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Advocates**

For a Green Congo Basin

DEGAZETTING AND GRANTING OF 60 000 HECTARES OF PRIME FOREST FOR OIL PALM PRODUCTION PROJECT IN CAMPO AND NYETE SUB-DIVISIONS – OCEAN DIVISION, SOUTH REGION OF CAMEROON

Evaluating the biodiversity impact of the CAMVERT project on the
Campo Ma'an Technical Operations Unit (TOU)

BIODIVERSITY ANALYSES



April 2021

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INTRODUCTION/CONTEXT

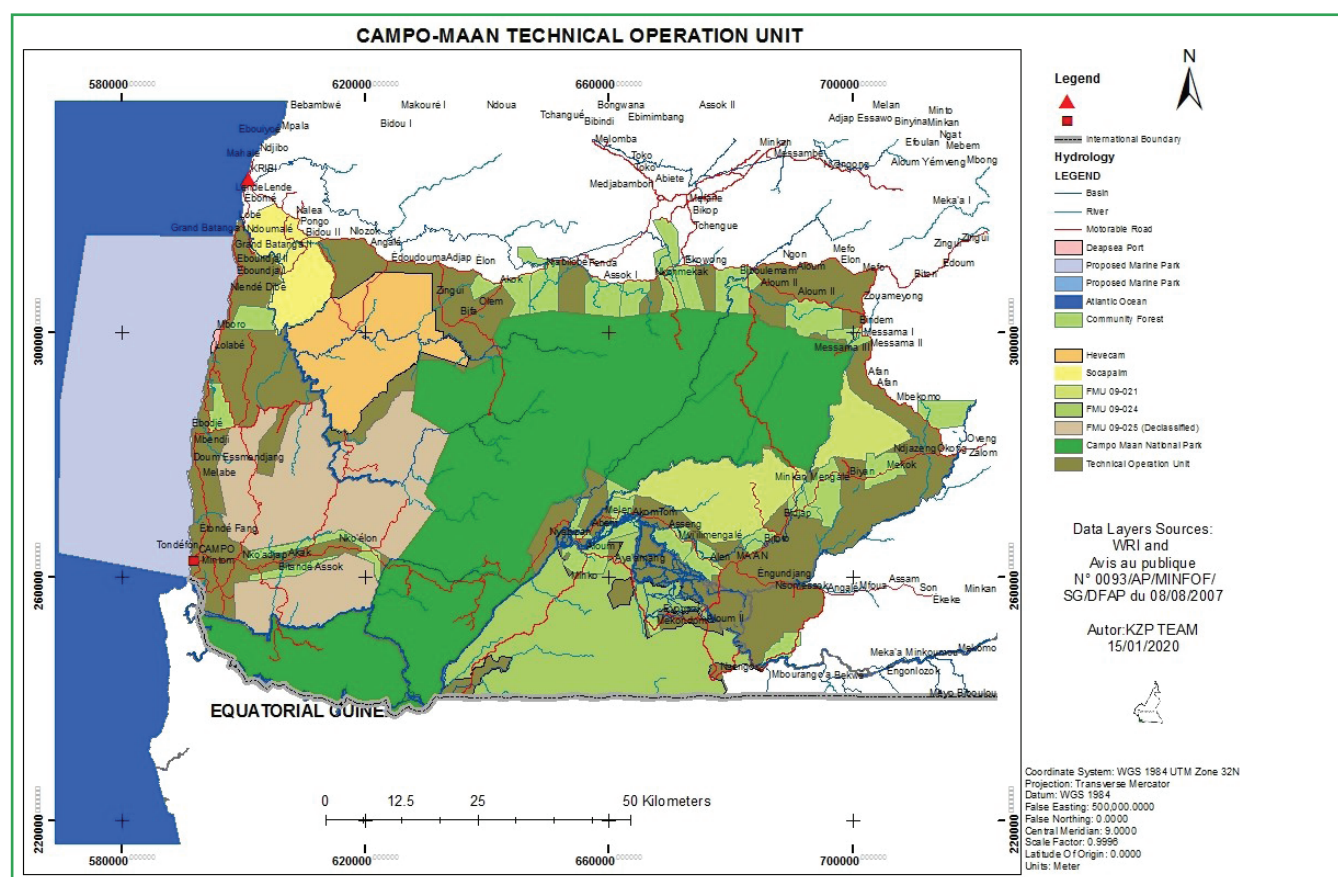
Created by Prime Ministerial Decree No 054CAB/PM of 6th August 1999, the Campo Faunal Reserve and the Ma'an Production Reserve were merged in 1999 to create the Campo-Ma'an Technical Operation Unit (TOU) located in the South Region of Cameroon precisely, between 2°09'-2°53'N and 9°48'-10°25'E (Campo Ma'an National Park Management Plan 2015 – 2019). The TOU (Land and Seascape) covers a surface area of 776,000 hectares comprising the Campo Ma'an National Park (264,064 ha, category 1 Park by MINFOF classification). Administratively, it is spread over three Divisions: Ocean, Vallée du Ntem and Mvila; and seven Sub-divisions: Kribi, Campo, Akom II and Nyete in the Ocean Division, Ma'an and Ambam in the Vallée du Ntem Division and Ebolowa in the Mvila Division. The Campo Ma'an National Park is a High Value Conservation Forest (HVCF), surrounded by a multiple buffer zones including the Dipikar Island for the Gorilla Habituation project and five Forest Management Units: FMU 09-021, FMU 09-022, FMU 09-023, FMU 09-024 and FMU 09-025 that form the six permanent forest blocks in the TOU; Agro-industrial plantations HEVECAM (Rubber Plantation) and SOCAPALM (Oil Palm Plantation), a Deep Seaport at Kribi, Memve'ele HEP plant, Community Forests and other unclassified forest blocks.

LOCATION OF THE STUDY

A spatial view of the TOU shows congestion of land use patterns with logging and mining concessions, protected areas, Deep seaport, Hydroelectric Power plant, community forests, agro-industrial plantations and to a lesser extent unclassified forest blocks for peasant agriculture, artisanal logging and hunting (see Fig 1). The most recent land use change in the TOU is the Prime Ministerial Decree degazetting 60,000 hectares of part of the FMU 09025 into an oil palm agricultural production. The FMU covers a surface area of 88,275 ha and divided into two blocks; Block A to the north and Block B to the

south. A public notice creating the FMU was published in 2004 by MINEF by Notice No1094/N/ MINEF/SG/DF/SDIAF/SA and approved by Prime Ministerial Decree No2005/0527/PM of 14th February 2005 in the Campo and Nyete Sub-divisions of the South Region of Cameroon (Atlas of Cameroon Version IV). This forest that was attributed in 1997 and until recently due to the CAMVERT oil palm production project, have been successfully managed by SCIEB in partnership with WIJMA and was under FSC certification.

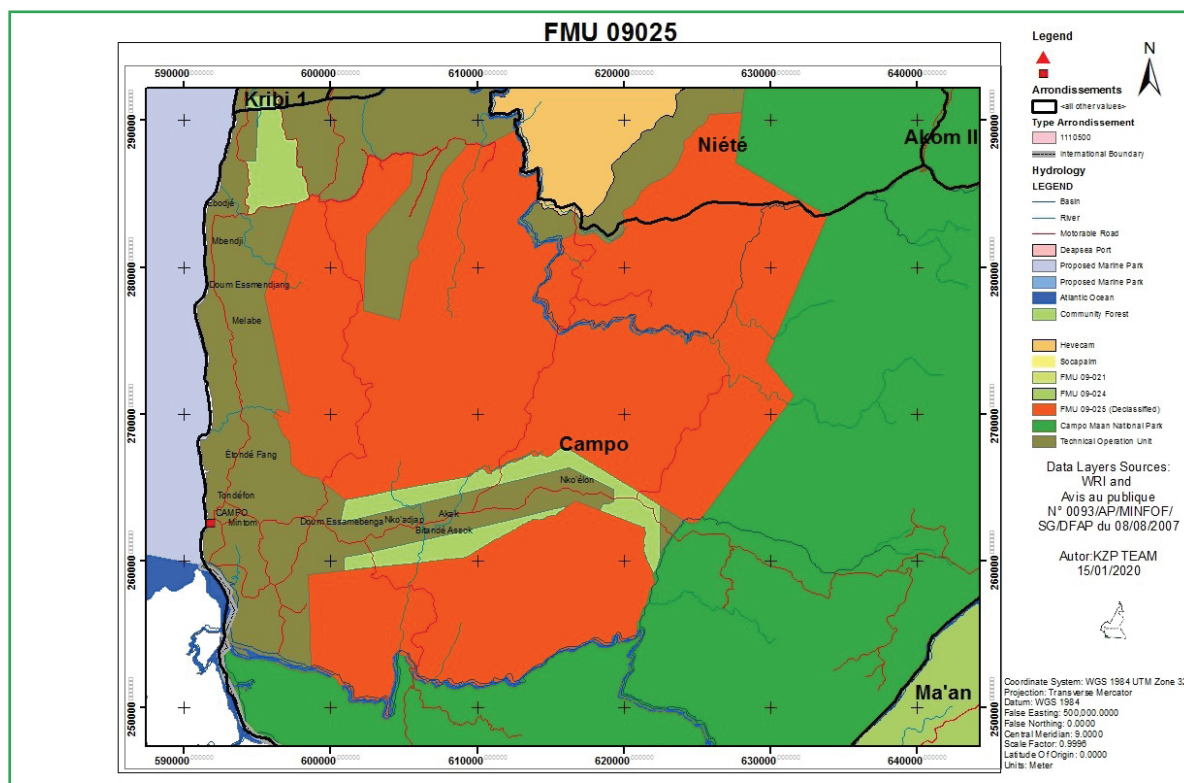
Figure 1: Land Use Patterns of Campo Ma'an TOU



Thus on May 15, 2019, the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), Mr. Jules Doret NDONGO published notice N° 0082/AP/MINFOF/DF/SDIAF/SC, decommissioning part of Forest Management Unit (FMU) 09-025 for a monoculture agricultural plantation and this was later followed by Decree No 2019/4562 of November 11,

2019, signed by His Excellency Prime Minister Joseph DION NGUTE, degazetting a forest area of 60,000 hectares of the FMU under the private domain of the State for agricultural production, located in the Campo and Nyete Sub-divisions (with over 95% located in the latter) of the Ocean Division in the South Region – Cameroon.

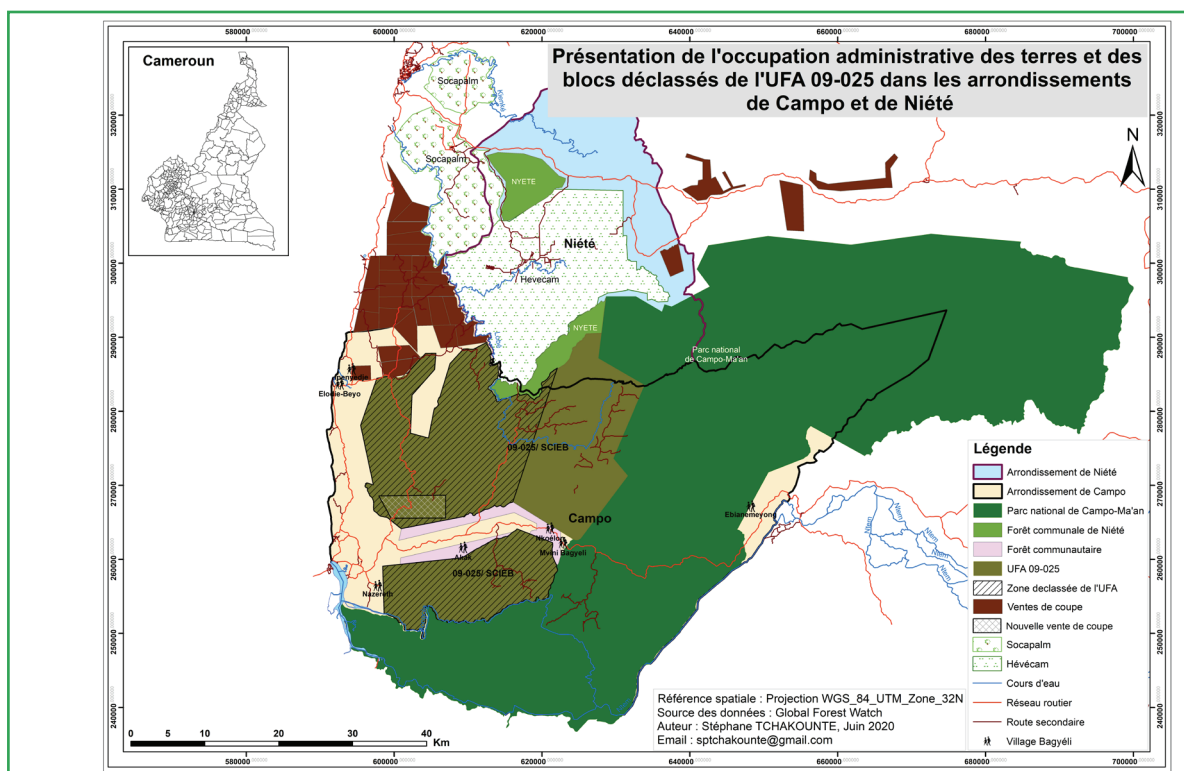
Figure 2: FMU 09025



The 60,000 ha is split into two blocks, Block A of 40,000 ha is located to the north while Block B of 20,000 ha is located to the south leaving less than 30,000 ha to the eastern part of the plantation to act as buffer to the Campo Ma'an National Park, too small for a park that is 264,064 ha.

Block B is 20,000 ha and contiguous with the Dipikar Island in the Campo Ma'an National, precisely the home range of the Gorilla group under habituation.

Figure 3: CAMVERT Planned Agro-industrial Concession



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General objective

The general objective of this analyses is to evaluate the impact of the CAMVERT project on the Campo Ma'an TOU's rich biodiversity with particular attention being paid to flagship species present in the zone.

Specific objectives

This analyses particularly seeks to;

- Describe and asses the rich biodiversity of the study zone;
- Prepare a list of endangered / endemic/ flagship/ economically important flora and fauna species (Forestry and Wildlife Law, IUCN list, etc) found within the study area;
- Evaluate the present impacts/implications of the proposed CAMVERT oil palm Project activities on this rich biodiversity of the zone;
- Make future projections of the CAMVERT oil palm project on the survival of the biodiversity of the Campo National Park and its buffer zone.

DESCRIPTION AND ASSERTION OF THE RICH BIODIVERSITY OF THE STUDY ZONE

Flora Diversity

Cameroon represents 8300 plant species with the Campo Ma'an TOU area characterised by a rich and diverse flora representing 1500 with 114 are endemic (NBSAP II and FEDEC website) and threatened plant species, of which 29 are found/ restricted only to the area and very rich in Caesalpinioideae (Tchouto et al, 2006). Most often during inventories carried in the park does not take into consideration the park's buffer zones which support 17 strict endemic species that are not found in the park, and which are under serious threat and does not have any conservation status for the moment. 22 species are

considered to be of conservation status and are listed as endangered in the IUCN red-list (Tchouto et al, 2006).

The landscape harbours over 2,297 vascular plants and ferns species distributed in over 851 genera and 155 families. Amongst these 97 species are listed in the IUCN Red-list and list of threatened plants (WCMC, 1998), 10 species are threatened with extinction and 6 with special protection status in Cameroon. There are 249 species of NTFPs, four of which are prominent (ICRAF, 2010) and 112 species of exploitable timber.

Fauna Diversity

The Campo Ma'an landscape harbours 390 species of invertebrates, 249 species of fresh fish out of the 848 species found in Cameroon, 122 species of reptiles, 302 bird species (the CMNP and buffer zones are designated by Birdlife International as an "Area important for Bird conservation" (NBSAP II, FEDEC website) and 80 medium and big size mammal species (MINFOF, 2014) out of the 335 found in Cameroon (NBSAP II). A recent study (Nzoo, et al. 2015) provides estimates for elephant (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*, 544 [425-695] individuals), and western lowland gorilla and chimpanzee, (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla* and *Pan troglodytes troglodytes* combined 2,199 [1736 – 2786] individuals) whose populations are considered stable following 2008 and 2011

survey. Other large mammals recorded in the TOU include, the forest buffalo (*Syncerus caffer nanus*), mandrill (*Mandrillus sphinx*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and giant pangolin (*Smutsia gigantea*). Over 68 small mammal species have been recorded in the TOU. The Campo Ma'an Landscape and the neighbouring Rio-Campo reserve (34,000 ha) in Equatorial Guinea (EQ) have been identified as one of the 18 priority landscapes for the conservation of the western lowland gorilla and the central chimpanzees and high-level meetings held in 2010 and 2011 have supported the creation of the "Rio-Campo-Ma'an Binational" conservation initiative between the two countries (IUCN, 2014).



Image 1 (internet): Great Apes found in the Campo Ma'an TOU

Furthermore, the TOU has been designated as an important site in the conservation of Chimpanzee and lowland gorilla and the Campo Ma'an National Park is the only protected area within the home range of the Mandrill rendering

it an important site in the protection of these great apes and the mandrill. Over 23 species of these mammals were recorded in IUCN Red-list in 2000.



Image 2 (internet): some medium size mammals found in Campo Ma'an TOU

The coastal fringes of the Ebodje and Campo beaches are important for the conservation and home to four (4) endangered marine turtle species and acts as nesting areas that satisfy their egg-laying needs; the Hawksbill turtle (Eret-

mochelys imbricata), the green turtle (Chelonia mydas), the leatherback turtle (Dermochelys coriacea) and the Olive Ridley turtle (Lepidochelys olivacea) (Angoni et Fretey 2002).



Image 3 (internet): Turtle species found in the beaches of Ebodje and Campo Beach

LIST OF ENDANGERED /ENDEMIC/FLAGSHIP/ ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT FLORA AND FAUNA SPECIES (FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE LAW, IUCN LIST, ETC) FOUND WITHIN THE CAMPO MA'AN TOU AREA

Trends and Status

Available data of fauna wildlife species populations in the landscape portrays an increasing or stable trend of key wildlife species of conservation and economic concerns as indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Status and Population Trends of key wildlife species of conservation and economic concerns

SN	Local Name	Scientific Name	IUCN	MINFOF	Trends in key Fauna Species			
					2008	2011	2015	Remark
1	Forest elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana cyclotis</i>	VU	A	335	596	544	Statistically stable
2	Lowland Gorilla	<i>Gorilla gorilla gorilla</i>	CR	A	675	675	1,000	Statistically stable (Great Apes)
3	Chimpanzee	<i>Pan troglodytes troglodytes</i>	EN	A	629	629	1,220	
4	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	VU	A	0.01 sign/Km		0.05 signs/km	
5	Giant Pangolin	<i>Smutsia gigantea</i>	EN	A	1.3 signs/Km	-	-	
6	Mandrill	<i>Mandrillus sphinx</i>	VU	A	0.05 signs/Km	-	0.11 signs/Km	
7	Forest buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer nanus</i>	NT	B			0.15 signs/Km	
8	Red-capped Mangabey	<i>Cercocebus torquatus</i>	EN	A			0.01 sign/Km	
9	Yellow-backed Duiker	<i>Cephalophus sylvicultor</i>	NT	B		2373	2528	Stable
10	Sitatunga	<i>Tragelophus spekei</i>	LC	B				
11	Blue Duiker	<i>Philantomba monticola</i>		C	6,476	-	-	Stable
12	Red duiker (Ogilby and Bay duikers)	<i>Cephalophus ogilbyi</i> and <i>Cephalophus dorsalis</i>		B	7,731	5,072	5,055	increase

VU= Vulnerable, CR= Critically Endangered, EN= Endangered, NT= Not Threatened, LC= Least Concerned
Sources: Gilles Etoga & Desire Foguekem, 2008; Gilles Etoga et al, 2011 and Nzo Zach et al, 2015

Available data of flora species in the Campo Ma'an TOU landscape with conservation and economic concerns as indicated in the table below.

Table 2: Rare and endemic flora species present in FMU 09025

Family	Scientific name
Begoniaceae	Begonia montis-elephantis
Celastraceae	Pristimera luteoviridis
Cyproraceae	Hyprolytrum sp. nov. ined
Dichapetalaceae	Tapura tchoutoi
Euphobiaceae	Afrotrewia kamerunica
Gramineae	Guadualla mildbraedii
Icacinaceae	Rhaphiostylis subsessilifolia
Lauraceae	Beillshmedia cuspida
Lauraceae	Beillshmedia dinklagei
Loganiaceae	Strychnos canthioides

EVALUATION OF THE PRESENT IMPACTS/ IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSED CAMVERT OIL PALM PROJECT ACTIVITIES ON THIS RICH BIODIVERSITY OF THE ZONE

Current trends in biodiversity depicts Campo TOU's biodiversity as very important and diverse in variety, quantity, ecosystems and of genetic resources. There are however, a regressive trend currently being observed through forest conversion in huge quantities is of great concern as this is causing multiple negative consequences for them. The attribution of 60,000 hectares of prime forest of FMU 09025 to CAMVEERT Sarl for oil palm production is already causing far reaching negative impacts to the environment, human wellbeing

and wildlife. Loss of valuable habitat and food trees necessary for the thriving of wildlife or a change in habitat quality leading to population declines, change in migrations patterns and disappearance of wildlife species and increase in human-wildlife conflicts, briefly put, biodiversity loss (Foley et al. 2005; Green et al. 2005). The current impacts/implications of the CAMVERT oil palm project on the Campo TOU biodiversity are classified into environmental, human well-being and wildlife.

Environmental impacts of the biodiversity destruction by the CAMVERT project

The Campo TOU covers approximately 769,445 hectares of forest. Logging concessions (FMU 09021 – 09025) within the said TOU represent 31.4% with FMU 09025 considered an HFC representing 12.5% of the total forest (Tchouto, 2004). Destroying this stretch of forest which is of great biodiversity importance to the zone, will have the following implications on the environment.

i. Land-Use Change conflicts: any economy which system depends on natural resources, there is bound to be the quest for land for agricultural development which is one of the principal driving forces of biodiversity loss (NBSAP II, 2012) and which usually results in huge land conflicts between communities and investors. This is the case of the CAMVERT project whereby, communities were informed during 'consultations' they will operate community farms within the 60,000ha requested by CAMVERT but to their greatest dismay after CAMVERT operations started, they were told some of them have to

give 100 meters, 200 meters and 300 meters of their riparian forest to add to CAMVERT's 60,000 hectares (GDA field visit report, 2020). This is already creating conflicts as some communities such as Akak II, Bouandjo, Doumessamendjang, Ebodje, Nazareth etc who say they have limited forest on which their livelihoods depend on and cannot give out any.

ii. Pollution: several communities in the Campo and Nyete sub divisions are suffering from lack of pipe borne water and the rivers found within the Campo TOU serves them this purpose. The eventual clearing down of this forest will mean depriving communities from drinking and household water use. Bore holes were constructed in the communities during similar projects and "they functioned for just a week" said the Chief of Doumessamendjang. Communities see such promises from CAMVERT as fake and therefore would not accept the project as it will lead to them losing their water sources from agro-industrial waste.

iii. Loss of species: clearing down 60,000 hectares of forest for the CAMVERT oil palm project, will contribute to flora and fauna species extinctions in the Campo TOU ecosystems which is having more than 1500 species with 114 being endemic.

iv. Destruction of aquatic life: the current trend of biodiversity loss will exacerbate the destruction of aquatic life and impose sufferings on the populations who depend on them for their

livelihoods. Ebodje and Campo Beach communities are strongly involved in the conservation of marine turtle and in fishing activities and are very close to FMU 09025 where CAMVERT plantation activities are being carried out. These communities are very sceptical about aquatic life in the area should the CAMVERT project go fully operational as many rivers that empty into the sea are found in FMU 09025 would be polluted with chemicals.

Socio-economic impacts on the biodiversity destruction by the CAMVERT project

- **Loss of NTFPs/other species:** The already cleared 1500ha of FMU 09025 by CAMVERT has limited the zone for the collection of NTFPs for the Campo TOU that counts about 250 types of Non-Timber Forest Products (Tchouto, 2004) and these products form an integral backbone of rural economy and livelihoods for the about 28 communities around the Campo TOU for providing food, fuel, building materials, medicine, craft materials, and other items. CAMVERT's activities are having a huge negative impact on the riparian communities who depend on the resources and this is already drowning the local economy and jeopardising the livelihood of local communities. Local communities don't use do-

mestic gas, all they have is the forest to harvest trees with which they use for domestic heating – recounted by the traditional ruler of Campo Beach and the other communities visited.

- **Loss of traditional rites:** the forest has been the home for the indigenous and local communities for decades now and have become a sacred site for them. These communities have their ancestors buried in these forests and have been carrying out traditional rites and that has permitted to maintain the biodiversity of the area, as it has become an integral part of their cultures and traditions. Replacing these forests with oil palms means denying and violating the populations rights.

Wildlife biodiversity impacts by the CAMVERT project

There have been some rising levels of man-animal conflicts at various locations of the Campo TOU due to close proximity between humans and wild carnivores particularly elephants and gorillas. Human populations in the area keeps expanding and natural habitats continuously being converted for other uses other than forest are causing people and animals to increasingly come into conflict over living space and food. The attribution of 60,000 hectares of prime

forest to CAMVERT for oil palm production of which they have already cleared more than 1500 hectares is causing human-wildlife conflicts already in the area. Recently, two elephants were killed near Afanessokye community as a result of CAMVERT activities (dislodged by noise from machines and labourers on the field) which despite being illegal, did not respect measures proposed by the Conservator of the Campo Ma'an National Park.



Image 4 (GDA): carcass of elephants killed

In the same line, wildlife species have been observed crossing the roads in the area under preparation, mainly caused by disturbances and noise of machines and labourers, changing the migration patterns and rendering them more vulnerable to poaching.

The FMU 09025 is a buffer zone for migration of wildlife particularly gorillas from the Campo Ma'an National Park to the Dipikar Island where the gorilla habituation project is being implemented by WWF. This project started in 2015 with the tracking of a group of gorillas by the Campo habituation team. There has some remarkable progress registered so far in 2018, which has enhanced hope for gorilla observation tourism, first of its kind in Cameroon. Upon completion

the habituation project is expected to boost ecotourism in order to generate sorely needed income for the communities and the State of Cameroon (WWF Cameroon). There have been some considerable negative impacts of the CAMVERT activities on the habituation project. *"I was in my farm some 50meters away from the highway, when I saw something sitting under a tree. At first, I thought was a man then realised it's a huge gorilla. Immediately, I started running thinking of what might happen if it is following me. All these happening because of the destruction of their habitats by CAMVERT and running away from noise from heavy the engines"* Christian, Regent Traditional ruler of Campo Beach.



Image 5 (GDA): Animals stranded due to clearing by CAMVERT

FUTURE PROJECTIONS OF IMPACTS OF THE CAMVERT OIL PALM PROJECT ON THE SURVIVAL OF THE BIODIVERSITY OF THE CAMPO TOU

Environmental impacts

The campo TOU is characterised by a rich and diverse biodiversity, which triggered the creation of the Campo Ma'an National Park in the year 2000 as an offset to the environmental degradation emanating from the construction of the Chad-Cameroon pipeline. From this point many initiatives have been put in place to protect the biodiversity of the landscape, including the planned creation of a Transboundary protected area with the Campo Reserve in Equatorial Guinea that is contiguous with the Campo Ma'an National Park and the planned creation of a Marine National Park to protect the endangered marine turtles and boost ecotourism.

The landscape has a thriving and stable population of forest elephants and great apes, other species of conservation concern include the giant pangolin, mandrill, yellow-backed duiker, manga beys and a recent ecological study monitoring of mammals in the Campo TOU led to the capturing of a leopard in a Camera trap deployed in FMU 09025 around Mount Mammel by a PhD student of the University of Granby, Canada.

The Campo TOU has equally been declared an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International based on its rich and diverse avifauna and an important site for their conservation.

Social and economic impacts

The influx of population in search for jobs is a probable source of insecurity in Campo and the neighbourhoods. This was one of the points raised by the Commissioner of Frontier Police Post, Campo in a bimonthly security meeting facilitated by WWF Kudu Zombo Programme.

Increased labour in the Campo TOU would entail increase in demand for proteins and farmlands leading to increase in human-wildlife conflicts,

A gorilla habituation project is ongoing in the Dipikar Island of the Campo Ma'an National Park adjacent to Block B of the declassified forest. The habituation process is far advanced with the gorilla group 'Akiba' already semi-habituated and ready for gorilla observation ecotourism. The objective of the project is to boost gorilla observation ecotourism and raise funds for park management and local development through Public Private Partnership governance. Therefore, the process of gorilla habituation is completely incompatible with the development of agro-plantations especially within the home range of the gorilla group under habituation.

These biodiversity/conservation attributes put the landscape in the limelight of fragile ecological ecosystems to be jealously managed jointly by the local communities and government to avoid loss of this natural heritage through the conversion of part of the landscape for agro-plantation. Loss of valuable habitat and food trees necessary for the thriving of wildlife or a change in habitat quality leading to population declines, change in migrations patterns and disappearance of wildlife species and increase in human-wildlife conflicts, briefly put, biodiversity loss (Foley et al., 2005; Green et al., 2005).

poaching and encroachment into the concession and the Park (park encroachment) or increase in wildlife related crimes.

Large scale oil palm plantations make use of inorganic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides to improve yields that would have negative impact on water quality and aquatic lives, and tourism if washed into Rivers Ntem and Lobe that empty at short distances into the Atlantic Ocean.

Studies have also revealed a wealth of plant species important for timber and non-timber products serving the local and indigenous populations and the government and these will be completely destroyed with the implementation of the CAMVERT oil palm project.

Tourism contributes 7.9% to South Africa's GDP and supports one in every 22 jobs, Cameroon can do same and even better if it stops destroying wildlife natural habitats. There are currently a number of proposed formal eco-tourism initiatives within the Campo TOU area. It is anticipated that eco-tourism developments, such as eco-resorts near the Campo Ma'an National Park areas, will serve to foster greater interest in the region. Growth in the product offering, as well as enhancement of existing touristic activities are regarded as significant prospects for the generation of employment and facilitation of entrepreneurial activities within the region.

Land grabbing will be the order of the day and would be intense if the project implements a robust small holder scheme.

With the establishment of a mill to process and produce finished or semi-finished products there would be chances of air pollution, and the use of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides and with effluents from the factory, there would be increased chances of water pollution, and in a municipality where a good representation of the

population doesn't have access to pipe-borne water, there are chances of prevalence of lung and water-borne diseases.

The poor disposal of wastes such as bunch stocks from plantation can form breeding grounds for insect vectors such as mosquitoes leading to upsurge of diseases such as malaria. Equally, the arrival of a large number of people could lead to the arrival of new diseases such as sexually transmitted diseases.

Going ahead with the implementation of the CAMVERT project will lead to destruction of plantations and homes in neighbouring villages by stray animals in search of new shelters.

Increased in banditry accusations leading to an increase in police/gendarme cases involving the local population that can be accused now and then of stealing the oil palm bunches by CAMVERT.

Addressing the causes/impacts of biodiversity degradation/loss is by reducing the direct and indirect pressures on it. Maintaining and improving the status of biodiversity is by safeguarding its ecosystems, habitats, species, and genetic diversity (NBSAP II, 2012). The clearing of 15,000 hectares of the 60,000 hectares demanded by CAMERT is causing a lot of controversy by threatening wildlife and forest dependent peoples and the very high conservation value of the area.

CONCLUSION

We are calling on the State of Cameroon to revisit its decision and STOP CAMVERT's activities on the field as it does not develop, respect, promote Cameroon's national and international engagements towards the protection of ecological fragile landscape in order to avoid further loss of this rich and wealthy biodiversity.

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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".