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CASE **AGRIBUSINESS** REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Congo-Brazza: Saris, a pure sugar success

The department's main private employer, Saris sells 85% of its production on the domestic market. And exports the rest to the sub-region.



The Somdiaa subsidiary factory, located in Moutela, produces 70,000 tonnes per year. © Muriel Devey Malu Malu for JA

Muriel Devey Malu-Malu

Published on October 6, 2016 Reading: 3 minutes.



FROM THE FILE

Congo: less oil, more ideas?

To limit its dependence on hydrocarbons, the Congolese economy is trying to grow new clusters of activity. As the 2012-2016 national development plan draws to a close, Jeune Afrique takes stock.

[Summary](#)

Based in Moutela, near Nkayi, the Agricultural Company for Industrial Sugar Refining (Saris) is more than just a business. It's a real institution. For decades, it has been the rhythm of life in Bouenza, and its employees – executives, engineers, technicians and specialized workers – are renowned throughout Central Africa for their know-how. We snatch them away. The main employer in Nkayi and the surrounding villages (700 permanent jobs and 4,000 temporary), Saris was created in 1991 with the main shareholder being the Society for the Organization, Management and Development of Food and Agricultural Industries (Somdiaa), of French group Vilgrain, which holds 66.04% of the share capital, alongside the Congolese State (33.96%).

The Vilgrain family's presence in Congo dates back to the 1950s, with the creation by Jean Vilgrain of the Société Industrielle et Agricole du Niari (Sian). In 1970, under the Marxist regime of President Marien Ngouabi, the vast, nationalized complex gave birth to four companies, including the Industrial and Agricultural Society of Congo (SIA-Congo), renamed Sucrierie du Congo (Suco) in 1975. Bad management, overstaffed, collapse of sugar production... all factors which led to the

privatization of Suco in 1991. Its buyer was Somdiaa. This is how the Vilgrains resurface in Congo.

THE REST AFTER THIS AD

Sodas. Saris holds a concession of 32,000 ha, of which around 12,500 are planted with sugar cane. After a record of 700,469 tonnes of cane in 2013, production rose to 622,823 t in 2015, while that of sugar reached around 70,000 t/year. Red, blond or white, refined or not, in powder or in pieces, it has been marketed under the Princesse Tatie brand since 2010. Its outlets? Mainly the Congo, a protected market whose consumption is around 60,000 t/year, with two major clients: the Brasseries du Congo (Brasco, which alone absorb 15,000 t/year for the manufacture of their lemonades and sodas) and Refreshers, Ice and Congo Water (Ragec), for the production of fruit juices. The rest of the production is distributed in Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic, the latter market experiencing strong expansion.

There is no shortage of investment projects. Following the drought of 2012, Saris launched an irrigation plan to cover 1,150 ha of plantations. In order to optimize yields and lower production costs, it is preparing to mechanize plantation preparation and cutting activities. Special basins will be installed to treat effluent from the factory (until now discharged into the Niari River). Finally, the company plans to install a bagging unit to manufacture the envelopes for individual sugar logs, currently imported from Cameroon.

biomass. In 2007, Saris acquired a limestone crushing plant in Madingou. Its production is used, in powder form, to enrich the soil in cane fields or, in the form of gravel, for civil engineering works. In recent years, the company has continued its investments in new niches, notably the corn sector. Objective: to produce flour (mainly for brewers) but also feed for livestock. “In addition to our own plantations, we will supervise small farmers to whom we will provide seeds,” explains Joseph Banzoulou, the secretary general of Saris. First installed in Pointe-Noire, the mill (wheat and corn) will then be established in Nkayi.

The company has also turned to the production of energy from biomass based on bagasse (fibrous residues from the crushing of sugar cane) and has just installed a turbo-alternator, the first tests of which are underway. The energy produced will satisfy the needs of Saris, while the surplus will be sold to the National Electricity Company (Snel). Latest project under study: the manufacture of bagasse loaves, which could be used as firewood .

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