

## **Gold Mining in Historical Perspective, Betare Oya (East Cameroon) 1933-2010**

Martial Massike Loke<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Ngaoundere, Department of History, Ngaoundere, Cameroon

mmassike@gmail.com

Drawing from oral testimonies and archival sources, this paper analyses how gold mining in one of the districts of Cameroon's East Region developed in changing political and economic contexts from the colonial era to the present. It pays particular attention to present patterns of mining organization, which have been decisively shaped by the closure of other avenues of economic opportunity after the crisis of the late 1980s, the increased involvement of the Cameroonian government and its donors in an attempt to "formalize" small-scale mining (*artisanat*), which was officially sanctioned in the 2001 *Code Minier*, and the recent return of foreign companies, which had left the area in the late colonial era, as part of a salvage operation of the gold reserves that will be flooded by the construction of the Lom Pangar dam, one of the country's most ambitious infrastructural projects for the present decade. Intensive fieldwork informs a reconstruction of the productive, commercial, financial, and regulatory relationships that tie different actors ranging from miners and their laborers, miners' common initiative groups, mining companies, gold merchants, customary authorities, government officials, and aid agencies.