

BioPalm plantation will lead to destruction of Bagyeli communities in Cameroon

News article

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Region

Cameroon (/en/regions/africa/cameroon)

Work theme

Palm oil & RSPO (/en/work-themes/responsible-finance-private-sector/palm-oil-rspo)

Translations

Français: La plantation de BioPalm mènera à la destruction des communautés Bagyéli au Cameroun (/fr/topics/huile-de-palme-et-la-rspo-table-ronde-sur-la-production-durable-d-huile-de-palme/news/2011/10)

Español: Una plantación de BioPalm provocará la destrucción de comunidades Bagyeli en Camerún (/es/topics/el-aceite-de-palma-y-la-rspo-mesa-redonda-sobre-el-aceite-de-palma-sostenible/news/2011/10/un)

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The government of Cameroon has signed a MoU for the creation of a 200,000 ha palm oil plantation by BioPalm Energy Ltd (a subsidiary of the Singapore-based SIVA Group) in Ocean province, Cameroon. This project was launched on Wednesday 24th August 2011 – despite the indigenous Bagyeli people opposing the decision to allocate their customary lands to the BioPalm plantation.

Recent fieldwork by Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) has found that neither the project nor the state has secured the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the Bagyeli, as required by the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights, which Cameroon has ratified.

To establish the plantation, native trees will be cut down and replaced with a monoculture of oil palms, making hunting and fishing in these areas impossible. The Bagyeli mostly depend on hunting, fishing and collecting forest products for their livelihoods, regularly going for several days deep into the forest. They also use the forest for traditional medicine. It is clear that the plantation will be the end of their way of life.

The Bagyeli communities that FPP visited said that “the plantation is a way to make the Bagyeli disappear”. As well as making their traditional livelihoods impossible the plantation will also lead to the erosion and loss of their culture by preventing transmission of their forest knowledge. They asked, “How will we survive?” as several of their villages are even located within the planned plantation – it is unclear how the project plans to deal with them.

The project does not plan to provide any compensation for indigenous peoples and other local communities (Bagyeli and others). Communities have merely been informed that a 4km-wide strip along the road will be left to them for all their activities. Some of the other local communities are divided, as some are attracted to the project by the promise of “development”, such as schools, health centres and a good road that the government has failed to provide so far. They are also hoping to benefit from employment in the company.

Nevertheless, many of these promised benefits are unlikely to materialise or to be short-lived as such concessions tend to employ people from much further afield, and any services that they establish need sustained investment in human resources. Moreover, the Bagyeli are already marginalized by dominant local communities, thus they are unlikely to see even short-term benefit from social schemes, employment or secure land for farming.

The felling of timber in the forest and the planting of palm trees has not yet begun. There is still an opportunity for the government to fulfil its role towards communities and respect its international obligations.

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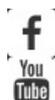
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