



**Green
Development
Advocates**
For a Green Congo Basin

For a sustainable oil palm production in Cameroon:
the imperative need to adopt and implement a sustainable
national strategy for palm oil production

Policy paper



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FOREWORD

Cameroon has since 2014 initiated the development of a strategy document for the production of palm oil that respects social and environmental requirements. Seven years later, the adoption and implementation of this strategy is still expected. Unfortunately, throughout the national territory, there is a strong demand for land for the establishment of new plantations like CAMVERT in the South Region or the extension in existing areas like SOCAPALM in the Sanaga Maritime and Moungo Divisions; This is not without consequences for communities and the environment. There is therefore an urgent need to validate and implement a sustainable oil palm strategy in Cameroon which will help curb these impacts. This note presents the socio-environmental consequences of the establishment of palm oil agro-industries and proposes key points which must necessarily be integrated into the strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon has a development vision to become ‘an emerging, democratic and united country in its diversity’ by 2035. Before it was Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) and today we talk of National Development Strategy 2020-2030 (NDS 2030), which gives an important place to the rural sector. The rural sector remains the key sector of the national economy both in terms of its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its knock-on effects on other sectors. The NDS and the Rural Sector Development Strategy (RSDS) have retained oil palm among the strategic sectors whose development is likely to contribute to the emergence of Cameroon by 2035.

In recent years, the global demand for palm oil has increased drastically, and is likely to increase in the future.

In Cameroon, between 2010 and 2014, the national demand for palm oil was around 450,000 tonnes. However, at the moment, the country produces about 230,000 tonnes of crude palm oil, which makes a deficit of about 130,000 tonnes¹. Consequently, the country imports this commodity from Asian countries (Malaysia, India, Indonesia, etc.) or from Gabon to cover the gap. To make up for the deficit, Cameroon, through its Rural Sector Development Plan, is proposing an increase in palm oil production from 300,000 tonnes in 2005 to 450,000 tonnes in 2020².

The sustainability of this trend can only be guaranteed if the challenges facing the entire oil palm sector are better managed, particularly in terms of reconciling the increase in palm oil production with conservation of biodiversity (fauna and flora) and environmental services such as the protection of ecological corridors ensuring the connectivity of habitats, the quality of water resources and respect for the rights of communities in areas adjacent to production sites. If well planned and supervised, the development of oil palm plantations will make it possible to respect these criteria while improving the stan-

dard of living of people in rural areas.

On the contrary, if the development of this sector is poorly planned and managed, it will be very detrimental to local communities and the ecosystem services and biodiversity on which the productivity of the rural sector is based. The most vibrant example is the recent news on the declassification and attribution of 60,000 hectares of pristine forest in the Campo and Nyete sub-divisions in the Ocean division of the South region to a company, CAMVERT Sarl, for the development of an agro-industrial oil palm complex in total violation³ of the relevant land tenure provisions. Such cases will inevitably increase over time, hence the need to clearly define a national policy on sustainable palm oil production and its effective implementation.

² Follow this link to read <https://infocongo.org/fr/cameroon-la-strategie-nationale-de-production-du-palmier-a-huile-attendue/#:~:text=La%20production%20nationale%20d'huile,mille%20et%20450%20mille%20tonnes>.

³ Follow this link to read the note <https://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/developpmentpalmierhuilecameroon.pdf>

⁴ Follow this link to read the note « les petites illégalités » du processus de déclasserment et de concession des 60 000 hectares de forêt au profit d'une agro-industrie à Campo et Nyété, GDA Août 2020 <http://gdacameroun.org/download/320/>; voir également l'analyse de l'impact du projet Camvert sur la biodiversité de l'UTO de Campo <http://gdacameroun.org/download/695/>.

It is therefore imperative for Cameroon to adopt and implement a national strategy for palm oil production in order to avoid the recurrent problems observed in the implementation of this type of project. The recurrent problems observed include;

1. Violation of customary land rights of local and indigenous communities

The establishment of an agro-industry in a locality is usually, if not always, at the origin of the grabbing of customary land from local and indigenous communities. The agro-industries are often established without respecting the customary land rights of the local and indigenous communities. As a result, they lose their agricultural, fishing, sacred sites and hunting and gathering areas, which constitutes a serious threat to their food security most especially for the Baka, Bagyeli/Bakola and Bedzang⁴, whose mode of life closely depends on the forest. It should be noted that Cameroon has voluntarily adhered to a certain number of international conventions⁵ that prescribe the respect of customary land rights of local and indigenous populations. The allocation of large areas of forest for the establishment of oil palm monocultures is a serious threat to their way of life and cultural identity.

2. Biodiversity destruction and disruption of ecosystems increasing the risk of zoonoses

The establishment of oil palm plantations has an immediate impact on forest cover and wildlife. Consequently, there is a decrease in forest cover and carbon stocks; there is also the destruction of sacred sites, pharmacopeia and wildlife habitat. Equally as a result of the establishment new agro industries and the expansion of old ones, people lose many of the non-timber forest products they need to survive on and there is an increase in human-wildlife conflict and emergence of zoonoses.



⁵ Cameroon has undertaken since 2011 a major study to identify, on the basis of United Nations criteria and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, those who can be considered as indigenous peoples in Cameroon. Although the study has not yet been published, preliminary surveys point out that the Baka, Bagyéli Bakola and Bedzang are Indigenous Peoples.

⁶ In particular the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights, the Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union on land issues and challenges in Africa, and the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for responsible governance of land tenure systems applicable to land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security.

3. Failure to address climate change issues

Agro-industrial plantations, particularly those of oil palm as they are implemented today at the national level, contribute greatly to the exacerbation of climate change through the release of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere from deforestation, soil ploughing (by oxidation of humus) and machinery emissions; methane (CH₄) from organic waste and nitrogen (N₂O) from excessive or poorly dosed use of nitrogen fertilizers. All these compromises Cameroon's commitment contained in its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to reduce its emissions by 32% by 2035 compared to the year 2010 and the numerous Climate Change Agreements ratified by Cameroon.

4. The weak consideration of Pollution issues

The most pressing challenge facing local and indigenous communities living around agro-industrial oil palm plantations is that of pollution of watercourses, which are used for consumption, cultivation and for domestic purposes. Agro-industries dump solid and chemical waste into these water courses, hence, communities no longer have access to clean water and suffer from digestive disorders, skin infections and diarrhoea. Residents' are also faced with the problem of air pollution caused by fumes from factories and rolling stock; this is one of the root cause of respiratory illnesses. Also, there is the destruction of aquatic fauna, as in the case of Lake Ossa, which is invaded by the presence of invasive plant species due to the dumping of waste from the SAFACAM Company in this lake. In view of the socio-environmental problems generated by the oil palm agro-industries in Cameroon, the future national oil palm strategy which, beyond the written word, must be effectively implemented.



RECOMMENDATIONS

As such, we recommend that the sustainable national strategy for palm oil production should:

- Be carried by a multi-stakeholder group to ensure better implementation by the different parties;
- Promote the regeneration of old plantations using appropriate technologies in order to intensify production on existing plantations, without increasing the area under cultivation;
- Improve processing capacity and extraction rates in smallholder oil mills, which are currently very low;
- Facilitate access to finance for small producers;
- Create voluntary, win-win partnerships between agro-industries and small producers;
- Establish incentives for small operators to take environmental issues into account in their development (REDD+, PES);
- Promote the conservation of high value species and with high carbon stocks;
- Promote respect for the rights of residents and workers in agro-industries.



List of signatory organisations

- 1- AAFEBEN, Miranda Mikam
- 2- ABAGUENI
- 3- ABAWONI
- 4- ACDD, Emilie Finette Dehmed, President
- 5- ADEBAKA
- 6- ADEMBO
- 7- AFHAN
- 8- AGOPPEPD
- 9- AJESH, Harisson Nnoko
- 10- APED, Victorien Mba
- 11- ASBABUK
- 12- ASBAK
- 13- ASDEBYM
- 14- ASE, Josiane TEDONGMO SONKWA
- 15- ASTRAHD, Brigitte Anziom
- 16- CAD, Martin ETONE, Director General
- 17- CADER; Mfom Edouard
- 18- CEFAID, Victor Amougou
- 19- CFE, Aboudi Ngonon Alain Bertrand
- 20- CIRMAD, Liyong Emmanuel Sama
- 21- CNCD, Wang Johnson
- 22- CODED, Guilene Nzoyem
- 23- COMAID, Christian Jitar Taku
- 24- CRADIF
- 25- FAJOID, Annie Florence ANKOM ONTSA
- 26- FODER, Christiane Zebaze
- 27- FORUDEF, Moses Tabe
- 28- Fusion Nature
- 29- GDA
- 30- GRADD-ACEO
- 31- PERAD, Pierre Djetoh
- 32- RADER, Djamen Ngami Modeste
- 33- RUDEC
- 34- SAILD, Ghislain Fomou
- 35- Synaparcam, Emmanuel Elong
- 36- WOAC, Senze Epie
- 37- YARSD, Kapo Herman
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Green Development Advocates (GDA) is a Cameroonian civil society organization, created in 2009 and legalized on the 30th June 2011. It works spans from development that respects social and environmental requirements. Its mission is to contribute to the sustainable development of African tropical forests while respecting the culture, rights, interests and needs of African peoples. A particular attention is paid to situation of indigenous forest peoples also known as "pygmies".

