

Cameroon: Wabane, An Agrarian but Underdeveloped and Enclaved Sub-Division (1995-2024)

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Abstract:

Located in Lebialem division of the South West Region of Cameroon, Wabane sub-division is one of the bread baskets of this region. Agriculture occupies at least 95 percent of its production capacity. This is thanks to the abundant biodiversity of this sub division. However, this paper argues that despite the natural endowments of this sub division, it remains one of the most underdeveloped and enclaved in Cameroon. Therefore, the objective of this study is to present the agricultural potentials of Wabane and the difficulties of tapping these resources for the wellbeing of the people and development of this area. An assembly of bits and pieces of this study were thanks to a combination of empirical data from primary, secondary, tertiary and iconographic sources, guided by the qualitative method of research. Data obtained from the review of selected literature revealed that Wabane can be an economic hub in the Central African sub region. It can supply both food and cash crops not only in Cameroon but to neighbouring Nigeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Central African Republic. But the paper observed with dismay the degree of enclavement and underdevelopment; poor road network and the absence of social facilities. The research concluded that this basically agrarian economy can be of great contribution to the economy of Cameroon should the government redeem the misery of these peasants by linking this sub-division to sister sub-divisions of Lebialem and other divisions in the South West, West and North West regions and develop farm-to-market roads, provide training and modern farm tools, improve seeds to farmers, ensure electricity and storage facilities, health facilities and personnel and pipe born water to the people.

Keywords: Wabane, agrarian, economic hub, enclaved and underdeveloped.

Introduction

Agriculture in Wabane sub-division is taken into hostage by enclavement. Created by decree No 95/082 of 24/4/95 of April 1995, with headquarters in Babong-Bamumbu, Wabane is one of the three sub divisions of Lebialem division of the South West region of Cameroon¹. This sub division is reputed in its agricultural potentials in the South West in general and Lebialem in particular. It produces great varieties of both food and cash crops. But this study laments the fact that Wabane is the most remote and enclaved sub division in the region despite its leadership position in agricultural production. What are the agricultural potentials of this sub division and what has being the impact of the remoteness of this sub division on agriculture and the wellbeing and development of its people? An answer to this worry orientated this study first to presentation of the study area, its agricultural potentials, the enclaved nature of the area and impact on agricultural development, output, economic growth and wellbeing of the people.

I. Presentation of the study area

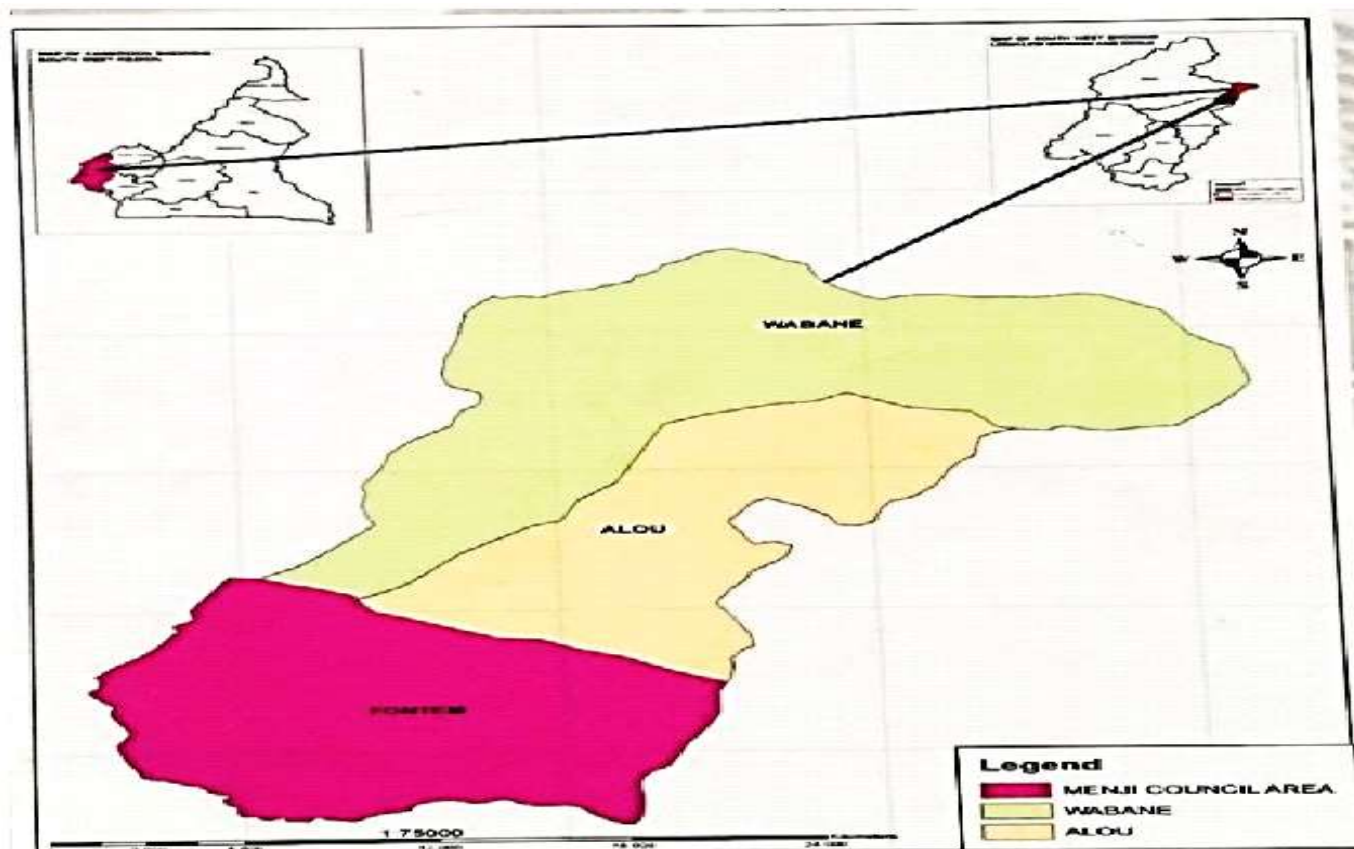
I.1. Geographical location of Wabane

Geographically, Wabane sub-division is located in the north-eastern part of the South West region of Cameroon. It is situated between latitudes 5°38 N and 5°43 N and longitudes 9°58 E and 10°06 E of the Greenwich meridian (Focho, Ndam & Fonge, 2009: 001-013). It covers a surface area of about 1800 square kilometers (sq km). It is bordered to the North by Batibo Sub-Division of Momo Division (North West Region), to the South by Upper Bayang Sub-division of Manyu Division, to the East by Mbouda-Bambotus (West Region) and to the West by Alou Sub-division of Lebialem Division. Major access routes to the council area are through Dschang (Menoua Division), Lewoh (Fontem sub-division), Guzang (Momo Division) and Kombu (Bamboutus Division)². The following maps further illustrate the location of this sub-division.

Map 1: Wabane sub-division in the South West and in Lebialem division

¹ Besides Wabane sub division, the other sub divisions of Lebialem are Menji and Alou sub-divisions.

² Wabane Communal Development Plan, (2012), p. 8.



Source: Constant Leke Ngolefac, *Encyclopedia of Lebialem Division*, p. 25.

I.2. The people

The people of Wabane constitute the Mundani tribe in the South West region of Cameroon. The Mundani are people of the former Fontem sub-division of the Mamfe division created in August 1966³. This sub-division comprised of eight villages; Bamumbu, Bechati, Besali, Banti, Bangang, Folepi, Nkong and Egumbo. Legend holds that the indigenes and first occupants of Mundani originated from Widikum in the Northwest Region in the 16thC. Subsequently, they were joined by other groups like the [Mmuock](#) tribe from the upper belt of Wabane sub-division precisely from [Dschang](#) in the Menoua Division of the west region as a consequence of the First World War. Others especially were from the lowland of upper Bayang in Manyu Division. The traditional regalia, dancing styles and mother tongues of these people give orientations to their respective origins. The main dialect is known as the [Mundani language](#). Other tribes found within the municipality are the Bangwa, the Bamelike the [Bayang](#), the Meta, the Bassossi and even the Ibos from Nigeria. Most of them are civil servants and traders (Agbor, 2020: 27).

It is important to note that the Mundani were merged with the Nwe to form the Nwe/Mundani council area that formed the Fontem sub division created under the Mamfe division on the 26th August 1966. According to the 1922 assessment report of Hal Cadman, the Divisional officer of Mamfe Division, the Mundani tribe area has eight villages; Bechati under chief Taji F.N., Folepi ruled by J.M. Nchong, Banti by Tali Teba, Bamumbu by Lekunze II, Besali under Tayem Njoh, Bangang by Metung (Matung), Nkong managed by Tanko Mbi Eyong and Egumbo (Igumbo) by Akum Ngonwe⁴. These traditional rulers were confirmed by Presidential decree No. 186 of 1st September 1992 confirming the eight Mundani villages and recognizing new chiefs Nkemtaji Jerry Jong of Bechati, chief Matung Folah of Bangang, chief Alaun Ngoni of Igumbo and chief Tanko Eyong of Nkong. All these villages are 3rd class chiefdoms except Bamumbu which following Arrete No. 019/PM/CAB of 07 February 1981 passed to a 1st class chiefdom⁵. However, the name Wabane was selected and named at the second conference of the Mundani Elite and Development Association (MEDA) that held in Banteng, Bamumbu on the 13th February, 1988 and the foundation was stone laid in December that same year⁶. It has an estimated population of 38175 habitants, 18909 male 19266 female (BUCREP, 2005:409). Like in other parts of the

³ George Nkemnguafor Asaba, (2019), *The Extinction of the Bangwa Tribe of Lebialem Division amongst the Tribes of the Republic of Cameroon*, ANUCAM Educational Books Plc, Buea, p. 4.

⁴ West Cameroon Gazette of 10th January 1970, pp, 15-16

⁵ Arrete No. 019/PM/CAB of 07 February 1981, upgrading chiefdoms.

⁶ The Wabane council has been managed since then by four mayors in three successive mandates - Mr. Manfred Nkonganyi Fontem, Tanyi Simon Kedju, Jong Manasseh Teba, who came in to complete the turn of predecessor and Nembo Ketu Israel. It has 31 councilors 5 of whom are female and the rest 26 are male. The council has a work force of 22 staff. Out of the 22 man power, 19 are permanent workers while 3 temporary staff

country, the population of Wabane is made up of mostly young people. The ages 0–4 years and 5–14 years accounts for 21% of the population each, and 15–44 years 31% while ages above 45 years accounts for only 27% of the total population. The youthful nature of the population is indicative of enormous need in education, health and future demands for employment⁷. This people heavily depend on agriculture and petit trading for livelihood.

I.3. Natural potentials

Wabane sub-division is African in miniature (Ojuku, 2020: 11). Its abundant biophysical and human diversities have distinguished this-sub division from others of the division and one of the riches in Cameroon. The topography of Wabane forms part of the Lebialem forest low and savannah highlands which rise to about 8,000 meters feet, forming part of the Bamboutous highlands in West Cameroon. This alternating landscape fascinated early European explorers. It was described by Gustav Conrau, a German trader and colonial plantation labour recruiting agent in 1898 to be “*an awe-inspiring mountain scenery with its accompanying steep, sometimes perilous paths, crossed by rushing torrents even in the dry season; high tumbling waterfalls with isolated compounds behind plantain groves and hedges*” (Brain R, 1967). Wabane has three distinct topographical regions and marks the end of the Manyu plain. The landform is undulating and characterized by elevated, prominent mountainous terrain, with altitude ranging from lowland in Nkong (72m), Bechati and Besali (570m), through Alongkong (1470m) to M'mouck Leteh (2200m), very favourable for agriculture (Wabane Communal Development Plan, 2012: 7). Besides, the climate and soils are agriculturally appealing too.

The area experiences two seasons - the dry season that begins in November and ends in March and the rainy season that commences in April and stretches up to October. It has three climatic zones following the differences in topography and vegetation. The lower belt popularly called lower Mundani is characterized by hot temperature, typical of a tropical forest zone. The middle belt has a higher altitude and the temperature is mild. The upper belt is the tropical savanna, with an altitude of up to 2100m. Here, temperatures sometimes drop below 18 °C between December and January. This favourable climate has determined soil types and a direct bearing on the output and variety of crops (ibid).

Soils in the lower belt and part of the middle belt can be described as sandy-loam to reddish alluvial (ferralsol). The soils of the lower belt are highly exploited for plantation agriculture (oil palm and cocoa, coffee plantations) and to a lesser extend subsistence crops like plantain, cassava, cocoyam, banana, pepper and other vegetables. On the other hand, the upper belt has rich alluvial and silty-loam soils interspersed with very barren chalk and clay soils. These soils serve for very high commercial market gardening crops like Irish potatoes, cabbage, carrots and leeks, beans, to name just these. The soil fertility is also determined by a dense hydrological network.

The main rivers and streams in the council area are found in the lower and middle belt. The main river of the municipality, river Manyu or Mezi (Meyi as per the Bamumbu) as called in the local parlance gets its rise from mount Bamboutous and to it is added many other tributaries downstream. There is also river Mooh and river Mehop and many other streams and springs that enrich its banks with alluvial soils, provide water for household usage and irrigation.

This sub division is also rich in flora and fauna that improve soil fertility. There are three distinct vegetation types; the tropical forest vegetation in the lower belt from the villages of Nkong, Bangang through Besali to Egumbo; wooded savanna in the middle part around Talung, Alongkong, Nchingang and Banteng and the tropical savanna vegetation at the higher altitudes of M'mouck Leteh to Magha all of Bamumbu village. The lower tropical forest and the wooded middle zones hold the highest level of flora - timber and non-timber forest species including medicinal plants (Focho, Ndam & Fonge, 2009: 001-013). With respect to fauna, the difference in vegetation type gives rise to a variety of wildlife species (mammals, reptiles, birds and insects). Amongst others are the primates (chimpanzees and western lowland mountain gorillas) to wild cats like African civets, genets, foxes, stone hayracks, antelopes, deer, caneras, and grass cutters⁸. There is also a variety of avifauna species like the Bannerman's turaco and parrots⁹. For fear of extermination of the above-mentioned primates the Environment and Rural Development Foundation (ERuDeF)¹⁰ alongside the Ministry of Wildlife created a sanctuary in the lower Mundani zone¹¹. This rich biodiversity has made the Wabane area an agricultural heaven.

II. Agricultural potentials of Wabane sub-division

Agriculture is the principal economic activity in this municipality. It occupies about 95% of total production and economic activities

⁷ BUCREP Bureau Central des recensements et des études de population (BUCREP), 3rd Cameroon's population census of 2005, p. 409.

⁸ ERuDeF, (2025), Lebialem highlands initiative, Newsletter, accessed from <https://erudef.org>

⁹ Nkemi L., Skeen R. & Ndeloh D., (2006) The Lebialem highlands mountain birds' conservation project, Cameroon, conserving wildlife and protecting fragile environments, pp.14-15, accessed from <https://ruffordorg.s3.amazonaws.com>

¹⁰ The first non-governmental (NGO) organization on wildlife created in Wabane

¹¹ Prime Ministerial decree No. 20145212 of September 29, 2014, creating Tofala Hill wildlife sanctuary in Wabane and Alou sub divisions in Lebialem division, South West region, covering a surface area of 8087hectares with headquarters in Bechati, accessed from <https://erudef.org>

of the people. The difference in topography, climate, vegetation and soil type provides the area with multiple agricultural assets and potentials. Wabane is blessed with varieties of cash and food crops.

II.1. Food crop production

A variety of food crops are grown in the area following the different and favourable climatic options. Thus, the types of crops vary from the lower and middle belt to the upper belt. Maize, cassava, groundnut, cocoyams, plantains, groundnuts, bananas, pepper, beans and okra are cultivated in the lower and middle half to the Irish potatoes, cabbages, carrots, leeks, wheat, ginger in the upper regions of M'mouck Letch and Magha (Lockhart, 1994). The following pictures portray some of the food crops.

Plate 1: Some food crops (cocoyams and irish potatoes) in the lower belt of Wabane



Source: Wabane Communal Development

Source: Adopted from the Wabane rural council (2008)



Source: Snapshot by the author 21/03/2025

Picture 2: Road accident on the Bechati-Kendem road, 15/04/2024



Source: Wabane Communal Development Plan, 2012.

It should be noted that crops produced in the Upper belt serve both as food and cash crops to these people. This is because the same crops produced for local consumption in this region are equally exported in large scale. Besides food crops, this sub division is also outstanding in the production cash crops.

II.2. Cash crop production

Favourable geographical conditions in this sub-division also encouraged the cultivation of cash crops like oil palm, cocoa, coffee and many others.

Plate 2: Cash crops in Wabane sub-division



Source: Snapshot by the author 21/03/2025

Source: Snapshot by the author 21/03/2025

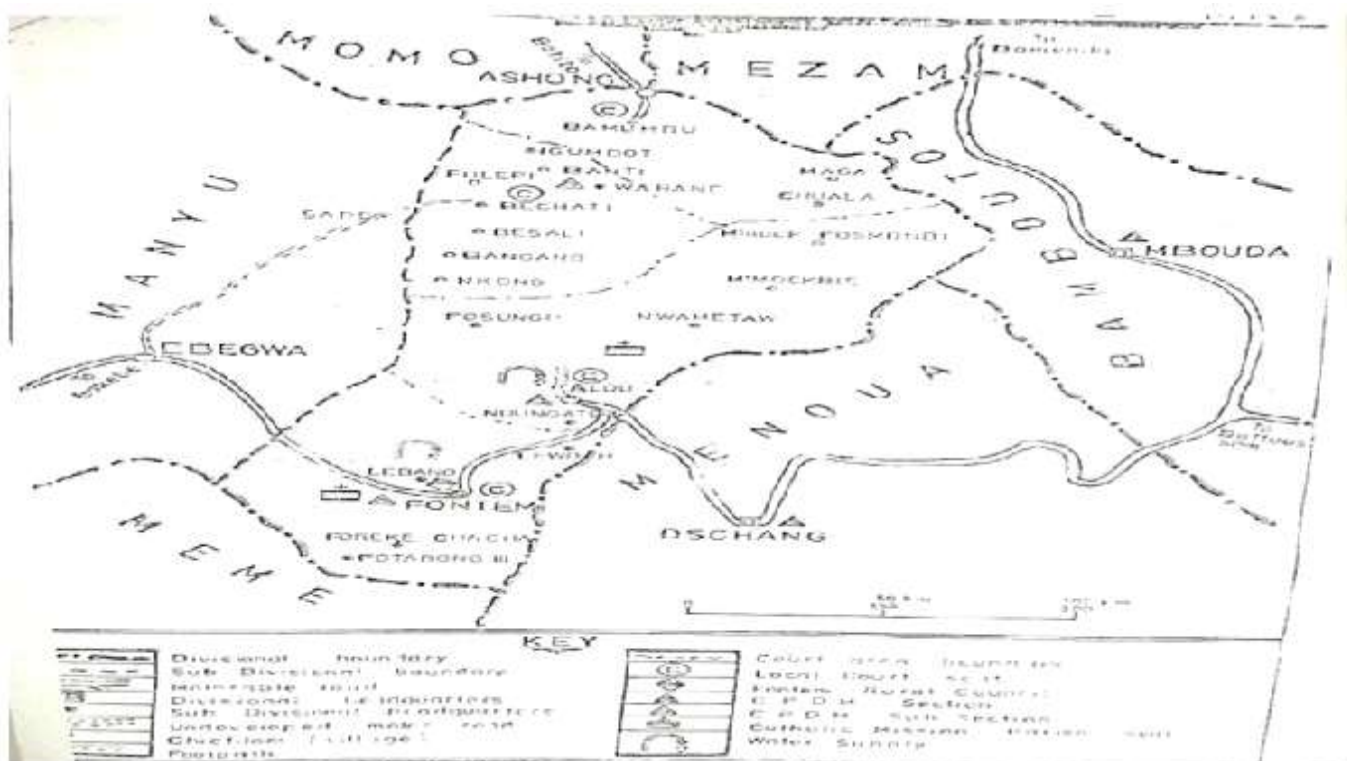
In lower Mundani, the main cash crop is palm oil production, cocoa and coffee (Mentoh, 2020:26). Apart from farming, other economic activities are very low, probably due to the [enclave](#) nature of the area. Livestock, hunting and fishery activities equally prevail in the area, though to a lesser extent due to constraints imposed by the enclaved nature of the sub-division.

III. Constraints to agricultural development in this sub-division

III.1. Poor road network and its consequences

Though in a strategic position between Dschang, Bangang and Mbouda in the Menoua Bamboutos divisions, Mamfe and Tinto in Manyu division and Batibo in Momo division, accessibility to Wabane is a nightmare. This sub-division is the most enclaved in Lebialem and second after Akwaya sub-division in the South west region of Cameroon.

Map2: Wabane sub division council area



Source: Adopted from the Wabane rural council (2008)

The few existing secondary tracks are virtually impracticable in the rainy season. All roads leading to Wabane from Alou, Menji, Mmockbin, Mmock Leteh, Kendem and Tinto are highly seasonal, with a stop in activity in the rainy season. Those who venture with their cars were exposed to risk of accidents as seen on the pictures below.

Picture 2: Road accident on the Bechati-Kendem road, 15/04/2024



Source: Snapshot by the author

Picture 3: Road accident on the Bechati-Mbecho road, 21/03/2025



Source: Snapshot by the author

These vehicles were going to or coming from Bechati village, the main economic and commercial center of the sub-division. The first picture shows a car transporting palm oil and plantains to Bamenda. This depicts of main agricultural products of the area. However, this study observed that transportation in Lebialem division in general and Wabane in particular is a thorny problem. The distance from Menji to Wabane is just about 60 kilometers and about 40 kilometers to Alou, a distance of about two hours if the road was good but which takes courageous drivers a day or two to get to Dschang and Fontem. The dangers of traveling by car or motorcycle on these roads have brought many to prefer to cover these distances by trekking through footpaths and motorable earth roads, sometimes with head loads to get important administrative and medical services or education. Even at that, crossing rivers like River Mezi (River Manyu), River Mekemi, River Mooh, River Mehob (Mehob), River Mephoh and many others without bridges especially in the rainy season is very risky as seen on the following snapshot.

Picture 4: Bridge over River Manyu in the dry



Source: Snapshot by the author (12/02/2024)

Plate 5: Bridge over River Manyu in the rainy season



Source: Snapshot by the author (25/08/2024)

These bad roads and the absence of bridges over existing rivers also impede the transportation of farm products to the market for sale. Parts of the division are inaccessible except through passages from other neighboring regions of Cameroon. Lebialem division is one of the rare divisions in Cameroon without a kilometer of tarred road out of the headquarters Menji. This makes the population of the sub-division to depend on local markets with very small magnitude compared to quantities of farm outputs. Thus, supply of agricultural output is more than the demand as a result of bad roads precluding external buyers. Consequently there is a drastical fall in prices, preventing farmers from making much money out of their hard work and the council unable to generate revenue for the development of this municipality. This has rendered much of the population poor and vulnerable. All these have hindered the development of agricultural opportunities despite the push from the two agricultural posts in Babong-Bamumbu and Bechati. It has equally hold back the economic and social development of this sub-division (Ojuku, 2020: 11).

III.2. The absence of social amenities

Wabane sub-division lacks social facilities like electricity, storage facilities, agricultural training centers, health facilities and many others. The government has completely abandon Wabane. After the landslide 2003, killing 21 people and destroying agricultural products and domestic animals, Bamumbu was declared unfit for human habitation (Ntasin, Ayonghe & Suh, 2009: 79-90). Even

before the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in the area in 2017, even government officials like teachers, medical doctors and many others commissioned to ensure administrative relay always desert the area. People trek for about sixty kilometres to consult a medical doctor. In some parts of the sub division, patients are carried on locally made stretchers to the hospital following the poor states of roads. To make things worse, the District Medical Officer (DMO) for Wabane was hardly on seat to supervise health issues of the district. This *laissez-faire* culminated to the inappropriate consultation and admission of patients in the district office. The natives therefore depend on traditional medicine for the treatment of ailments prevalent in the region. Traditional healers operate in organized traditional healing homes (Focho, Ndam & Fonge, 2009: 001-13).

With respect to electricity, apart from some parts of Bamumbu where the biased Mayor caused electrification, the rest of the sub-division is in total darkness. Below are some instruments of electrification in this sub-division.

Plate 3: Instruments of electrification in Wabane sub-division



Source: Snapshot by the author

Besides the absence of electricity, there is automatically the lack of storage facilities (cold houses) for this highly perishable farm products.

The health sector in this sub-division is also deplorable. There are just two health units; one in Bamumbu and another in Bechati for an estimated population of 38175 habitants. But it is lamentable to note that this even the two existing government health facilities in the area does not have personnel. Most medical and administrative staff deserts the area after taking service or do not come at all. All these are because of the enclaved nature of Lebialem division in general and Wabane in particular. Roads in this division resemble paths dug by some wild animals. Meanwhile this division is politically represented by a member of parliament (Honourable Ateawung Benard Foju 2002-present), Nembo Israel Ketu and Senator (Fon) Lekunze Nembo-Ngwe III. These people have manifested a very high degree of greed towards their people, coming going them only at the eve of every election. Yet, a Lebialem man continue to offer himself cheap by accepting bottles of beer, salt, T-shirts, rice and other perishable items and voting to maintain these elites in power. The appeal here is simple. The powers that be should tilt their attention to the development of Lebialem. These hard working people expect just good roads and social facilities from the government and they shall be well empowered to take care of themselves. Their farms can provide millions of francs CFA to them if main roads from Dschang, Ebiagwa, Mamfe, Menji, Kombou can converge in Wabane and a Wabane man will not ask for any employment from government (Akanga, 2020:9)¹².

Conclusion

Wabane sub division is blessed with fertile soils and mild climatic conditions conducive for agriculture. This physical advantage and available man power has made this sub-division an agricultural giant not only in Lebialem but in Cameroon. The people produced both abundant quantities of both food crops (maize, cassava, groundnut, cocoyams, plantains, bananas, beans, okra, irish potatoes, cabbages, carrots, leeks, wheat, ginger ...) and cash crops (Cocoa, coffee, oil palm ...). In spite its diverse agricultural potentials and other economic endowments, the sub division suffers from acute underdevelopment resulting from a poor transport network. Despite huge production of both cash and food crops, the people remain very poor. Good roads linking the sub division to neighbouring divisions and sub-divisions would have help this people to easily convey their products to wider markets, thus fetching the farmers much money. This could have also invited business persons from far to do business with the people thus empowering them. Suffice to note that with good roads, Nigerian markets are very close to Wabane producers, passing through Mamfe. With

¹² CONLECUDA (Confederation of Lebialem Cultural and Development Association) 2020

this, this study invites the elites, government and friends of the sub division to work in synergy for the development of this sub-division.

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