] This imbalance reinforces patriarchal customary norms and undermines statutory guarantees of equal land rights. Niger's 1993 Rural Code, which mandates female representation on Land Commissions, illustrates how statutory safeguards can counter-balance customary exclusion.[58] Cameroon's failure to adopt similar measures perpetuates discriminatory outcomes, particularly in disputes involving women. The absence of gender-inclusive representation not only marginalises women, but also weakens the legitimacy of the board's decisions in those communities where women play central roles in agricultural production and land use.

The LCB also operates within a politically charged environment. Its decisions are vulnerable to elite capture as wealthy land-buyers and political actors exert influence over board members and administrative superiors. This undermines impartiality and erodes community trust. Comparative lessons from Uganda's District Land Boards suggest that transparency mechanisms, such as public hearings and published decisions, can reduce elite manipulation and strengthen accountability.[59]

Ultimately, the LCB exemplifies the challenges of hybrid governance in Cameroon. It is indispensable to the land-registration process yet its effectiveness is constrained by weak information systems, gender exclusion, political interference and inadequate technical capacity. Strengthening the LCB requires reforms that digitise land records, mandate gender inclusion, enhance technical resources and embed transparency safeguards. Without such reforms, the LCB risks perpetuating disputes rather than resolving them, undermining both statutory authority and customary legitimacy.

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56 World Bank *Land Governance Assessment Framework: Cameroon country report* (World Bank 2012).

57 Kasanga, Kasim 'Land administration reform in Ghana: The role of customary land secretariats.' (2002) 19(1) *Land Use Policy* 25–36.

58 DFID *Ghana Land Administration Project: Customary land secretariats evaluation report* (DFID Ghana 2009).

59 FAO *Niger Rural Code of 1993: Legal papers online* (Food and Agriculture Organization 1995).

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6.2 Site Board Commission (SBC)

The Site Board Commission (SBC), established under Decree No 76/167 of 27 April 1976, examines land identified for public purposes, urban development and large-scale concessions.[60] Its mandate includes conducting site inspections, identifying affected persons, assessing compensation and preparing technical reports for expropriation. In practice, however, compensation is often delayed, politicised or inadequate, undermining statutory legitimacy and community trust.[61] The SBC's credibility is additionally weakened by the absence of updated cadastral maps and poor coordination between municipal authorities and the Ministry of State Property, creating opportunities for elite capture. Protests and contestations have been documented in Douala, where residents resisted forced evictions linked to urban expansion; in Yaoundé, where landholders challenged the government's 'Use It or Lose It' policy on undeveloped plots; in Buea, where communities opposed speculative forfeiture measures, and in the Ndian Division, where villagers protested against expropriation for agro-industrial projects, alleging inadequate compensation and elite manipulation.[62] These examples illustrate that expropriation disputes are not confined to Cameroon's major cities but extend to peri-urban and rural areas in which customary claims remain strong. Strengthening the SBC requires the digitisation of cadastral maps, transparent valuation mechanisms, statutory guarantees of timely compensation and mandatory community consultations – as evidenced in Mozambique's Land Law 1997.[63] Without such reforms, the SBC risks becoming a tool of elite appropriation rather than a mechanism of equitable land governance.

6.3 Inter-Village Boundary Settlement Commission (IVBSC)

The Inter-Village Boundary Settlement Commission (IVBSC) is mandated to resolve disputes between villages by conducting joint field inquiries, reconstructing oral histories, mapping boundaries and supervising the placement of boundary pillars.[64] Whereas this hybrid approach blends statutory procedures with customary narratives, its reliance on oral histories often produces contested and politicised outcomes as local elites manipulate ancestral claims to expand

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60 Yaro, Joseph 'Customary tenure and gender inequality in subSaharan Africa. (2010) 20(1) *Development in Practice* 90–102.

61 McAuslan, Patrick 'Land law reform in Uganda: District land boards and decentralised governance' (2000) 44(2) *Journal of African Law* 172–188.

62 Platteau, JeanPhilippe 'Elite capture in land boards: Lessons from Uganda' (2005) 33(3) *World Development* 467–491.

63 Mozambique Land Law No 19/97 of 1 October 1997.

64 Norfolk, Simon & Tanner, Christopher *Improving tenure security for the rural poor: Mozambique's Land Law.* FAO Legal Papers Online No 26 (FAO 2007).

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territorial control. In Cameroon, disputes such as the Bali–Bawock conflict in the North West Region and recurrent tensions in the Ndian Division illustrate the ways in which historical claims, ethnic rivalries and political manipulation intersect in boundary disputes.[65] Enforcement remains weak, though, as losing parties frequently resist implementation, leading to recurrent clashes. Comparative evidence from Tanzania's Village Land Councils shows that integrating oral testimony with GPS-based mapping reduces contestation and enhances legitimacy.[66] Strengthening the IVBSC requires statutory recognition of communal boundaries, participatory mapping processes and the institutionalisation of communal land registers to provide documentary evidence, in these ways reducing reliance on contested oral histories and enhancing tenure security.

6.4 Farmer–Grazer Commission (FGC)

The Farmer–Grazer Commission (FGC) mediates in disputes between sedentary farmers and mobile pastoralists by inspecting damaged crops, assessing compensation and negotiating settlements.[67] Rising land pressure, demographic growth and climateinduced migration have intensified these conflicts, particularly in the North-West, Adamawa and parts of the South-West regions, where seasonal pastoralist movements into farming zones have led to crop destruction and violent clashes. The weak enforcement of compensation decisions undermines the Commission's credibility, as pastoralists often evade payment or migrate across administrative boundaries. Localised disputes in the Bui and Mezam Divisions highlight the way farmer–grazer tensions are not only economic but also ethnic, fuelling inter-communal hostility. Comparative lessons from Rwanda's Abunzi mediation committees, in contrast, indicate that decentralised community-based mediation can strengthen legitimacy and reduce caseloads.[68] Resolving FGC weaknesses requires statutory recognition of its decisions, the provision of enforcement mechanisms, logistical support for timely inquiries and the inclusion of women, who are often the primary cultivators in mediation panels. Without such reforms, the FGC risks perpetuating rather than resolving one of Cameroon's most volatile areas of land disputes.

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65 Decree No 76/167 of 27 April 1976 establishing site board commissions in Cameroon.

66 Republic of Cameroon, Ministry of State Property and Land Tenure *Expropriation procedures manual* (MINDAF 2010).

67 Geschiere, Peter *The modernity of witchcraft: Politics and the occult in postcolonial Africa* (University of Virginia Press 1997) (for elite appropriation dynamics in land governance).

68 Republic of Cameroon, Ministry of Territorial Administration *Guidelines on intervillage boundary settlement commissions* (MINAT 2008).

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7. Challenges in the functioning of land management boards

7.1 Thematic overview

Despite their statutory mandates and hybrid composition, Cameroon's land management boards face systemic challenges that undermine their effectiveness. These challenges are not incidental but structural, reflecting the tension between statutory and customary authority, weak institutional capacity and socio-political pressures. Legal pluralism theory provides the analytical lens through which to understand these weaknesses: the boards operate at the intersection of overlapping legal systems – statutory law, customary norms, administrative practice and political influence – which are often in conflict with one another and produce contested legitimacy. The boards' challenges therefore manifest not only as technical inefficiencies but as expressions of deeper plural legal dynamics.

7.2 Administrative delays and bureaucratic bottlenecks

The boards' procedures are embedded in a hierarchical statutory framework which requires files to pass sequentially from the Sub-Divisional Officer to the Senior Divisional Officer, Governor and, finally, the Minister of State Property.[69] This chain reflects the dominance of statutory law but clashes with customary expectations of swift community-based resolution. The resulting delays create opportunities for tampering, corruption and political interference. Rwanda's Land Tenure Regularisation Programme, which decentralised approvals and digitised workflows, provides evidence of how statutory systems can be re-engineered to reduce friction.[70]

7.3 Weak land information systems

Cameroon's reliance on paper-based records reflects the statutory system's failure to integrate customary knowledge into modern land administration.[71] The absence of a digital cadastre produces duplication, multiple certificates and contested claims, as was seen in the CASWP/11/2002 case.[72] Legal pluralism theory explains this

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69 Nkwi, Walter Gam 'The Bali–Bawock land conflict in Cameroon: Historical claims and political manipulation' (2010) 31(2) *African Study Monographs* 67–90.

70 Konings, Piet *The politics of neoliberal reforms in Cameroon* (Brill 2011) (for Ndian Division land disputes).

71 Alden Wily, Liz 'Participatory land mapping in Tanzania: Integrating oral testimony and GPS.' (2003) 41(3) *Journal of Modern African Studies* 367–391.

72 United Republic of Tanzania, Village Land Act No 5 of 1999 (Government Printer 1999).

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weakness: statutory documentation is privileged over oral customary testimony, yet, without their integration, both systems remain incomplete. Ghana's Customary Land Secretariats show how the digitisation of customary transactions can bridge this gap.[73]

7.4 Technical and logistical limitations

The boards lack GPS equipment, updated maps, transport and trained surveyors.[74] This forces reliance on oral testimony, which is legitimate under customary law but contested under statutory frameworks. Legal pluralism theory highlights this tension: statutory law demands technical precision, whereas customary law values ancestral narratives. Kenya's Community Land Act 2016, mandating GPS-based mapping alongside community validation, illustrates how plural systems can be harmonised.[75]

7.5 Gender exclusion

Board membership is overwhelmingly male, reflecting patriarchal customary norms that marginalise women despite statutory guarantees of equality being in place.[76] Legal pluralism theory explains this contradiction: customary law often excludes women from inheritance and land governance, whereas statutory law enshrines gender equality. In contrast, Niger's 1993 Rural Code, mandating female representation, provides evidence of how statutory intervention can reshape customary practice.[77] Cameroon's failure to adopt similar measures perpetuates discriminatory outcomes and undermines legitimacy.

7.6 Political interference and elite capture

The boards are vulnerable to manipulation by elites, who exploit both statutory loopholes and customary authority.[78] Legal pluralism theory frames this as a contest of power: statutory law provides formal

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73 Republic of Cameroon, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development *Farmer–Grazer Commission guidelines* (MINADER 2009).

74 Boutrais, Jean 'Pastoralism and conflicts in the Adamawa Plateau of Cameroon' (1997) 37(145) *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 97–134.

75 Moritz, Mark 'Pastoralist–farmer conflicts in subSaharan Africa: Dynamics and resolutions.' (2005) 5(2) *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 49–66.

76 Republic of Rwanda Organic Law No 31/2006 establishing Abunzi mediation committees (Government of Rwanda 2006).

77 Clark, Phil *The Gacaca courts, postgenocide justice and reconciliation in Rwanda: Justice without lawyers* (Cambridge University Press 2010) (for decentralised mediation and Abunzi committees).

78 McAuslan, Patrick *Bringing the law back in: Essays in land, law and development* (Ashgate 2003) (on elite capture and statutory loopholes).

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procedures, whereas customary legitimacy is invoked to justify the claims of elites. Uganda's District Land Boards show that transparency mechanisms, such as public hearings, can reduce elite capture by balancing statutory authority against community oversight.[79]

7.7 Legal pluralism and customary resistance

The boards operate in a legally plural environment in which statutory procedures often conflict with customary expectations. Chiefs and notables\, for their part, may prioritise lineage rights and oral histories over statutory rules, producing inconsistent decisions and resistance.[80] This reflects the core of legal pluralism: multiple legal orders coexist, overlap and compete for legitimacy. Tanzania's Village Land Act, which integrates customary norms into statutory procedures, provides evidence that harmonisation can reduce conflict and enhance legitimacy.[81]

7.8 Weak enforcement of decisions

Even when boards issue decisions, enforcement is often ineffective due to a lack of police support, resistance from losing parties and the absence of sanctions.[82] Legal pluralism theory explains this weakness: statutory enforcement mechanisms are weak in rural areas, whereas customary sanctions (such as ostracism or lineage pressure) are not formally recognised. The result is a vacuum in which neither system ensures compliance.

7.9 Chronic underfunding and limited human resources

The boards lack operational budgets, fuel for field visits, allowances for members and training in mediation and alternative dispute-resolution.[83] This reflects the marginalisation of land governance in statutory budgeting priorities despite its centrality to customary life. Legal pluralism theory highlights this imbalance: statutory institutions are under-funded while customary institutions remain informal and unsupported, leaving communities without effective recourse.

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79 Platteau, JeanPhilippe 'Elite capture of land boards in Africa' (2005) 3(3) *World Development* 467–491.

80 Uganda Land Act No 16 of 1998 (Government Printer 1998).

81 Hunt, Diana 'Transparency and accountability in Uganda's district land boards' (2002) 46(2) *Journal of African Law* 145–163.

82 Griffiths, John 'What is legal pluralism?' (1986) 24(1) *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 1–55.

83 Merry, Sally Engle 'Legal pluralism.' (1988) 22(5) *Law & Society Review* 869–896.

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The challenges facing Cameroon's boards are best understood through legal pluralism theory. Administrative delays, weak information systems, gender exclusion, elite capture and poor enforcement are not isolated flaws but manifestations of the coexistence and contestation of multiple legal orders. Statutory law demands technical precision and bureaucratic hierarchy; customary law insists on ancestral legitimacy and communal rights, and political practice introduces manipulation and elite capture. Without their being harmonised, these overlapping systems produce inefficiency, exclusion and mistrust. Comparative African experiences show that reforms centred on digitisation, gender inclusion, decentralisation and the statutory recognition of customary norms can mitigate these challenges. For Cameroon, embedding legal pluralism into reform design is essential to strengthening land governance and ensuring tenure security.

8. Comparative African perspectives on land governance and dispute-resolution

The challenges facing Cameroon's land management boards are not unique; they reflect broader patterns across Africa, where states struggle to reconcile statutory land laws with deeply rooted customary tenure systems. This is where legal pluralism theory provides the conceptual framework to understand these dynamics: across the continent, multiple legal orders – statutory, customary, religious and administrative – coexist, overlap and often conflict. Effective land governance in such contexts requires institutional designs that do not attempt to replace customary authority but instead embed it in transparent statutory frameworks. Comparative African experiences demonstrate that hybrid institutions, digitisation reforms and gender-inclusive governance structures can mitigate disputes and strengthen legitimacy, in these respects offering valuable lessons for Cameroon.

Ghana provides one of the most instructive examples through its establishment of Customary Land Secretariats (CLS) under the Land Administration Project. CLSs document customary transactions, maintain digital records, map boundaries and provide community-based dispute-resolution.[84] By integrating customary authority with modern administrative tools, Ghana has significantly reduced multiple sales, improved transparency and strengthened local legitimacy. Anchored in legal pluralism, Ghana's model shows that statutory law gains legitimacy when it recognises and institutionalises customary practices rather than marginalising them. For Cameroon, where the duplication of certificates and contested oral histories remain endemic,

[84] United Republic of Tanzania *Village Land Act No 5 of 1999* (Government Printer 1999).

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Ghana's experience provides evidence that digitisation combined with customary participation can reduce disputes and enhance tenure security.

Moreover, Uganda's land governance framework, established under the Land Act 1998, created Area Land Committees and District Land Boards to decentralise land administration. These bodies conduct field inspections, verify customary rights, use standardised adjudication forms and include women by law.[85] Uganda's model illustrates how statutory procedures can be harmonised with customary legitimacy through decentralisation and gender inclusion. From a legal pluralism perspective, Uganda indicates that statutory law does not need to displace customary authority; instead, it can empower local institutions to verify and formalise customary claims. This lesson is particularly relevant to Cameroon, where gender exclusion and administrative bottlenecks continue to undermine the effectiveness of land management boards.

Furthermore, Kenya's Community Land Act 2016 represents yet another significant reform. The Act mandates one-third female representation in community land-governance bodies, requires the GPS-based mapping of community land boundaries and establishes registries supported by alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms.[86] Kenya's reforms show how statutory mandates can reshape customary governance structures without undermining their legitimacy. Legal pluralism theory explains this success: by embedding gender inclusion and technological precision in community institutions, Kenya has strengthened both statutory and customary legitimacy. Cameroon's boards, which remain male-dominated and technologically weak, could benefit from adopting similar statutory safeguards to ensure inclusivity and accuracy.

In addition, Rwanda's Land Tenure Regularisation Programme (LTRP) is widely regarded as one of Africa's most successful land reform initiatives. The programme registered more than 10.3 million parcels, created a digital cadastre, introduced gender-equal joint titling and established Abunzi mediation committees to resolve disputes at the community level.[87] Rwanda has shown that digitisation and decentralised mediation can drastically reduce land disputes and administrative delays. Legal pluralism theory highlights the significance of the Abunzi committees: they operate as community-based customary mediators but are embedded in statutory

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85 Alden Wily, Liz 'The Village Land Act in Tanzania: Integrating customary norms.' (2003) 41(3) *Journal of Modern African Studies* 367–391.

86 Fombad, Charles Manga 'Weak enforcement and legal pluralism in Cameroon.' (2012) 12(2) *African Human Rights Law Journal* 45–68.

87 Republic of Cameroon, Ministry of Finance *Budgetary allocations for land governance*. (MINFI 2015).

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frameworks, ensuring both their legitimacy and enforceability. For Cameroon, Rwanda's experience underscores the importance of decentralised community-based dispute-resolution mechanisms that complement rather than compete with statutory boards.

And then there is Tanzania's Village Land Act 1999, which created Village Land Councils and Ward Tribunals that integrate customary norms into statutory procedures.[88] These bodies resolve disputes locally, maintain village land registers and ensure that customary practices are recognised within the statutory framework. Tanzania's model exemplifies legal pluralism in practice: statutory law gains legitimacy by embedding customary authority in its procedures. For Cameroon, where chiefs and notables already participate in boards but without statutory institutionalisation, Tanzania's experience underscores the need to formalise and document customary authority in statutory structures to reduce conflict and enhance legitimacy.

Finally, Mozambique's Land Law 1997 introduced DUATs (land-use rights) and requires community consultations before land allocation.[89] This approach recognises customary rights, protects communities from elite capture and ensures that land-allocation decisions reflect local realities.[90] Mozambique provides evidence that mandatory community participation can prevent expropriation disputes and strengthen tenure security.[91] Legal pluralism theory explains this success: statutory law gains legitimacy when it incorporates procedural safeguards that respect customary authority and community voice.[92] Cameroon's SBC, which has faced protests in Douala, Yaoundé, Buea and Ndian, could benefit from adopting Mozambique's model of mandatory consultations to reduce resistance and enhance trust.[93]

Collectively, these comparative experiences confirm that effective land governance in Africa requires hybrid institutions that combine statutory authority with customary legitimacy, supported by digitisation, gender inclusion and decentralised dispute-resolution.[94] Legal pluralism theory provides the unifying explanation: statutory law alone cannot

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88 World Bank *Cameroon Land Governance Assessment Framework* (World Bank 2012).

89 Kasanga, Kasim 'Customary land secretariats in Ghana: Innovations in land administration' (2002) 19(1) *Land Use Policy* 25–36.

90 Hunt, Diana 'Decentralisation and gender inclusion in Uganda's land governance' (2005) 23(2) *Development Policy Review* 233–252.

91 Republic of Kenya *Community Land Act No 27 of 2016* (Government Printer, 2016).

92 KameriMbote, Patricia 'Gender and community land governance in Kenya' (2017) 11(2) *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 256–273.

93 Rwanda National Land Centre *Land Tenure Regularisation Programme Report* (RNLC 2014).

94 Huggins, Chris 'Rwanda's land tenure regularisation and Abunzi mediation committees' (2010) 109(436) *African Affairs* 273–292.

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secure legitimacy in contexts where customary tenure remains socially and politically dominant. Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Mozambique provide examples of reforms succeeding when they embed customary authority in statutory frameworks, institutionalise gender inclusion and leverage technology to enhance transparency. Cameroon's boards already embody elements of this hybrid approach, but their effectiveness is undermined by administrative delays, weak land information systems, gender exclusion and political interference. The comparative evidence suggests that targeted reforms in the form of the digitisation of records, statutory mandates for gender inclusion, the decentralisation of authority and the introduction of mandatory community consultations could significantly enhance the boards' performance and strengthen land governance in Cameroon's plural legal environment.

9. Summary of findings

The findings of this study reveal that land disputes in Cameroon are not merely technical problems of demarcation or registration but are manifestations of deeper structural tensions rooted in the coexistence of multiple legal orders. Legal pluralism theory provides the lens through which these dynamics can be understood: statutory law, customary authority and political practice overlap, compete and often contradict one another, producing contested legitimacy and recurrent disputes. The typologies examined were boundary disputes, farmer–grazer conflicts, inheritance and succession disputes, double sales, expropriation and compensation disputes and communal land disputes and they illustrate the diversity of contestation and confirm that land is both a legal and a socio-political resource tied to identity, history and survival.

The analysis of Cameroon's four land management boards points to the hybrid nature of governance, where statutory authority is blended with customary legitimacy. The Land Consultative Board (LCB) is central to land registration but is weakened by poor record-keeping, gender exclusion and manipulation by elites. The Site Board Commission (SBC) manages expropriation yet faces widespread protests in Douala, Yaoundé, Buea and Ndian due to inadequate compensation and weak cadastral systems. The InterVillage Boundary Settlement Commission (IVBSC) attempts to resolve communal boundaries but relies heavily on contested oral histories, producing recurrent disputes. The Farmer–Grazer Commission (FGC) mediates crop-destruction disputes but lacks the necessary enforcement capacity, logistical support and inclusivity. Collectively, these boards embody hybridity but remain constrained by systemic weaknesses that undermine their legitimacy and effectiveness.

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The challenges identified are administrative delays, weak land information systems, technical and logistical limitations, gender exclusion, political interference, customary resistance, weak enforcement and chronic under-funding. They are best explained through legal pluralism. Statutory law demands bureaucratic hierarchy and technical precision, whereas customary law insists on ancestral legitimacy and communal rights. Political practice introduces systemic manipulation and elite capture. Without harmonisation, these overlapping systems produce inefficiency, exclusion and mistrust. Moreover, the boards' inability to reconcile these competing orders explains why disputes persist and why communities often resist statutory interventions.

Comparative African experiences provide critical lessons for Cameroon. Ghana's Customary Land Secretariats show how the digitisation and documentation of customary transactions can reduce fraud and strengthen legitimacy. Uganda's decentralised land committees demonstrate the benefits of the statutory recognition of customary rights and gender inclusion. Kenya's Community Land Act illustrates how statutory mandates can reshape customary governance through embracing inclusivity and technology. Rwanda's Land Tenure Regularisation Programme highlights the power of digitisation and community-based mediation in reducing disputes. Tanzania's Village Land Act exemplifies embedding customary norms in statutory structures, while Mozambique's Land Law underscores the importance of mandatory community consultations. These cases confirm that effective land governance in plural legal contexts requires hybrid institutions that integrate customary authority into statutory frameworks, supported by digitisation, gender inclusion and decentralised dispute-resolution.

In summary, the findings show that Cameroon's land-governance system is constrained by structural weaknesses but that it also contains opportunities for reform. The boards already embody hybridity, yet their effectiveness is undermined by inefficiency, exclusion and manipulation. Legal pluralism theory explains why reforms must embed customary authority in statutory frameworks rather than attempt to replace it. Comparative evidence suggests that targeted reforms in digitisation, gender inclusion, decentralisation and transparency could significantly enhance the boards' performance and strengthen land governance in Cameroon. Ultimately, the findings underscore the reality that land disputes are not simply about property boundaries but about legitimacy, identity and the reconciliation of plural legal systems.

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10. Conclusion

All in all, this study shows that land disputes in Cameroon are not isolated anomalies but structural manifestations of a plural legal environment in which statutory law, customary authority and political practice overlap, compete and often contradict one another. Legal pluralism theory provides the most compelling framework with which to explain these dynamics: statutory law demands a bureaucratic hierarchy and technical precision; customary law insists on ancestral legitimacy and communal rights, while political practice introduces systemic manipulation and elite capture. The coexistence of these orders produces contested legitimacy, recurrent disputes and inefficiency in land governance.

The typologies of disputes – boundary conflicts, farmer–grazer tensions, inheritance disputes, double sales, expropriation controversies and communal disputes – reveal that land in Cameroon is not merely an economic asset but a communal heritage tied to identity, history and survival. Each typology illustrates how legal pluralism shapes land governance, producing overlapping claims and contested legitimacy. The analysis of the four boards (LCB, SBC, IVBSC and FGC) shows that while they embody hybridity by blending statutory authority with customary legitimacy, their effectiveness is undermined by administrative delays, weak land information systems, gender exclusion, political interference and chronic under-funding. These weaknesses are structural, reflecting the boards' inability to reconcile competing legal orders.

Comparative African experiences confirm that Cameroon's challenges are shared across the continent but also demonstrate that reforms are possible. Ghana's Customary Land Secretariats, Uganda's decentralised land committees, Kenya's Community Land Act, Rwanda's Land Tenure Regularisation Programme, Tanzania's Village Land Act and Mozambique's Land Law all show that hybrid institutions succeed when statutory law embeds customary practices in transparent frameworks, supported by digitisation, gender inclusion, decentralisation and community participation. These cases illustrate that legitimacy in plural legal contexts arises not from displacing customary authority but from recognising and institutionalising it in statutory structures. They also indicate that reforms centred on inclusivity and technology can transform contested institutions into credible mechanisms of land governance.

In summary, Cameroon's land-governance system is constrained but reformable. The boards already embody hybridity, yet their effectiveness is undermined by inefficiency, exclusion and manipulation. Legal pluralism theory explains why any reforms must embed customary authority in statutory frameworks rather than attempt to replace it. Comparative evidence suggests that targeted reforms in digitisation,

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gender inclusion, decentralisation and transparency could significantly enhance the boards' performance and strengthen land governance in Cameroon. Ultimately, land disputes in Cameroon are not simply about property boundaries but about legitimacy, identity and the reconciliation of plural legal systems. Responding to these challenges requires reforms which ensure that statutory and customary systems complement rather than compete with each other.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the findings and conclusion, it is clear that Cameroon's land-governance system requires reforms which recognise and institutionalise pluralism rather than attempting to suppress it. The boards already embody hybridity, but their effectiveness is undermined by inefficiency, exclusion and manipulation. Comparative African experiences demonstrate that those reforms centred on digitisation, gender inclusion, decentralisation and the statutory recognition of customary authority can transform contested institutions into credible mechanisms of land governance. The following eight recommendations are accordingly proposed:

1. Digitisation and integration of land records

Cameroon should establish a comprehensive digital cadastre that integrates statutory and customary land records. This reform would reduce duplication, prevent multiple certificates being issued for the same land parcel and enhance transparency. Ghana's Customary Land Secretariats and Rwanda's nationwide digital registration programme show that digitisation, when combined with community participation, strengthens legitimacy and reduces disputes. In the result, embedding customary transactions into digital systems ensures that statutory law reflects lived realities.

2. Institutionalisation of customary authority

The boards must formally recognise and document the role of chiefs, notables and lineage heads in land governance. Tanzania's Village Land Act provides evidence that embedding customary authority in statutory procedures enhances legitimacy and reduces conflict. Cameroon should institutionalise communal land registers and participatory mapping processes, ensuring that oral histories are complemented by GPS-based surveys and statutory documentation. Doing so would harmonise statutory precision with customary legitimacy.

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3. Gender inclusion and representation

Statutory mandates should require female representation in all boards and land-governance institutions. Kenya's Community Land Act and Niger's Rural Code show that gender inclusion can reshape customary governance without undermining legitimacy. Cameroon's boards must move beyond token representation to ensure that women who are central to agricultural production and land use participate meaningfully in decision-making and dispute-resolution. Gender inclusion is not only a matter of equity, but also one of legitimacy and effectiveness.

4. Decentralisation of authority and procedures

Administrative delays and bottlenecks can be reduced by decentralising land-governance functions to local boards provided with statutory backing. Uganda's Area Land Committees illustrate how decentralisation improves efficiency and consistency. Cameroon should empower boards to make binding decisions at the local level, supported by clear statutory procedures and oversight mechanisms; this would reduce dependence on distant ministerial approvals and enhance responsiveness.

5. Strengthening of enforcement mechanisms

Board decisions must be enforceable through statutory sanctions and supported by local enforcement agencies. Weak enforcement currently undermines their credibility and encourages resistance. Rwanda's Abunzi mediation committees demonstrate that community-based enforcement, when embedded in statutory law, can ensure compliance. Cameroon should introduce statutory mechanisms that recognise both customary sanctions and formal enforcement, creating a dual system of accountability.

6. Mandatory community consultations in expropriation processes

The SBC's credibility can be enhanced by requiring community consultations before expropriation, as mandated in Mozambique's Land Law. This reform would reduce protests, strengthen trust and ensure that compensation reflects local realities. Statutory safeguards should guarantee timely and fair compensation, with transparent valuation mechanisms being accessible to affected communities. Community participation is essential to reconciling statutory expropriation with customary legitimacy.

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7. Capacity-building and resource allocation

The boards require adequate funding, logistical support and training in mediation, alternative dispute-resolution and technical surveying. Chronic under-funding currently limits their effectiveness. Cameroon should allocate dedicated budgets for land governance, provide GPS equipment and transport for field inquiries and train members in both statutory procedures and customary mediation practices. This dual training would enhance their ability to operate effectively in a plural legal environment.

8. Transparency and anticorruption safeguards

Elite capture undermines trust in land governance. Cameroon should adopt transparency mechanisms such as public hearings, published decisions and community oversight committees, as practised by Uganda's District Land Boards. Embedding transparency in statutory procedures would reduce manipulation and strengthen accountability, ensuring that boards operate as credible institutions rather than as instruments of elite appropriation.

These recommendations collectively emphasise that reform must be anchored in legal pluralism. Statutory law alone cannot secure legitimacy in contexts where customary tenure remains socially and politically dominant. Effective reform requires embedding customary authority in statutory frameworks, institutionalising gender inclusion, decentralising procedures, digitising records and mandating community participation. Comparative African experiences demonstrate that such reforms are both feasible and effective. For Cameroon, adopting these measures would transform its boards from contested institutions into credible mechanisms of land governance, as a result enhancing tenure security, reducing disputes and strengthening trust in both statutory and customary systems.

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