

Harnessing Cultural Attractions for Sustainable Development in Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract: This article examines cultural attractions in Mezam Division and their potential contributions to sustainable development. Through a comprehensive analysis of the area's rich cultural heritage, including arts and craft(gastronomy), traditional manifestations (annual festivals), architecture, and natural landscapes, the study explore how these assets can be strategically harnessed to promote economic, social and environmental sustainability. The research made use of a mixed-methods approach including surveys, field observations and in-depth interviews to assess the current status of cultural attractions and their potential role in sustainable development. A stratified purposeful sampling technique was used to select 95 respondents. The findings reveal that Mezam Division is endowed with diverse cultural attractions which offer significant opportunities in fostering sustainable development in the area. However, these potentials remain underutilized to fully address sustainability issues. There is therefore, a need for strategic interventions in order to effectively harness cultural attractions for sustainable development in Mezam Division.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Cultural Attractions, Mezam Division, Heritage, Tradition.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry. This type of tourism defined as the travel directed towards experiencing arts, heritage, and traditional places does not only offer opportunities to generate economic benefits but also creates avenues to preserve cultural identity and promote inclusivity and social cohesion. Given its importance, the UNESCO (2005) Convention [9] on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions recognized culture not just as a mere object of conservation but as a mainspring for sustainable development. In addition, the United Nations has put more emphasis on the potential of cultural heritage and the creative industries to drive inclusive growth, preserve cultural identities and foster resilience in communities. Cultural tourism offers great opportunities for communities to leverage their rich heritage for socioeconomic development, thereby fostering economic resilience and social cohesion [10]. This type of tourism is therefore, seen as both a catalyst and enabler of sustainable development. The sustainable development paradigm emphasizes on the need of meeting the needs of the present generation without

compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Within this context, cultural attractions offer meaningful opportunities for creating sustainable livelihoods, preserving indigenous knowledge systems, and enabling cross-cultural understanding.

Connecting the overall principles of sustainable development and local realities, Mezam Division located in the North West Region of Cameroon offers a fertile ground for culturally driven development. The Division holds a cultural reservoir and is endowed with a wealth of cultural attractions ranging from beautiful royal palaces and sacred traditions to colourful festivals, outstanding cuisine and skilled craftsmanship. However, these cultural assets remain untapped and underutilized in contributing in local development. This tourism sector in Mezam Division is still at it infancy stage to generate meaning development in a sustainable manner. Against this backdrop, aligning cultural tourism with the principles of sustainable development becomes critical.

This paper examines the cultural endowments of Mezam Division and situates them within the broader

framework of sustainable development. It seeks to examine how a culturally rooted, community-based approach to tourism can be harnessed not only as a means for economic revitalization but also as a pathway to inclusive and resilient growth and overall sustainable development.

II. STUDY AREA

This study is limited within the confines of Mezam Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. Mezam Division is one of the seven divisions in the North West Region of Cameroon situated within the high land area of the

North West Region of Cameroon. It is located between latitudes $5^{\circ}40'N$ and $7^{\circ}50'N$ and longitudes $09^{\circ}8'E$ and $11^{\circ}51'E$ with an approximate land surface area of $1,841.45\text{km}^2$. Mezam Division is divided into seven sub-divisions:- Bamenda I, II, and III Sub-divisions, Bafut Sub-division, Bali Sub-division, Santa Sub-division and Tubah Sub-division with Bamenda city serving as the administrative headquarters. Mezam is bounded to the North by Menchum and Boyo Divisions, to the south by Lebialem Division and the Bamboutos highlands, to the West by Momo Division, and the East by Ngo Ketunjia Division (Figure 1).

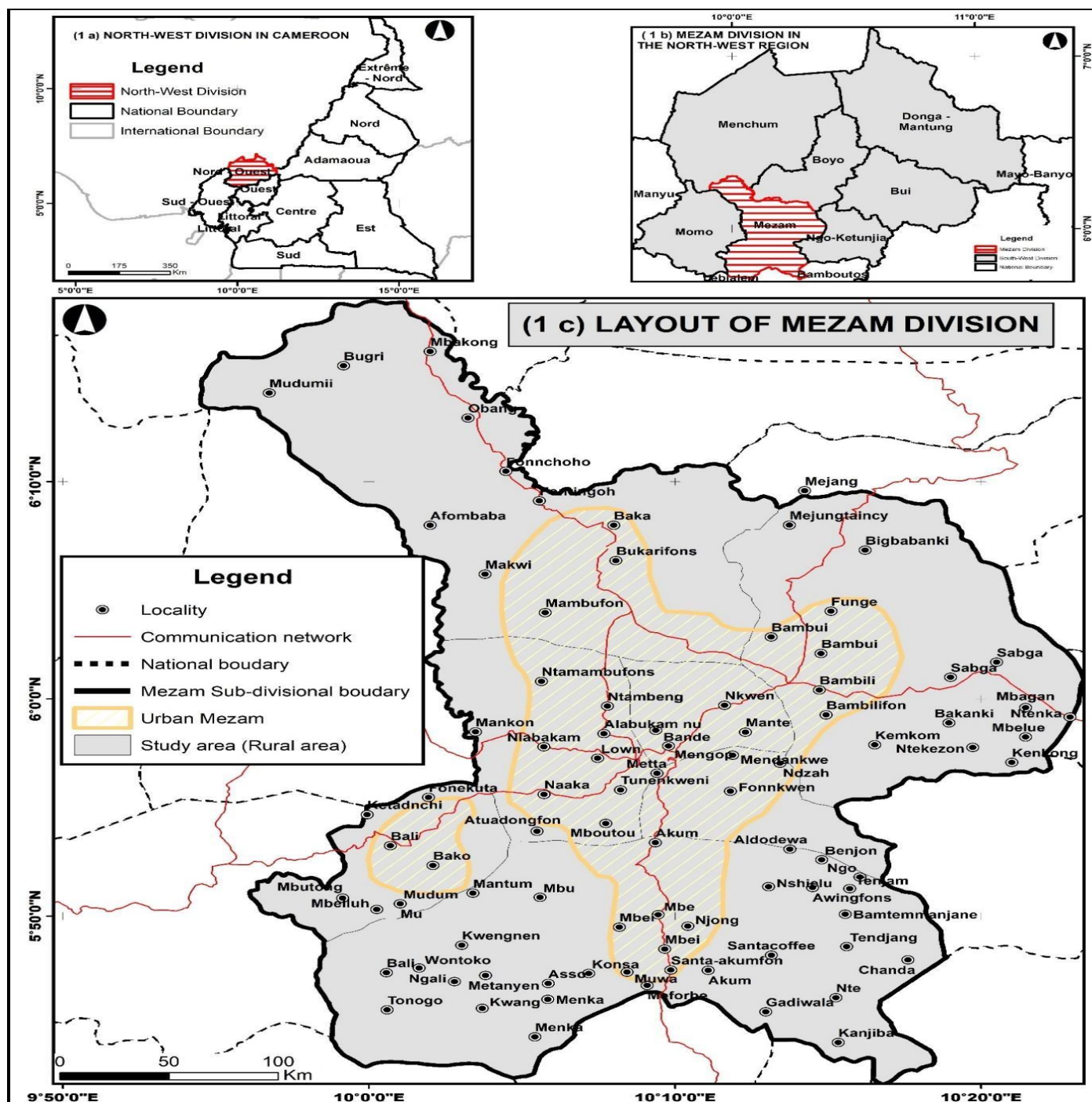


Fig 1 Location of the Study Area

Source: Generated from Geo database of Cameroon, 2013, NIS Yaounde

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to examine the role of cultural tourism in promoting sustainable development in Mezam Division. The qualitative method is used in the study to gain an in-depth understanding of cultural attractions and stakeholder perspectives on the place of cultural tourism in sustainable development while the quantitative method is used to assess the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of cultural tourism in the study area.

The qualitative data were collected through field observations and semi-structured interviews. Cultural festivals were attended, while site visits were made to traditional palaces, and craft areas to appreciate the state of cultural tourism infrastructure and heritage preservation. During these visits, photos were taken to virtualize the rich cultural potentials of Mezam Division. In-depth interviews were conducted with traditional rulers, cultural custodians, local government officials as well as tourism related officials in order to gain meaningful insight on the role of cultural heritage in sustainable local development.

Quantitative data were collected with the use of structured questionnaires. The findings of the study are drawn from a focused segment of data collected during a broader research project carried out by the authors. Based on this, a sample of 95 respondents was purposefully sorted from the larger sample size for the purposes of this article. Using stratified purposeful sampling technique, the questionnaires were administered to the local residents, cultural stakeholders, municipal authorities and small business owners involved in tourism related activities.

Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and field notes expanded, coded and thematically analysed. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were entered to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies and cross-tabulations to identify trends and patterns related to community participation in cultural tourism and the perceived role of cultural tourism in sustainable local development.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (ANALYSIS)

➤ *Inventory and Condition Assessment of Cultural Attractions in Mezam Division*

The findings of the study reveal that, Mezam Division is endowed with numerous cultural attractions ranging from arts and craft, traditional manifestations, cultural infrastructures and nature based attractions.

• *Arts and Craft Cultural Attraction*

Arts and crafts constitute an integral part of cultural attraction in Mezam Division. The region is renowned for its bamboo works, woodcarving, weaving, embroidery, and beadworks. The craft work does not only represent the artistic expressions and creativity of the people but also portrays the indigenous knowledge systems and historical narratives.

Woodcarving is a prominent traditional as well as an economic activity in Mezam Division. The people of Mezam use carving as a way to portray their culture and at the same time as a source of livelihood. The different items carved have different designs and cultural significances depending on the message the carver wants to convey. Carved items include masks, statues stools, cups, and door posts. The masks are mainly used by Masquerades during traditional dance manifestations. Statues are often carved and placed in shrines, or used in ritual ceremonies, and for decoration while others statues are carved as monuments of important dignitaries and symbolic animals. The very old carvings have become antiquities kept in museums. These carved items are often made of varied designs with motifs of lions, tigers, elephants, lizards, leopards, and parts of human beings (heads, hands, legs, amongst others). Some of these carving are shown on Plate 1.



Plate 1 Carved Artifacts in Mezam Division

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Plate 1 shows some carved artefacts in Mezam Division. Note: Photo A shows a wooden stool decorated with lizard motif. Photo B, a human statue in traditional attire and a carved globe, photo C a wooden comb and photo D monuments of past

The Mezam people were also noted for their weaving prowess. Weaving activity in the area involves the transformation of raw materials such as raffia bamboo and rattan into admirable products such as chairs, tables, traditional curtains, bags, wall hangings, baskets and rattles among others. The research findings revealed that this activity is mainly in the Bamenda II, Bamenda III, Bafut and Santa Sub-Divisions. These parts of the study have extensive valleys and marshy lands with large raffia bamboo and rattan vegetation. The presence of these raw materials has encouraged the establishment and growth of this cultural activity in these areas. Plate 2 shows some weaved items in the study area.



Plate 2 Weaved Items Displayed in the Bamenda Handicraft Cooperative Society Workshop in Bafut

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Photo E shows weaved Purse and Slippers', Photo F shows a woven table and Chair while Photo G shows baskets and statues that symbolizes traditional huts in the Grass field, made from straw and raffia bamboo fibres.

Embroidery is another significant artistic activity in Mezam Division. It is the craft of decorating fabric or other materials using needles and assorted threads. Works of embroidery have attracted many tourists since time immemorial. Traditional caps, bags, shoes, and regalia are items produced by the artisans. The traditional regalia commonly called 'Togho' stands out to be the most renowned embroidered item by virtue of its demand and use from all over the world. It is very unique in its design; it is made with multi-coloured woollen threads of red, green, yellow, and white that are skilfully marked into a black fabric with

different symbols and patterns [3]. 'Togho' is designed for males and females; some are restricted to royalties and others for commoners. Designs carrying special symbols like cowries and animal skin attached to them are meant for royalty and notables. Embroidered designs include the gong, calabash, spear, peace plants, flowers, the sun, the moon, spider, crab, lizard, snake, and snail, which all have different meanings. These designs are marked depending on the message the designer is trying to communicate. The gong signifies a musical instrument used during traditional celebrations, while the crab stands for rebirth. Some are done manually, and others are marked with the use of machines. This regalia is complemented by traditional caps (Plate 3) crocheted with different designs. Those designed with porcupine spikes and feathers are worn by Fons (traditional leader), chiefs, and entitled men of the community.



Plate 3 Displayed Tradition Regalia
Source: Field work, 2022

Photo H shows a grass field Regalia - 'Togho'. This regalia is won with crocheted caps in Photo I, having different designs depending on consumers taste.

To complement traditional regalia and other cultural attires, bead works have emerged and expanded throughout the region. It is the most recent and fastest growing activity in the handicraft sector. The items produced are unique and

outstanding, which have attracted a lot of tourists (national and international borders). They include ornaments (sandals, slippers, handbags, and belts), household decorations (lamp stands, table mats, and flower vases), and jewellery (bangles, necklaces, and earrings). This activity is dominant in the urban areas of the study area and in Bafut, and it is a steady activity done by the palace women (Photo H).



Plate 4 Displayed beaded Jewelries

Source: Field work, 2022

These beaded items are in high demand not only in Mezam Division but across the national territory and beyond. It is a tradition for Fons, chiefs, notables, princes, and princesses to adorn themselves with beads of all kinds. Today, many individuals accompany their traditional attire with bead jewellery. During traditional marriage ceremonies, the couples and their bridesmaids adorn themselves with beads. Tourists promoted this style. The availability of finances to buy raw materials and expertise are the other factors that have influenced the sector.

Culinary tradition otherwise known as gastronomy is an important cultural attraction in Mezam Division. It is the art or science of good eating. 'Achu' accompanied with 'Yellow soup', and corn fufu complimented with fried garden

huckleberry vegetable are two main staple meals of Mezam indigenes. Achu is a name given to crushed cocoa yams. Sometimes unripe bananas are boiled together with the cocoa yams, and they are then crushed together in a mortar to give it a suitable texture. Yellow soup, commonly called 'njia achu', is prepared with the use of palm oil, limestone, achu spices, and stock from meat and fish. Corn fufu, the other staple meal, is prepared by grinding corn into corn flour. Water is then boiled, and the corn flour is poured into the hot water, which is then stirred to make it smooth. Garden huckleberry, commonly called 'njama njama', is boiled and fried using palm oil with some onion and pepper; it is then accompanied with meat to accompany the corn fufu. Plate 4 shows the two major staple food in Mezam Division.



Plate 5 Traditional Dishes of the Indigenous Community of the People of Mezam

Source: Field work, 2022

Photo J shows Achu and Yellow soup; Photo K is Corn fufu and fried garden huckleberry vegetable

These staple meals are the main dishes prepared in all traditional ceremonies like coronation ceremonies of the Fon, annual festivals, death celebrations, marriage ceremonies, twin festival ceremonies, and official meetings organised by the indigenes. These staple dishes are often accompanied by palm wine, locally called 'Mbu' (a traditional alcoholic beverage made from fermented sap of various species of palm trees like the oil palm, raffia palm, date palm or coconut palm). Corn fufu is the staple meal of the people of Bali and part of the Tubah Sub-divisions (Kedjoum Ketinguh and Keku). In Kedjoum keku and Kedjoum ketinguh, this garden huckleberry vegetable is replaced with roasted chicken, commonly known as "Kati Kati." Meanwhile, indigenes in Bamenda, I, II, and III Sub-divisions, Bafut, and part of Tubah Sub-division like Bambui, Bambili, and part of Santa Sub-division like Akum, Awing, Santa, and Barfochu all have Achu and yellow soup as staple meals.

- *Traditional Manifestations in Mezam Division*

Cultural manifestations and traditional dances constitute one of the major cultural attractions in the Mezam Division. They vary per Sub-division; some are displayed for public view, while others are sacred (seen only by initiated people), and others are not to be seen by women or children. These manifestations are exhibited during annual traditional festivals hosted at the end of the year in most villages in the study area. In Mankon, it is popularly known as 'Abin Mfor'; in Bafut, it is called 'Abin e Mfor'; in Awing, it is called 'Ndong Awing'; and 'Lela' in Bali. Other traditional manifestations that are great cultural attractions include enthronement ceremonies, death celebrations of royalties and notables, the 'Achu' eating ceremony, and royal marriages. Plate 5 shows a display of traditional costumes and artefacts during festivals and traditional ceremonies.

**L****M****N****O**

Plate 6 A Display of Traditional Costumes and Artefacts

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

*Photo L: Galena dance Manifestation in Bali Nyonga;
Photo M: Grouped Masqueretes Dancing 'Mbon' in Bafut;
Photo N: Kwifon members out for Traditional Rites; Photo
O: Nkwen princesses in Traditional attire in honour of
Missing Fon*

During annual festivals, the culture of the people is showcased with many other traditional rituals performed. The annual dances are a main trigger for tourists in the study area. During the months of December and January, there is an influx of tourists into villages to attend annual ceremonies. During this period, palaces are full of visitors who come to witness the end-of-year celebration, likewise promoting the tourism industry through the buying of souvenirs and other services like restaurants, bars, hotels, hospitals, and markets.

Annual dances such as the 'Lela' in Bali, the 'Abine-mfor' in Bafut, the Abing-afo in Mankon, and the 'Ndong Awing' in Awing attract more than 50,000 visitors to these communities.

- *Architectural cultural attractions in Mezam Division*

Architectural cultural attractions here include palaces, museums, and monuments. Mezam Division is an arena of several significant royal palaces including the Fon's palace in Bafut (a UNESCO World Heritage site), the Fon's palace in Mankon and the Fon's palace in Nkwen. These palaces serve as repositories of traditional governance systems, historical artefacts and architectural heritage (Plate 6).

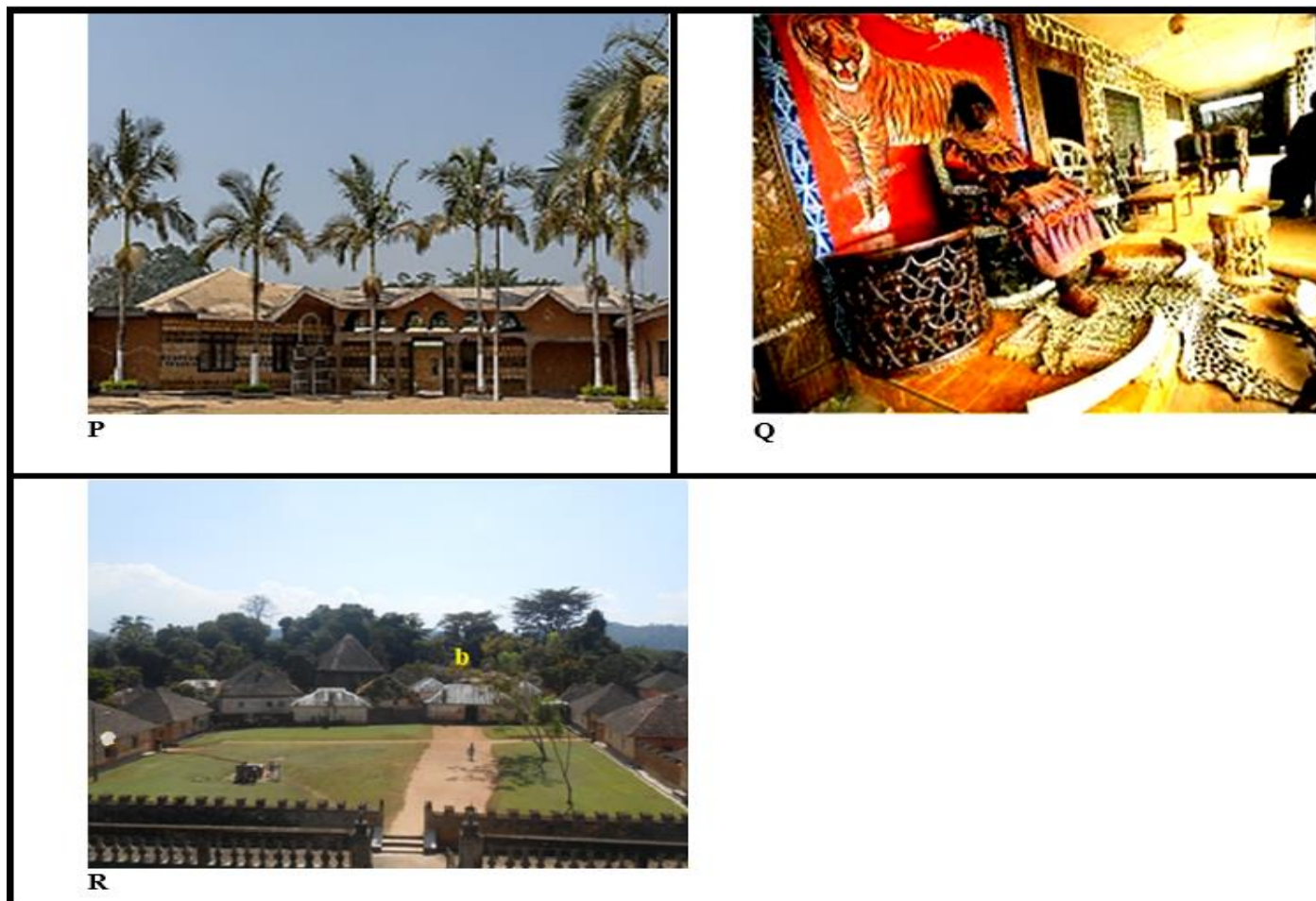


Plate 7 The Mankon, Bali Nyongha and Bafut Palaces in Mezam Division

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Photo P shows Makon Royal Palace; Photo Q is Bali Nyonga palace and photo R the Bafut Royal Palace

The Bafut Palace is one of the oldest in the region said to be built in 1635 [6]. It is made up of a cluster of over 50 traditional houses, surrounded by a sacred forest. The walls and roofs of the palace buildings are built with traditional tiles, commonly known as burnt bricks. This sacred forest is believed to be a place inhabited by the spirits of all the 'Missen Fons' with other ancestors. Therefore, it is a meeting point between the present Fon and his ancestors. Tourists can see from a distance and enjoy the sweet melody of birds and other animals like squirrels in the forest, but they cannot gain direct access to the forest.

The Mankon Palace is one of Cameroon's major attractions and an important centre of traditional African arts. It is a prominent first-class Fondom located strategically at the heart of Bamenda City Council of Mezam Division. This area is often described as a microcosm of the Grassfield culture. The entrance of the palace is decorated with beautiful works of art; the pillars are made of well-decorated wood carvings. On the walls are paintings of the royal gong and drawings of animals like the lion and elephant, considered to be very symbolic in Mankon culture (royalty, strength, and power).

Also of great attraction is the Bali Nyonga palace which possesses a strong and unique cultural heritage. At the gateway to the palace and at the Fon's external and middle seating galleries are beautiful artistic displays of different significant paintings of animals like the lion, elephant, tiger, and others (royal gong). These paintings all symbolise royal power, majesty, mysticism, and invincibility. It is also an expression of the multiple powers and magnificence of the royal authority of Fon Galega II.

Museums are another architectural cultural attraction in Mezam Division. Museums are storage areas for artefacts, arts and crafts items, and other historical objects [1]. In the study area these museums store numerous historical and contemporary arts and crafts items. Some of these museums are found in palaces, while others are owned by private individuals. The Bafut Royal Museum is found in the palace, which is endowed with rich cultural and historical artefacts related to the past Fons' and their wives and key historical events. The museum is a reinstallation of the existing palace collections that was officially opened in 2006. During an interview session with Fon Abumbi II (the present Fon of Bafut), it was gathered that when he came to power, he inherited a great deal of crafts that were stored in the private palace storehouse. Motivated by the number of tourists that visited the palace, he developed the desire to display these cultural objects that were stored in the 'Achum'.



Plate 8 The Bafut Museum, Achum and Cultural Artefacts
Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Photo S shows the Bafut Museum; photo T Achum shrine and photo U some exhibited Artefacts

Items in the Bafut Royal Museum are displayed in various sections; the room of the Fon (that contain dresses, beds, weapons, and stools used by all the Fons from time immemorial), war room which has the statues of Zingraff the German explorer, his wife and weapons that were used during the Germano-Bafut war), a documentary room (which have remnants of the 1st elephant killed over 200years in Bafut, status of witches and wizards that have existed in Bafut, books concerning the Fondom and post cards), the slave trade room (contains all the weapons used by the Fon's during slave trade), and the Queen mother's room containing farming tools, household utensils, bed and statues of the deceased Queen mothers.

Like the Bafut palace, there is a museum found in the Mankon palace. The Mankon Royal Modern Museum is a building in the palace that stores the cultural and artistic productions of the kingdom. It was inaugurated in 2006 and is situated at the entrance to the Mankon Palace. It has about 180 artefacts divided into different thematic sections, namely: There are sections: Ala' Mankon; History; Arts and Power; Arts and Society; Exchanges and Artistic Relationships; and Creativity. Items displayed within these various sections of the museum are statues, masks, furniture, containers, costumes, ornaments, musical instruments, and arms that are very significant to the culture of the people. This museum has a remarkable collection of rich historical ethnography and beautiful objects linked to rituals and prestige, identified in different shapes, all bearing memories of kings, notables, and sacred societies (Plate 8). Occasionally, some of these items are exhibited for public viewing for tourists and members of the community.



Plate 9 Cultural Artefacts in Mankon Royal Palace Museum

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Photo V is a decorated masquerade called 'Ndob' Ritual head Mask, photo W is a 'Ndop ritual costume and photo X is a statue of a Notable.

Plate 9 bears items found in the Mankon royal museum: a beaded mask to exhibit arts and crafts as a talent of the people, the 'Ndob' ritual beaded facial mask, and the 'Ndob ritual' costume worn when displaying the 'Ndob' traditional ritual dance. The male and female statues decorated with cowries are some of the fascinating artefacts present in the museum.

➤ Nature-Based Cultural Attractions

These are natural occurrences in which the indigenous people of Mezam have attached cultural values to make them culturally attractions. They include caves, lakes, sacred forests, shrines, wildlife, caves, beautiful mountains, and hills.

Caves are considered cultural attractions in the study area because it is believed they are habitats of gods. It is also

believed to inhibit both good and bad spirits that protect or can cause harm to the community. These caves vary per sub-division. In Bamenda I Sub-division, there are a series of caves named 'Crystal Farms' along the escarpment, partially developed by an individual. He has attempted to transform it into a cultural attraction site by using local indigenous material and decorations, but it is still substandard. In Bafut Sub-division, there are quite a number of caves identified as cultural attractions, such as the 'Niko' cave, which is a very large rock shelter that can contain about 500 people. It was used in the past as a hideout during the intertribal wars; today, it has become the home for many animals [5] and a cultural attraction because of the great role it played in history as a shelter for the population during inter-tribal wars. The Shum Laka Rock Shelter is the most prominent rock shelter site in the Grassfield region, located in the Laka Valley of the Santa Sub-division. In this cave, relics of early man dating back as far as the Iron Age were discovered. These deposits indicated each phase of cultural development in the grassfield [4]. Plate 9 shows a partial view of the Crystal farm and Shum Laka cave.

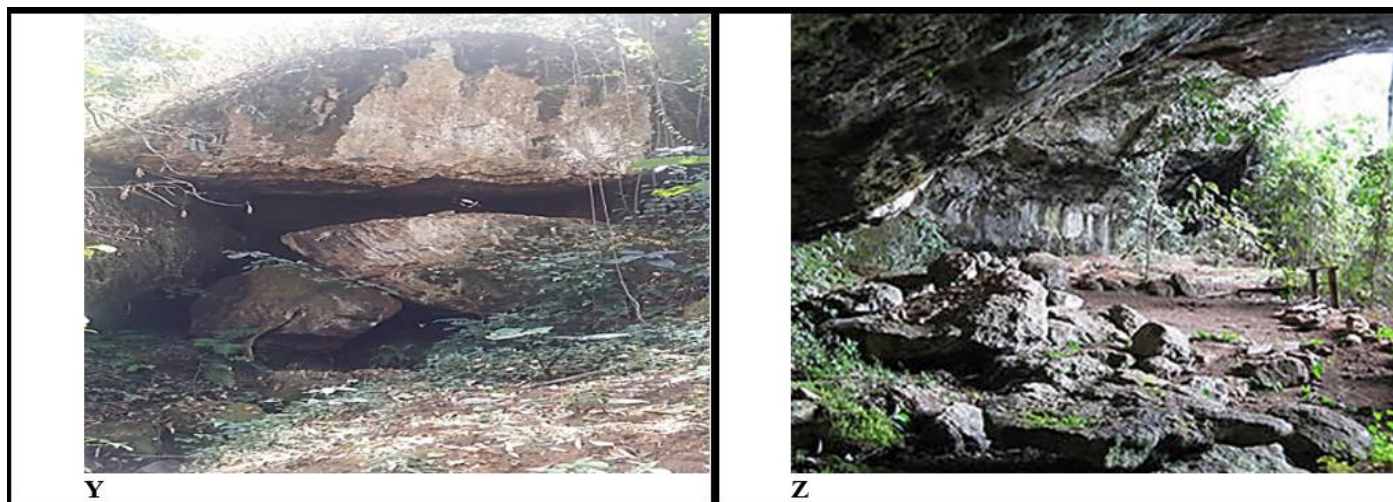


Plate 10 Cave in Bamenda I, Up Station and Shum Laka Caves in Santa Sub-division
Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Photo Y shows a Cave in Bamenda I up Station and photo Z shows the Shum Laka Cave of Baforchu in Santa Sub-division

Like caves, lakes constitute important cultural attractions in Mezam Division. There are two lakes identified as cultural attractions: Lake Awing and Lake Bambili. Lake Awing is a crater found in the Santa Sub-division while Lake Bambili is found in the Tubah Sub-division. Lakes are

believed to be the home of the gods. As such, yearly rituals are offered to these lakes as a form of sacrifice to appease the gods so as to guarantee fertility, peace, and love in the land. During the ritual days, many tourists and members of the community visit these areas to witness the ceremony. Cultural dances and other attractive cultural items are being displayed during the events. Plate 10 shows a view of Lake Bambili and Lake Awing.



Plate 11 Lakes Bambili and Awing in Mezam Division
Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Photo A1 shows Lake Bambili, and Photo B shows Lake Awing.

Other natural attractions with cultural value in Mezam Division include Mountains and hills, shrines and sacred forests. Indigenous in the study area often consider mountains and hills as sites for traditional ritual practices. During the annual cultural festivals organised at the end of every year, racing activities accompanied by cultural displays are organised in some of these mountains. The Kol hills in Bafut Sub-division are a good example. Similar racing activities are organised on Mt. Lefo (Awing) and Mt. Manah (Pinyin), all in the Santa Sub-division. These events are important attractions for tourists.

Shrines and sacred forests are other vital natural attractions with great cultural values attached to them. They are believed by customs and traditions to be venues for spirits. Some of the prominent shrines identified were the 'Achum' of Bafut and the 'Atsum' of Mankon Palaces. In Nkwen, there are 'Fejah' and 'Alaluh' shrines. The 'wolela' and the 'Ntsi-sufu' in Bali Nyonga are remarkable shrines, not forgetting the fortune god stone in Bali Nyonga. There are many other shrines that are not secret. Some prominent sacred forests identified were the Royal Sacred Forest Reserve and the 'Nefo'o' sacred forest. These sacred forests are still in their natural state and are homes to many biodiversity.

➤ *The Role of Cultural Tourism in Sustainable Development in Mezam Division*

The findings of the study reveal that, the cultural attractions of Mezam Division have the potential to serve as powerful drivers of sustainable development. This segment of tourism creates economic opportunities, promotes social inclusion, preserve the cultural heritage and foster environmental conservation and awareness.

• *Economic Dimension*

The research findings indicate that cultural attractions in Mezam Division can generate significant economic benefits through multiple channels including employment, and income generation. The respondents were asked to indicate their views on the economic potentials of cultural attractions in Mezam Division. Their opinions were centered on the role of cultural attractions in employment creation, income generation and local entrepreneurship. Table 1 shows the respondents' views on the economic benefits of cultural attractions in Mezam Division.

Table 1 Respondents' Opinions on Economic Benefits of Cultural Attractions

| Economic benefits | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Create job opportunities | 59 | 62.1 |
| Increase household income | 43 | 46.2 |
| Promote local tourism businesses (entrepreneurship) | 61 | 64.2 |
| No perceived economic benefits | 13 | 13.7 |

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

As shown on table 1, 62.2% of respondents believe that cultural attractions have the potential of creating jobs for the local population. A majority (64.2%) of the respondents agreed that these attractions promote local tourism business while 46.2% perceive the attractions to be a source of household income. However, 13.7% reported no clear economic benefit of cultural attractions in Mezam. This indicates their lack of knowledge about these cultural attractions or poor visibility of the attractions in the community.

These attractions generate income not only to individual but for the community as well. Cultural attractions like museums generate income, which is usually ploughed back into the community through developmental projects. For example, an appraisal of the financial lock book of the Bafut Royal Palace Museum showed the amount of income generated from tourist activities from 2012 to 2018 (Table 2).

Table 2 Income generated by Bafut Royal Palace Museum from 2012 -2018

| Year | Income Fcfa |
|--------------|--------------------|
| 2012 | 7.340.000 |
| 2013 | 7.728.000 |
| 2014 | 8.136.000 |
| 2015 | 7.108.000 |
| 2016 | 3.040.000 |
| 2017 | 120.500 |
| 2018 | 10.400 |
| Total | 33.482.900 |

Source: Adopted from [2] and Archives of Bafut Royal Palace Museum (2021)

Table 2 shows that within the period of 2012 right up until 2018, the amount of income generated from entrance fees and photo taking by tourists was 33.482.900Fcfa. Even though there was a drastic drop in the amount generated from 2016 to 2018 because of the Anglophone crisis, the museum was finally closed because visitors seldom visit the attraction sites. This income generated is used for the upkeep of the palace and to pay for security services. Some of the money is sent to the Bafut rural council to support community development projects like the construction of markets, roads, water, and schools.

Complementing the quantitative results, the results of in-depth interviews with service providers working within cultural infrastructures like museums, palaces, hotels, restaurants, and bar receptionists shed more light on how the

sector has provided jobs to the community. One of the respondents who sees the cultural attraction sector as a source of employment explained:

"Working here has been a great opportunity for me, because at the end of the day the salary obtained here does help only me. I have been able to sponsor two of my children right up to the level of a Bachelor degree thanks to this job".

• *Social Dimension*

The findings of the study reveal that cultural attractions have the potential to foster social sustainability in Mezam Division. The opinions of the respondents were linked to the contribution of these attractions to community cohesion, education, identity and inclusion. Figure 2

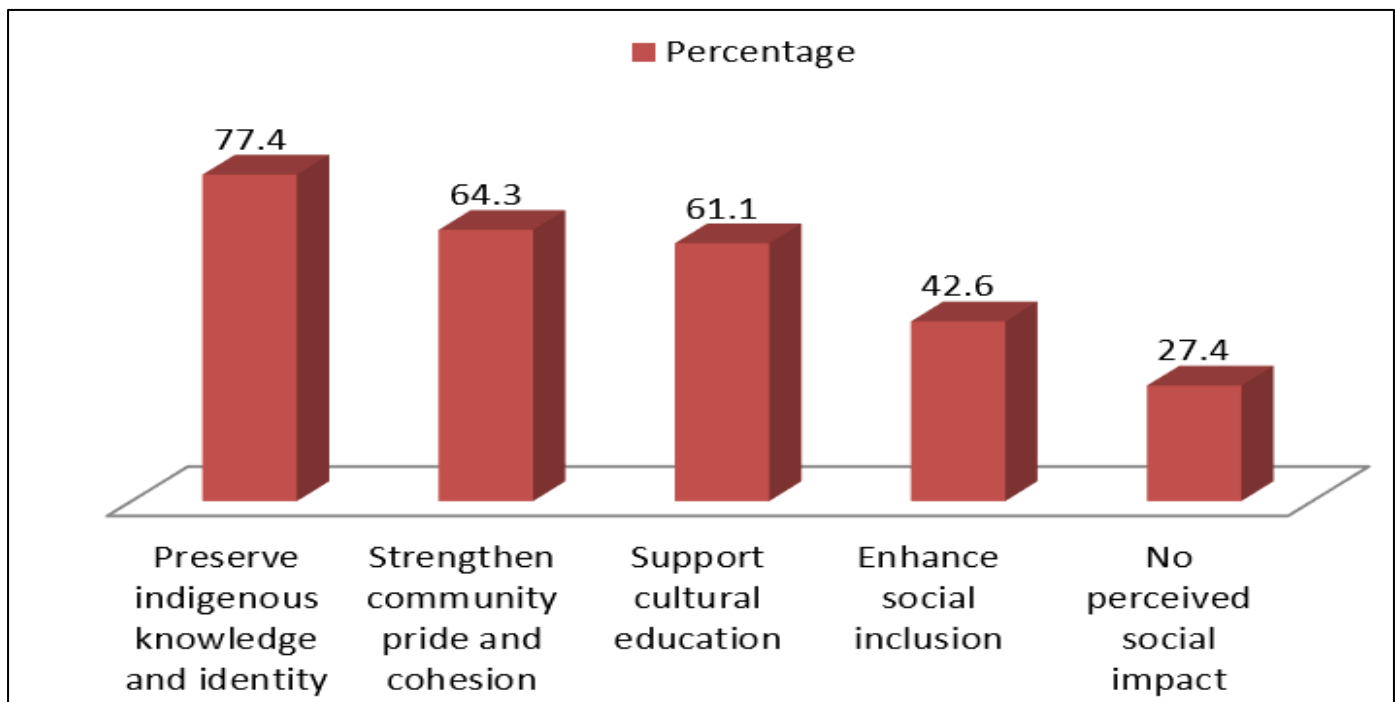


Fig 2 Social Contributions of Cultural Attractions in Mezam Division

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

The respondents established a strong consensus on the role of cultural attractions in preserving indigenous knowledge and identity (77.4%), promoting community cohesion (64.3%), and supporting cultural education (61.1%). Less than half of the respondents (42.6%) of the respondents linked cultural attractions to social inclusion while 27.4% perceived no social impact of cultural attractions in Mezam Division.

More analysis on the role of cultural attractions in education revealed that, these attractions have contributed to promoting the educational sector by raising professionals through skill development in arts works and managerial

services. The Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP) of Cameroon, through the Rural Artisan and Home Economics Programme and Trades Training Centres (SAR/SM), often selects candidates for training and capacity building in the craft sector. About 30% of craft producers surveyed had benefited from this programme. Apart from Rural Artisan and Home Economics Programme and Trades Training Centres, MINEFOP partners with many other training institutions to train professionals in arts and other cultural related activities in Mezam. Table 3 shows some partner institutions and number of individuals who benefited from these training programs in 2015.

Table 3 Institutions working with MINEFOP and number of trainees in 2015

| Institution | Year of creation | No/ of candidates with Diplomas in 2015 |
|---|------------------|---|
| Institute for Hotel catering and tourism management | 2013 | 5 |
| Chumbaw foundation of vocational training center | 2013 | 25 |
| New Ero Vocatioal Institute | 2014 | - |
| Fidelity Advance Vocational training center | 2000 | 43 |
| SAR/SM, Hospitality Santa | 1984 | 10 |
| SAR/SM Baligham | 1996 | 13 |

Source: Archives of MINEFOP, 2018

Table 3 shows that the Institute for Hotel Catering and Tourism Management with Fidelity Advance Vocational Training trains professionals in hospitality management to control and manage accommodation centres and other leisure establishments like hotels and resorts. The Chubaw Foundation of Vocational Training trains experts in beadwork, painting, and decoration. New Ero Vocational Institutes train experts in carving and staff work. The SAR/SM in Santa and Baligham trains professionals in

hospitality management and embroidery. In 2015, a total of 96 students obtained diplomas from these institutions.

• *Environmental Dimension*

Like the economic and social dimensions, cultural tourism has a significant role to place in environmental sustainability in Mezam Division. The respondents were asked to share their opinions on the relationship between cultural attractions and environmental sustainability. Figure 3 shows their responses.

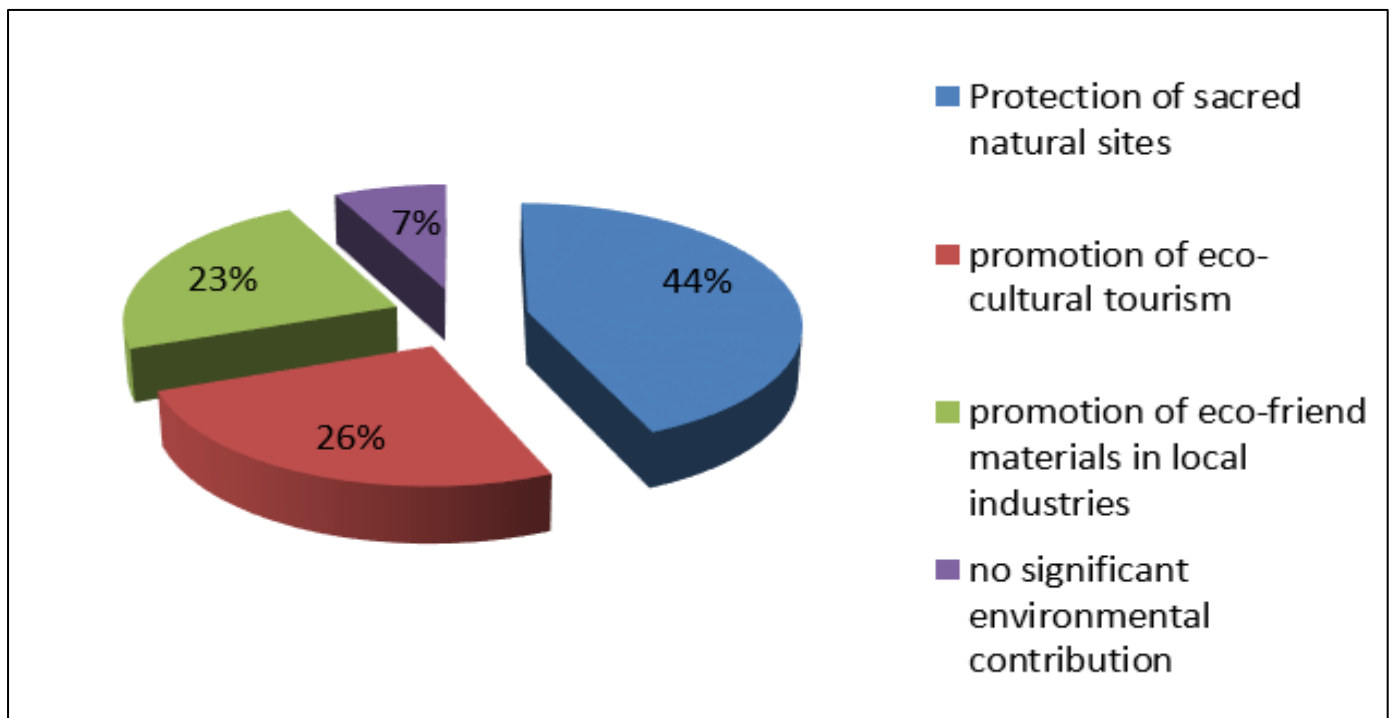


Fig 3 Environmental Contributions of Cultural Attractions in Mezam Division
Source: Fieldwork, 2022

As seen in figure 3, cultural attractions have the potential to foster environmental conservation by creating opportunities for the protection of sacred natural sites as indicated by 44% of the respondents, promote eco-cultural tourism (26%) and encourages the use of ecological friendly materials (23%) in local industries.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research findings reveal that, Mezam Division is endowed with diverse cultural attractions ranging from arts and crafts, traditional manifestations, to architectural infrastructure, and nature-based heritages. The artists in the area produce outstanding works which is appealing not only to eyes of the local inhabitants but also to tourists. Traditional manifestations which prompted the use of colour traditional attires and regalia often pulled cultural lovers far and near into the area. Natural attractions (caves, lakes, sacred forests, shrines, hills and mountains) to which the indigenes of Mezam have attached cultural values to make them is also an important cultural attraction identified in the area. Previous studies carried out in part of Mezam Division (Bafut Subdivision) [2], identified similar attractions in the area.

The findings also reveal that, cultural attractions in Mezam Division generate value across different dimensions of sustainable development. Economically, cultural attractions create employment, generate income and stimulate entrepreneurship. Revenue generation, promotion and publicity of cultural attractions, employment opportunities for people, the country's global recognition, cultural exchange in regard to lifestyle, cuisines, arts, architecture, and many more aspects of culture were identified as positive impacts of cultural attractions [8]. The study establishes a strong connection between cultural tourism and social

sustainability. Cultural attractions were noted in preserving indigenous knowledge, fostering education, and promoting community cohesion and social inclusion. The study also recognized the value of cultural tourism in environmental sustainability as it helps to protect sacred natural sites, and promotes eco-friendly production and eco-cultural tourism. Local material from raffia palms and rattans serve as the main raw materials for weavers, who use them for the production of baskets, bags, caps, mats, chairs, tables, cupboards, and thatches [7].

Though the study has demonstrated that cultural attractions in Mezam Division holds significant potentials to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development across economic, social and environmental dimensions, these attractions are underutilized and there is a substantial gap between potential and practice. There is therefore a need for deliberate and coordinated approach that bridges the gap between availability of cultural attractions and their utilization in order to attain full impact.

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