

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND TRADITIONAL USES OF HIGHLANDS AMONG THE KILBA TRIBE OF HONG LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

From time immemorial settlements were restricted to the most desirable highlands for variety of benefits. The aim of the study is to identify the socio-economic and traditional uses of highlands among the Kilba communities. The types of data required are highlands and their features such as altitude and specific activities associated with the landforms. The data were generated from the field, published relevant materials and interviews. The scope covers highlands of Hong Local Government Area and their uses among Kilba communities. From the results, the Kilbas occupy a region that is generally hilly with highlands ranging from 426 to 1158m above mean sea level. The highlands have diverse attributes such as presence of settlement sites, caves, perennial water points, observation post and niches that are used for defence and sustenance. The people attach predominant socio-economic and traditional activities to some observable locations on the highlands that enabled them to withstand undesirable circumstances. The result recommends customs and traditions that made communities more stable should be up-hold and to serve as a base for rural development. The result implies with inclination to highland attributes and adoption of traditional technologies there is strong unity and stability among the Kilbas.

Keywords: Landforms, Settlements, Highland resources, Caves, Culture, Defence

Introduction

From the concept of Environmental Quality, there are varieties of highland attributes that attracted settlement from time immemorial (Ballinger, 2011). Likewise, the concept of Geographical Determinism states that when settlements were on the selected hills the physical environment was the primary determinant of social, cultural and economic activities (Murphy, 1971). In Africa, landforms have been viewed as resource and as constraints (Faniran, 1985). Hence, there are certain environmental qualities considered conducive by people that attracted settlement on hills(Ballinger,2011). The heritages of the highlands are important to the indigenes because the landscape and local materials are strong force for community cohesion and reduce rural isolation (Highland Leader, 2008). Over large areas of tropical Africa, the sort of settlement unit which were common before 1950s was the hilltop settlements. Often the site offers protection and has essential environmental resources (Hilton, 1961). Likewise, study by the European Commission (2006) reveals that hill slope are cultivated by peasant farmers on highly fragmented farmlands. The studies of Ballinger (2011) and Hilton (1961) are important by identifying the physical features of the highlands that attracted man from time immemorial. However, the studies did not significantly assess the socio-economic and traditional uses of highlands to rural communities. More

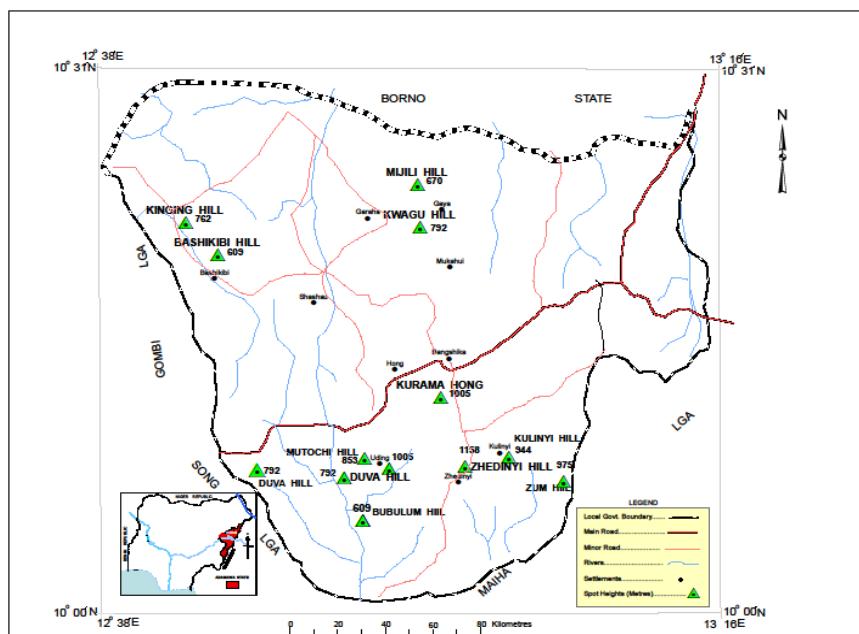
importantly, no micro-scale study has been done on the socio-economic and traditional uses of highlands among the Kilba tribe of Hong Local Government Area.

It is from this perspective that the research was embarked upon to assess the socio-economic and traditional uses of highlands among the Kilba tribe while the objectives are to identify the prominent highlands, their distribution, geometric characteristics and resources. The scope and relevance of the study is restricted to Hong Local Government Area, Kilba communities, and the significance of the highlands. The relevance identified how the Kilbas from time immemorial depends on the highland environment for various needs. It also enables researchers to identify and differentiate the traditional uses of highlands among the diverse tribes of Nigeria and elsewhere which could be a stepping stone for further rural development and environmental resources planning.

Background to the Study Area

Hong Local Government Area is located in Adamawa State, Nigeria. It lies between latitudes $09^{\circ}57'$ and $10^{\circ}32'N$ and between longitudes $12^{\circ}38'E$ and $13^{\circ}16'E$ as shown on Figure 1.

The relief and landforms of the area is generally hilly with highlands ranging from about 426 to 1158m above mean sea level (Garkida, Nigeria, Sheet 155).



Source: Garkida, Nigeria, Sheet 155

Figure 1: Sample Highlands of Hong Local Government Area

The landscape of the area consists of high plains dominated by compacted residual hills such as Tholbang, Kiratho, Kakahi and Motuchi; and isolated domes of various heights and sizes such as Kingking, Hizza and Duva. The relief portray different forms such as long and narrow range of hills such as Hizza, Tholbang, Kulinyi and Motuchi to broad and

compacted hills of Shangu'i, Kakahi, Lum, Kiratho and Dlam. Duva, Bashikibi, Kinging and Bubulum among others form the conical hills that are isolated and show higher points above the surrounding flat surfaces. Kukurpu on the other hand is a pile of large granitic boulders. There are stretches of lower surfaces such as Dungkula, Duduku, Gang-Mulia and Babal-Fida between Motuchi, Jagwatu and Gabadzil hills. The highlands serve as catchment for streams and rivers such as Fa'a, Bubulum, Ngilang among others that are in a dendritic pattern (Garkida, Nigeria, Sheet 155).

The Huba land has prominent highlands on which settlements and farmlands were situated in the 13th century (Gudumbul, 2006). The Huba people were referred to as Kulba and translated to mean Kilba which is the most popular term used in official records since the colonial days (Gudumbul, 2006). Gudumbul (2006) adapted the concept Huba, but this research adapted Kilba. The tribe is the predominant ethnic group that occupies the mountainous region of Hong Local Government Area, Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

The types of data required for the study are information related to geometric characteristics and distribution of the prominent hills and specific socio-economic and traditional uses of the highlands. The sources of data include the field where contemporary activities such as arable farming and grazing were observed; topographic sheet(Garkida, Nigeria, Sheet 155) provide data on geometric characteristics of highlands such as height and distribution; and traditional activities associated with the highlands were generated from the respondents which consist of both aged male and female. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents especially the elders who have ideas on the traditional uses of highlands. Furthermore, prominent highlands with significant heights above mean sea level were purposively sampled as shown on the Figure 1. More importantly, published related materials provide data on background to the study. A total of 80 respondents were selected for the study. This was distributed among the 16settlements that were purposively selected. From each settlement 5 respondents which include both adult male and female were selected.

Results and Discussions

The pre-colonial settlements among the Kilbas were restricted to the prominent highlands due to fear against the tribal wars, relatively inaccessible heights, presence of defensive caves and reliable sources of water. In contrast to the past, the highlands are used for arable farming, livestock rearing and sources of essential vegetal products such as herbs and native vegetables. Height of the sample highlands ranges from 609 to 1158m. Zhedinyi and Zhegumi are the highest while Bashikibi and Bubulum form the lowest. This implies that their elevations above the pediment are ideal for sentry.

Table 1 presents the prominent highlands of the area and their geometric characteristics.

Table 1: Sample Highlands and their Geometric Characteristics

S. No.	Highland	Height (m)	Peak Location	
			Latitude	Longitude
1	Bashikibi	609	10°17'	13°49'
2	Bubulum	609	10°05'	12°52'
3	Duva	792	10°07'	12°49'
4	Kulinji	944	10°10'	13°00'
5	Kwagu Krama	792	10°24'	12°59'
6	Hong(Kakah)	1005	10°13'	12°58'
7	Mijili	670	10°20'	12°59'
8	Motuchi	853	10°08'	12°54'
9	Tholbang	1005	10°08'	12°57'
10	Zhedinyi	1158	10°09'	13°00'
11	Zhegumi	1158	10°09'	12°51'
12	Zum	975	10°08'	13°03'
			$\bar{x} = 880.83$	

Source: Garkida, Nigeria, Sheet 155

Socio-economic and Traditional Uses of Highlands among the Kilbas.

Table2 presents the respondents' view on the predominant uses of highlands among the Kilbas.

Table2: Respondents' View on the Predominant Uses of Highlands among the Kilbas

Uses	Respondents	Percentage
Settlement site	17	21.25
Observation post	15	18.75
Niche for traditional ceremonies	12	15.00
Reserve for wildlives	10	12.50
Sources of water	8	10.00
Hunting and gathering	7	8.75
Arable farming	5	6.25
Catchment regions	4	5.00
Transhumance	2	2.50
Total	80	100.00

Source: Field Study, 2013

Settlement Site: From the table, settlement site is the most important use of the highlands with 21.25% respondents. According to the respondents, the earlier settlements among the Kilbas are Bashikibi, Gaya, Kinging, Krama Hong, Mijili, Mukahui,

Tholbang and Uding among others were confined to some selected prominent hills. These hills (Duva, Krama Hong, Kulinyi, Kwagu, Motuchi, Mukahui, Tholbang and Zum) according to the respondents were found more convenient for establishment of settlements because they have desirable security features such as caves, relatively inaccessible height and high sentry post. Other features include well drained surfaces, and have pools which are reliable sources of water.

Some caves (*thol*) have certain security features that attracted people. They have features like 'room', for example, *thol* Zama on Motuchi hill that was inhabited by a hunter known as Ali. The caves served as 'room' in addition to hide-out for women and children at any time of tribal wars and wild live attack. The caves that were selected as safe dwelling 'room' have a narrow and single entrance, it cannot be penetrated by rain and flowing water, and some have bed-like boulders.

The caves are essential by serving as a 'room' to some wild animals such as leopard, baboon, badger and lion that are sensitive to rainy weather. Nocturnal such as porcupine and hyena spend their inactive day-length in the caves. More importantly, the totem ear-mark specific caves as their residence. Totem (*mutu*) is specific wild animal that is initiated to human being traditionally by synthesis. Gudumbul (2006) stated that totem (*mutu*) is a secret mystic relationship with certain wild animals by means of magical rites, thus, the person and the animal became so identified that each is the alter ego of the other.

From the respondents, during the hill-top settlements, the traditionalists' ear-mark certain cave as residence of 'god' where the appointed elderly male son of a specific family performs certain traditional rite in form of appreciation or request. For example, at Uding during any period of severe ill-health such as smallpox and leprosy, and during climatic anomaly like drought, Nya Motuchi and Gabazil which were considered as the most powerful 'gods' were consulted by offering a male black goat as sacrifice to cast away the calamities. Furthermore, Gudumbul (2006) maintained that the cults located on Ngau and Zhedinyi hills were regarded as a medium through which Kilba could reach God (*Hyel*) by the priests who maintain the cults by annual sacrifice. The cults were sought for obtaining rain and for more secular purpose such tribal war.

Besides, initiation of adult male into manhood (*mba*) is one of the most important traditional ceremonies associated with specific caves. The initiation is a non-cult either a ritual ceremony performed once to an adult male to mark the beginning of independency of an adult male from the parents, and prepares man to face community challenges. For example, Dzugldam cave at Motuchi hills. The cave was preferred because of certain acquired characteristics such as it is transparent because of the two wide opposite entrance (*nyathol*) that allows significant penetration of sunlight and facilitate the up-right movement of people; relatively accessible; and has significant smooth roof and wall to mark a recognizable symbol by the adult male that is initiated (*mbabiya*). The mark cannot fade away easily, but remains for a period of about ten years. During the initiation (*mba*), the man (*salmba*) makes signs of his interest on the wall of the cave with a traditional paint (*hutsudu*) to serve as an evidence that he has been initiated (*mbabiya*).

Observation Post: From the respondents, 18.75% stated that the high points on the extensive highland surfaces such as Duva, Kulinyi, Kwagu, Motuchi, Mukahui, Tholbang, Zhegumi and Zum served as sentry post. For example, a high spot (*Pathar Hyel*) on Motuchi hills was ear-marked for observation of any approaching enemies. Whenever an approaching mob is identified the whole communities are informed by blowing horn as a hint to the warrior group (*midala*) to lay ambush using the traditional technology on any possible access. During this incidence, children and female were sent to the safe caves. According to the respondents this technique was adopted to defend themselves from any invading mob. For example, Udo (1980) maintained that the Kilbas were never subdued or enslaved by the

Fulani Jihad during the domination of the surrounding plains in the 19th and 20th century because they live on relatively inaccessible highlands such as Kingking, Kulinyi, Motuchi and Tholbang among others that dominated the area. Furthermore, according to the respondents during the Boko Haram sudden attack on Hong Local Government Area on Thursday 13th November, 2014 hills such as Kulda at Pella, Krama Hong at Hong, and Patha at Uding serve as defensive locations to the locally displaced people.

Niche for Traditional Ceremonies: According to 15% of the respondents, initiation of adult male into manhood (*mba*), outing ceremony (*tiwi*), totem initiation (*mbamutu*) and turbaning of chieftaincy (*mbakur*) were the predominant social activities associated with certain ear-marked points on the highlands. The respondents stated that for a site to be generally accepted as a niche for traditional activities it has certain recognizable features such as presence of boulder (*dzaku*), huge tree stands or cave.

The respondents revealed that from about 1915 up till the creation of the seven districts of Hong Local Government Area in 1992 the predominant chieftaincy among the Kilbas are *TolHuba*, *Yerima* and *Shall*. *Tol Huba* was turbaned at Krama Hong; *Yerima* on Motuchi hills at Uding; and *Shall Kulinyi*, *Mukahui*, *Pella*, and *Zhedinyat Kulinyi*, Mukahui, Tholbang and Zhedinyi hills accordingly. From the respondents, there were traditionally isolated and preserved sites on the hills of Hong, Kulinyi, Mukahui, Tholbang, Uding and Zhedinyi which are the traditional settlements responsible for the turbaning of chieftaincy (*Tol*, *Yerima* and *Shall*). The ear-marked niches were maintained and served as relics where every *Tol*, *Yerima* and *Shall* takes an oath on his well-wish leadership. However, with the decentralization of traditional ruler from *Tol Hubato* District Heads, and the introduction of deceitful imposition of the district heads by politicians soon after creation of the seven districts in 1992 as against the normal election of the chief (*Tol*) by the constituted traditional king makers, there is a systematic decline in use of the traditional sites.

More importantly, at Zugwanguli (Uding), *Patha* was ear-marked as a niche for outing ceremony (*tiwi*). The ceremony is a non-ritual and cult rite that is performed once after the death of an elderly person to appreciate and mark the burial. It is organized by the relatives of the deceased. *Patha* is an area characterized with significant flat surface (about 1,500sq.m.) for dancing, horserace; and has three perennial water points which include Kurnyi, Lakwasarya and Zugwanguli that are very close (about 500m). Another area designated for outing ceremony was Moshamaat Mulia (Uding). For sustainable utilization, the respondents stated that the areas were fenced with boulders and cactus to control gully erosion. In addition, the respondents stated that high spots within the communities were used for public announcements during the period of hilltop settlement. This is because the elevation boosts the voice of the town-crier to ensure wider household coverage. For example, because of the central location and high point of Mosubu on Motuchi hills was ear-marked by the wards such as Zugwanguli, Holma, Duduko and Mulia on which to make public announcements.

Reserve for Wildlives: From the respondents, 12.50% believe that highlands such as Bubulum, Duva, Kinging, Kwagu, Kulinyi and Motuchi are ideal habitats for wildlives (mammals, reptiles and aves). The highlands serve as a secured habitat for the animals than the pediment because of the presence of caves, perennial pools, crowded vegetation cover and the physiographic nature (piled boulders, high sentry post and inaccessibility) that provide cover from sight by prey and predators. Also there is insignificant intervention by human activities such as bush burning, massive vegetation clearance, hunting, and above all, the highlands are exclusively restricted from intervention by non-indigene.

Sources of Water: From the respondents, 10% revealed that when settlements were confined to hills because of insecurity, the people obtain water for domestic uses from the perennial pools such as Zugwangulion Motuchi hills (Uding), Chacha on Kwagu hills

(Gaya), *Dol* Taku on Krama Hong hills, Hihiland Tapichima on Tholbang hills (Pella). According to the respondents, during the raid by 'PrasariArabiu', the mob conceal around *Dol* Ngilang, the only observable source of water on the pediment between Mothol, Pella and Uding settlements with the belief that they will capture anybody descending from the hills (Tholbang, Kulda and Motuchi) to fetch water, but none appeared because people have reliable sources of water on the hills.

The pools were few and insignificant in area coverage (about 2-3sq. m.), but they yield water to satisfy the demand of the populace. For sustainable development, the pools were fenced with boulders and thorny plants such as *guldula* and cactus to control siltation from geological and accelerated erosion, and were dredged annually. However, it is observed that most of the pools such as Zugwanguli, Hihiland Tapichima have dried up due to siltation and local landslides. This is so, because people have descended from the hills and the pools are neglected due to accessible, clean and perennial sources of water such as bore-holes and artisan wells on the plains.

Hunting and Gathering: From the results, 8.75% of the respondents stated they practice hunting and gathering as avocation on the hills. They selectively and occasionally hunt wildlives such as mammals, birds and reptiles for bush meat either by setting traps on their routes or bow and poisoned arrow, but not din-gun that frighten the totem. The highlands are characterized by insignificant intervention by human activities such as massive vegetation clearance, bush burning, relatively quiet and have caves. These conditions support diverse wildlife species than on the pediments that are significantly affected by human activities such as noise of moving vehicles at the detriment of the wildlives. In addition, the caves favour breeding of diverse species of wildlives such as the diurnal like badger, and the nocturnal like porcupine that are hunted for bush meat.

According to the respondents, the populace harvest native vegetal products such as fruits like *Haemostaphusbarteri* (*daka*) that are adapted to the hilly and well drained soils, vegetables like *Balanitesaegyptiaca* (*baha*), and fuel wood from species like *Anogeissusleiolarpus* (*tava*) that burns steady. Nonetheless, indigenous species of plants identified as useful components of herbs could be available on both the highlands and pediments. However, the respondents stated that the species on the highlands are better preferred on the belief there are peculiar characteristics that made them more genuine. For example, some are insignificantly affected by fire; human and animal wastes (urine, faeces and dung) that contaminate the species; other species have not been exposed to longer and frequent periods of harvesting; and some species are only found on the highlands associated with well drained soils.

Arable Farming: From the table, 6.25% of the respondents stated that the fertile soils on the accessible highlands are exploited for crop production. On the highlands, it is observed that crops such as beans, guinea corn and groundnuts are cultivated on the spotted soils between the boulders. From the respondents, highland crop cultivation is more profitable than the pediments because occasionally highlands experience relief rainfall different (occurrence, duration and intensity) from the surrounding pediments that support plants growth. For example, Faniran and Ojo (1980) maintains the average lapse rate of 6.5°C per 1,000km, and 1°C per 164m (Areola *et al*, 2006) suggests that the highlands of the area which ranges from about 609 to 1158m high experience more rainfall than the surrounding pediments. Furthermore, the numerous exposed granitic rock surfaces generate water even under very little rainfall to meet crop requirements, and highland crop cultivation is closer (about 500m to 2km.) to settlements which reduce the long distance trekking. However, highland crop production is laborious because the diverse processes (clearing, weeding, harvesting and transportation of farm produce) are exclusively manual because the

steep slopes and rocky surfaces inhibits the use of machines, but only traditional and light tools.

Catchment Regions: From the table, 5% of the respondents stated that the highlands serve as catchments (high point of discharge down slope) which lead to the development of streams and rivers. The highlands because of their elevation (about 609 to 1158m), steep slopes and underlying hard geology reduce infiltration, and do not allow longer retention of concentrated surface water. For example, rivers like Dogwaba rises from Mijili (670m) and Kwagu (792m) hills; river Dzagula rises from Hizza hill (701m); river Fa'a from Bubulum (609m), Duva (792m) and Tholbang (1005m) hills; and river Tolowa from Tholbang (1005m), Motuchi (853m), Zhedinyi (792m) and Kulinyi (944m) hills (Garkida, Nigeria, Sheet 155).

More importantly, the respondents revealed that the wetlands provide fertile soils for the cultivation of diverse varieties of crop like rice at Mbulnyi and Dogwaba; sugar can eat Kwagang and Pella; and tree crops like mangoes at Waja, Fadama Reke, Pella and Zhedinyi. Furthermore, wetlands such as Dogwaba and Ngilang serve as the dry season (February to May) grazing lands because of the presence of palatable fresh pasture and water against the surrounding dry lands on which the grasses have been burnt, contaminated with animal slurries (urine and dung), over grazed and significantly trampled.

Transhumance: From the respondents, 2.50% identified that highlands are used for livestock grazing. The advantage of relocating cattle to the highlands include: it provides opportunity for livestock owners to put more labour into other productive activities such as crop production; it inhibits conflict between crop farmers and the herders over crops; and it saves money being spent on hired herdsmen. Transhumance among the Kilbas is associated with the dry and wet seasons, and the socio-economic activities of the populace. The vertical movement (from lowlands to highlands and vice versa) is characterized by seasonal availability of water and pasture. In the dry season (January to May) it is observed that surface water is very scarce on the highlands being limited to few scattered perennial pools like Mula'ool, Chirichiri and Lakwasarya; and depressions on the hard granitic rock surfaces such as Patha'ola and WachiraBata. Furthermore, during the dry season (March to May) when pastures are seriously scarce on the plains due to bush burning, over grazing and significantly trampled, the cattle are moved to the highlands to graze on pulp of tree species such as *Acacia albida* and *Acacia senegalensis*; dry grasses and palatable leaves such as *Kaya granfoliala*.

Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, culture, custom and traditions should not be neglected because of westernization, but upheld and improved upon to meet the challenges of the increasing insecurity in Nigeria and elsewhere. Furthermore, the indigenes should conduct rural resources assessment to identify their priority for sustainable development.

More importantly, the traditional rulers (district, village and ward heads) should encourage the entire communities to sustain the abandoned pools on the hills by dredging and fencing them to serve as water points for the wildlives and during abnormal situations. Furthermore, access to the caves which have been blocked by shrubs, and destroyed by erosion and local landslides should be rehabilitated to bring back their past glory as defensive sites.

Study should be conducted to find out the causes of the increasing conflict in Nigeria and elsewhere by comparing the traditional activities that facilitated harmony among the rural communities to the modern western cultures associated with conflicts. Furthermore, research should be embarked upon to investigate on how to improve the highland resources for sustainable development of the rural communities.

Conclusion

The names of the prominent hills within the Kilba communities represent the names of the ‘gods’ that live in such hills. The elders believed on them as their leaders whom they sought for help whenever there is need in connection to rain, defence, ill-health and any calamities. The hills serve as defensive spots because of the caves and high sentry post. They inclined their socio-economic and traditional activities onto the niches ear-marked on the hills. The result implies the hills support socio-economic and traditional activities than the pediment because of their elevation, have rugged surfaces, relatively inaccessible, presence of caves and niches.

The indigene-ship among the Kilbas coincides with the highlands on which people were living. The pre-colonial settlements were on the prominent highlands, but later on descended to the pediments. Thus, the names of most contemporary settlements have their origins from the highlands. However, on the pediments there are indiscriminate migration and diverse mixing leading to the abandon and adulteration of cultures and traditions. The tribe occupies highland area ranging from about 429 to 1158m above mean sea level and depends on highland features such as caves and water for existence.

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