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**What is driving land grabbing?
A critical overview across the Congo Basin region**



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OUR VIEWPOINT



The Congo Basin: in the Sights of Capital

The Congo Basin in Central Africa contains the second largest forest in the world. Its extensive territory is shared by six countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and Equatorial Guinea. With this Bulletin we seek to explore in depth and report on the intense land-grabbing that people are confronted with and resist in this region—a forested area that houses and provides the livelihood and sustenance for around 30 million people.

This Bulletin is the result of the WRM Secretariat's decision to focus some of its issues on regions, rather than thematically. Bulletin readers suggested this as a way to share information and delve more deeply into what is happening in some regions that are important due to their forests. We also hope that this Bulletin focused on the Congo Basin and collectively put together with organizations and activists based in the region, contributes to the dissemination of a broader view at what is happening in this area.

Indeed, a Bulletin focused on the Congo Basin is critically needed. The region is suffering from a new wave of colonialism. Land grabbing, while not new to the area, intensified after the financial crisis and sharp rise in food prices in 2007-2008. This situation, along with the relative calm that several countries in the region are experiencing after years of civil war and unrest—particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—has led to the promotion of foreign investment. The result will be more large-scale deforestation and the concentration of territorial control in few hands, with new investments in monoculture plantations, energy and infrastructure. This will especially affect the people who live in and depend on forests.

One article in this newsletter reflects on how international and regional forest policies have failed to achieve their own objectives, due to the fact that such instruments do not seek to implement deep and necessary changes. Yet, the issue of land ownership is at the center of the debate in the Congo Basin; therefore one article specifically focuses on the importance of access and rights to land for women in Africa, who are responsible for 60% of food production. Another article shares reflections from a regional meeting where participants identified tactics oil palm companies use when confronting local resistance in their drive to expand their monoculture on communal lands. One article



therefore explores agribusiness investment projects—like mega agroindustrial parks in the DRC—that undermine small-scale farming. Another article, on Cameroon, explores the true impacts of infrastructure, transport and energy projects. A final article of this Bulletin reflects on the failure of how protected areas in the Congo Basin have been established using “guards-and-guns” governance, which closed off large areas from access by local populations. For example in the Republic of Congo and in the DRC, planned large-scale REDD+ projects would partially encompass a national park and a reserve, respectively. Both projects contain regulations that could actually end up further dispossessing forest peoples

REDD+ type projects have begun to multiply concurrently throughout the region. The Congo Basin still has large preserved areas of forest, thanks to the communities who have traditionally lived there. However, the proliferation of “conservation” parks and projects like REDD+ have not impeded the continued increase in plans to expand oil palm and other monoculture plantations. Not only do REDD+ and similar projects allow for ongoing forest destruction and degradation, they also threaten the rights of communities who use, control and access their forests.

The impacts of this new wave of colonialism are clearly visible in this region. When looking at how land-grabbing is expanding—and thus the grabbing of forests, water, cultures and life—one can observe a foreign, predatory, extractive, and industrial model that sees forests like the Congo Basin as “resources” that can be quantified, extracted, controlled, bought and sold.

In this context, this Bulletin attempts to stress that the consequence of these extractive activities and the land-grabbing that facilitate them is the almost always violent expulsion of families, communities and peoples; the destruction of cultures, social fabrics, forest-based traditions and diverse identities; the loss of autonomy and territorial control by communities who have lived in the forests of the Congo Basin for countless generations.



WHAT IS DRIVING LAND GRABBING: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW ACROSS THE CONGO BASIN REGION



Emerging without submerging: the challenge of international policies on the environment in Central Africa

Central Africa is flooded with regional and international initiatives to manage its natural resources. In this forest region par excellence, the combination of these initiatives directly or indirectly affects the forest sector. The most active instruments of this kind are definitely the Voluntary Partnership Agreements for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT), and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, conservation, increased carbon reserves and sustainable forest management (REDD+). The first, product of a 2003 European Union policy change to limit illegal forest exploitation and its harmful effects in producer countries, was the subject of agreements with Cameroon, the Congo and the Central African Republic (CAR). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is currently in negotiations; meanwhile Gabon began negotiations but later stopped them. As for REDD+, all countries in the region have accepted this initiative with varied results. The DRC is at the forefront; meanwhile Gabon has paused development of the mechanisms necessary to implement REDD+, even though it approved a Sustainable Development Law in 2014 to facilitate carbon trading, among other things (1).

In addition to FLEGT and REDD+, countries in the sub-region are gradually adhering to certain forest-related initiatives that, while not directly related to the forest sector will strongly impact the forests. This is not least because all of these countries have forest cover of approximately 50% of their respective territories. The Tropical Forest Alliance (TFA 2020) and the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR 100) are among the most important initiatives. We can also mention supposed innovations in the fight against climate change: The Green Climate Fund, the 2015 UN Paris Agreement on the climate, etc. All these initiatives officially have excellent intentions to develop the sub-region, making it unsurprising that all governments have accepted them. However, previous experience with international initiatives presented in the most colorful terms should teach us to be very cautious.

Above all, we should be concerned about rural communities in general, and forest communities in particular; since when they are not mere spectators of these major



initiatives, they are often the most affected. It is important to examine cases of REDD+ projects in other African sub-regions (Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique, etc.). In Uganda for example, 22,000 people were uprooted from the districts of Mubende and Kiboga to enable installation of a massive REDD+ project. Closer to home, there are already examples of REDD+ projects that seriously threaten the survival of indigenous groups, which we will discuss below. After taking a retrospective look at the lessons learned from REDD+ and FLEGT in our countries, we will identify the risks associated with these new initiatives, and we will know whether such lessons were taken into account. Finally, we will propose some provisional measures to prevent these new development initiatives from becoming instruments of death.

Forest communities, REDD+ and FLEGT: lessons from the past that inspire distrust, or at least caution

There have been several analyses in recent years on the efficacy of these two instruments/mechanisms. The results are unanimous: while they did allow for a gradual opening of the political space, and awakened a greater interest in forest policy in the population, neither instrument has proven satisfactory nor fully responded to its own initial objectives.

FLEGT: Created to combat illegal exploitation of forests, this mechanism/instrument is far from achieving its initial objectives. When the CAR and the Republic of Congo signed Voluntary Partnership Agreements in 2009 and Cameroon in 2010, most actors were hoping the countries would be granted FLEGT licenses in 2013, coinciding with enactment of the European Union Timber Regulation. Three years later, no FLEGT license has been granted. To understand this, it is necessary to explain that these licenses would confirm that relatively good governance exists in the forestry sector, in particular due to better law enforcement. In other words, between 2009/2010 and 2016, States have failed to show that they are better managing their forests. So what does this mean for communities, in practice?

A positive change to highlight from this instrument/mechanism, is that civil society and communities have gained a better place at the negotiating table. Now they can express their opinions, on both the development of laws and policies and their implementation. For example, in Cameroon, civil society and indigenous communities are officially part of the monitoring bodies of the Voluntary Partnership Agreements. Yet beyond participation, it is important to examine how much participants' opinions are actually taken into account. Indeed in all countries, civil society and communities' opinions are frequently discarded with no real explanation. And despite FLEGT's arrival, living conditions in communities have not improved and in some cases have even worsened. Since 2015, communities in Cameroon are no longer receiving their annual share of forest royalties. While this change is not due to FLEGT, forest communities' numerous complaints about not receiving their share of royalties have failed to change anything. Finally, forest exploitation in general has not diminished in any country in the sub-region. Cases of illegal timber shipments to Europe and China have been the subject of numerous reports. One of the most sensational cases occurred in 2013, wherein a shipment confiscated on Belgian soil contained *Afromorsia*, a species of tree on the CITES list (2).



REDD+: Like FLEGT, REDD+ has facilitated the participation of groups usually excluded from decision-making processes. At each stage of Investment Preparation, civil society has mobilized to convey the importance of respecting communities' rights. Yet while part of the message was understood, in particular on the need for social and environmental safeguards, the rest seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Participation is considered to be a favor. Indeed, without a clear definition of what is meant by “participation,” it is very easy to devalue this term. A clear example comes from the Republic of Congo, where in 2014 the government decided to draft an instruction manual on REDD+ safeguards for forest communities. It only presented the educational material to civil society at the last minute, despite the fact that civil society should have been contributing their expertise at each stage of its creation. More recently, the government of Cameroon also distorted the meaning of participation, when it invited civil society to comment on its strategic document on REDD+ project investments in one week. In a week, a diverse civil society in a majority francophone country had to comment on an English document of about 100 pages. Finally, it is always crucial to question the legitimacy of “participants” wherever the case may be. Apart from indigenous associations and traditional leaders, no forest populations participate in these discussions, which will nonetheless affect their way of life.

Unlike FLEGT, which has not yet had direct negative impacts on forest communities, REDD+ has caused suffering in the DRC. Indeed, the projects in Ibi-Bateké and Maï-Ndombé show us that communities in the entire sub-region are at great risk. Neither of these projects sought Free, Prior Informed Consent from local indigenous communities (Batwa), even though they have customary rights to the lands the projects are using. In both cases, the companies exploiting carbon credits used the “divide and conquer” approach. One sector of the communities, mainly elites and village leaders, receive a portion of the income generated. This allows the company to claim it equitably shares benefits, even though most of the population is deprived of such income. And most significantly—in Maï-Ndombé for example—this has created tension between those who vehemently oppose the project and those who defend it. Finally, as with FLEGT, REDD+ has not proven effective in achieving even its most basic objectives: to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. Assessments of the above projects, which grant carbon credits, reveal that forest deterioration has significantly advanced. (3)

Neither FLEGT nor REDD+ has contributed to real and substantial change in terms of communities' rights. In the Republic of Congo, a law on indigenous peoples was passed when the FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements came into practice; yet its implementation remains impossible due to the absence of regulating text. In the DRC, despite grand promises, REDD+ has failed to move forward basic reforms on: land use planning, land ownership management, etc. While one could identify a link between civil society's interest in participating in the REDD+ process and the enactment of a decree favorable to forest communities in 2015; yet the reality is that this decree is not clear, nor is its true interest in communities. In this context, how can we trust new instruments, especially when they so strongly attract governments' attention? And when once again, as with FLEGT and REDD+, the role of forest-dependent communities is not clear from the start?



Current initiatives cannot address root causes

The reason that neither FLEGT nor REDD+ can profoundly change forest communities' current situation, is because these instruments are not intended to make profound changes. For communities to ultimately benefit from forests, three necessary changes stand out: to recognize and guarantee customary land rights; to build true and undeniable participation around benefits; and to ensure access to justice, in particular compensation for damages. However, if these fundamental changes are not part of the FLEGT or REDD+ mandates, they will be less so in the case of TFA 2020 or AFR 100.

Recognize and ensure customary rights to forest lands: in many cases communities have been unable to take action against illegal exploitation or an unjust REDD+ project, simply because of the rights recognized on lands where these activities take place. While communities claim customary rights to over 70% of lands, less than 10% are officially recognized. This discrepancy is very useful for forestry sector investors. In the aforementioned REDD+ projects, communities were displaced or saw their access restricted based on the erroneous principal that the State owns the lands and therefore can transfer them at will. Moreover, currently only the right to use forests is recognized throughout the sub-region, making it difficult and even impossible for communities to bar the way of an investor who has invaded their forests. Additionally, there is little transparency in the forestry sector; communities are often forced to go to the administration in order to identify companies logging on their lands.

Access to compensation and true benefit sharing: While all forestry and territorial laws contain rules on compensation in the event of damages or loss, in practice the reality is quite different. Compensation amounts are often far less than the real benefits communities used to derive from their lands. This is the case in Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and even in Gabon. Moreover, respect for laws—weak as they might be—is very problematic. As for access to benefits, current rules allow communities in all countries except Cameroon to receive a proportional share of the revenues generated from logging and carbon trading. These benefits usually arrive very late at the community level and are not always managed effectively, since communities have little financial management capacity. The reality is that companies, NGOs that promote REDD+ projects and intermediaries continue to be the primary beneficiaries.

Overall, there is inconsistency between good forest management goals and the development needs of countries. After the hunger crisis of 2008, the “emerging vision” flourished in the Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, placing these countries in competition for how fast they could develop. Thus, Cameroon's ambition is to become an emerging country by 2035; the DRC set its goal for 2030; the Republic of Congo and Gabon set the date for 2025. Equatorial Guinea is even more ambitious: this country foresees its economic emergence for 2020. The main development option these countries have chosen is based on capital valuation from natural resources. This means not only remaining dependent on oil, which in all these countries accounts for over 60% of national wealth, but on diversifying valued natural resources. One indicator of this trend is the gradual conversion of forests to industrial agriculture, mining or infrastructure purposes. Considering that in the last ten years, approximately 2 million hectares of forest have been allocated to non-forestry investments (agriculture, mining, infrastructure, etc.), it can be stated bluntly that there will be massive forest destruction in the coming years.



Similarly, the permits granted in 2011 to extract oil in the Virunga conservation park—the oldest conservation park in the DRC—are yet another example of the contradictions of governments in the sub-region in issues related to the environment.

What to do?

As we have seen, REDD+ and FLEGT are not very operative and are literally unable to meet their own objectives. When not adversely impacting communities, they contribute little to improving their situation or resolving the problem of forest loss; this is mainly because they leave intact the root causes we briefly described, and to which we could add a long list. TFA 2020 and AFR 100, like so many other programs, will run into the same problems. These are bandaid initiatives that exist for brief periods and do not address the bigger problems of the natural resources management. TFA 2020, with its goal of “developing sustainable agriculture based on public-private partnerships,” also foresees helping small-scale farmers. This will mainly involve one-off assistance to develop plantations. Yet there are no plans to address structural causes.

As for AFR 100, it is still too early to assess its capacity to impact forest communities in Central Africa. Its goal to “restore 100 million hectares of forest land between now and 2030” is very ambitious, and certainly laudable for communities that could see their environment restored. However, the modalities of access to land have not yet been specified. On the World Resource Institute's webpage on AFR 100, it indicates that some States have already agreed to “restore” 41 million hectares. (4) These states include the DRC and CAR. So far no consultation process with people of these countries has been initiated; yet it is clear that the land to “restore” will be community lands, as neither the DRC nor CAR government can claim to own such extensive areas of land free of community use. It seems reasonable therefore to question who will gain from forest “restoration.” The goal seems noble, but the risks are significant. Examples of REDD+ projects in the DRC are enough to prove that a restoration initiative can be harmful both to the environment (e.g. destruction of biodiversity in the Savannah being replaced by monocultures) and to communities (land-grabbing and destruction of essential resources).

Based on the above, it is easy to imagine that TFA 2020 and AFR 100 could follow in REDD+ and FLEGT's footsteps and negatively impact communities, or not significantly improve their standard of living. This is not a sufficient reason to discourage communities and civil society from participating in its implementation. It is well known that there are those who believe it is better not to sit at a bad negotiating table, and those who believe that if you do not sit at the table, you will become dinner. For our part, we believe that sometimes it is necessary to be involved in such processes, or at least be informed about them, in order to have the necessary tools to improve them when possible, or fight them if necessary. For now we can recommend three measures to take regarding these initiatives, which will no doubt multiply in the coming years:

Develop your arguments before sitting down at the table: one problem we have observed is that civil society and communities rarely manage to define the agenda. Yet environmental and social safeguards—nowadays almost mandatory for any REDD+ mechanism—are proof of these actors' ability to influence the program, as long as they are prepared to defend their positions. Therefore, it is necessary to achieve good internal consensus beforehand.



Aim for the substantial rights: FLEGT's main contribution in the Congo Basin was adoption of a law on indigenous peoples. Other changes in the Congo Basin and elsewhere involved less consistent or intangible rights, such as the right to participate in certain decision-making spaces. It is important to encourage reforms that truly aim to change the lives of communities, such as those that would ensure customary land rights, better distribution of benefits, or guaranteed access to compensation in the event of damages, etc.

Compare, “name and appreciate” good examples: NGOs in the sub-region should document positive examples of natural resource management in other countries more, in order to propose concrete and feasible solutions. Governments often oppose proposed laws that would better respect traditional rights, arguing that “they are not feasible.” However the region is full of positive examples. Cases from Ghana, Botswana and Burkina Faso show that it is possible to recognize important territorial rights for peoples without slowing national development. This kind of lesson is what prompted the African Community Rights Network to publish a comparative report in 2014 on community rights, REDD+ and FLEGT (5). The Network has just developed an index to rate the degree of land rights protections in Africa. They have already completed a first analysis using their rating index in eight countries; and presumably the results will show what is working, in order to encourage States to improve their position.

Téodyl Nkuintchua, nkuintchua@yahoo.fr

Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement, www.cedcameroun.org

(1) <http://gabonreview.com/blog/developpement-durable-les-inquietudes-de-la-societe-civile-sur-la-nouvelle-loi-dorientation/>

(2) <http://www.radiokapi.net/environnement/2013/11/28/Allemagne-saisie-de-deux-cargaisons-de-bois-illegalement-exporte-de-la-rdc>

(3) <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/congo-basin-rainforest-project-communities-leery-of-conservation-revolution/>

(4) <http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/AFR100/restoration-commitments#project-tabs>

(5) <http://www.cedcameroun.org/flegt-redd-et-droits-des-communautes-aux-forets-et-a-la-terre-en-afrique-lecons-apprises-et-perspectives/>



Women and Property in Cameroon: Laws and Reality

The agricultural force on the continent

In Cameroon as in many African countries, women daily endure practices that could be considered discriminatory in various areas of society, and especially related to land ownership. “In our family, a woman is a good, like a house or a plantation,” said Léon Mba, leader of the Pamue Congress in 1949. (1)

Since the president of Cameroon announced the launch of reforms at the agro-pastoral assembly on January 17, 2011, the issue of land tenure has been at the center of the debate in Cameroon. Even more central is the issue of women's access to land, since—as women's rights groups point out—women could be unwilling or unable to invest in land they do not own. According to some women's rights defenders, it is necessary to clear up this situation since “almost no women have access to formal tenure rights. This exclusion weakens women's ability to invest in the use of their lands.” Customary law applies in this predominantly patriarchal context, in which women do not inherit land and consequently have no formal control over it. African women produce 60% of the staple food and own only 1% of land on the continent; these figures are similar in Cameroon, where women constitute 70% of the workforce. (2) Statistics show that this problem exists not only in Cameroon. According to recent estimates, women in Sub-Saharan Africa account for over 70% of the agricultural labor force on the continent and produce close to 90% of food products. Since customary law only grants them access to but no rights to land, it is important to distinguish among access, use and control. In rural areas, land is the main source of income and subsistence. Therefore in practice, their lack of control exposes women to great insecurity and makes their economic situation very precarious, particularly in a context of large-scale land grabs.

This article has four parts. The first focuses on the context of customary law in Cameroon; the second shows how difficult it is for women to access land, due to the weight of tradition; the third explains how this difficulty is compounded by changes in a woman's marital status; and the last compares rural women's situation with that of women in large cities, in order to show the urgency of solving the problem of land tenure for rural women.



The evolution of land tenure in Cameroon and its impacts on women's property rights

We cannot discuss women's tenure rights in Cameroon without briefly examining the evolution of those rights in the country. In effect, Cameroon tenure rights are characterized by the coexistence of customary law and “positive” or “modern” law. Cameroonian land tenure makes a distinction between registered and privately owned lands, and unoccupied lands that belong to the State but which are used by traditional communities. Moreover, the 1974 ordinance—which establishes that registration is the only proof of ownership—further complicates the situation for rural communities. Indeed, the rural sector is mainly governed by customary law, which has not yet integrated the question of land titling. In this situation, women's right to land is a problematic and unresolved issue.

Land is an important factor in the development process, and is central in the fight against poverty in rural populations. Territorial legislation in Cameroon recognizes equal rights for men and women. However in practice, women are subject to marginalization that comes from traditional discriminatory practices. They are the ones who own the least amount of land in the world—only about 10%—and they daily face a situation of dependency. It is thus necessary to reflect on why rural women face this discriminatory situation, and why their inability to own land currently poses a problem in this context.

Patriarchal practices and difficult access to land for women

In rural areas, land is collectively managed. Women in Cameroon have a central role in said management, yet they are the first ones to be affected by territorial insecurity, which weakens their ability to invest. This can be explained by the discriminatory nature of rural land management. As mentioned above, women generally do not own land. Most often, women are allocated a small plot of land on which to cultivate, but the “property” itself belongs to her family or her husband. In this context, women do not acknowledge the written law that guarantees their rights to land; and furthermore, traditional uses and customs lead them to exercise a kind of self-exclusion from tenure issues in their communities, which is perceived as a men's matter.

It seems clear that individualism does not count in a world governed by customs, nor does total freedom exist in the sense in which we understand this word. In these societies, women appear to be subjected to men and the obligations the latter impose on them. Whether in the family a woman marries into or their family of birth, women are always under men's authority. Only men have the right to land, and this right is divided amongst the men of a family. As in most African countries, these systems of patriarchal management exist in Cameroonian villages. This is in spite of the fact that rural women can be the motor in the struggle to develop, even though they are for the large part peasants without land because traditional customs prevent them from inheriting it. In short, they do not have direct access to land.



Does a change in a woman's marital status affect her customary land rights?

Customary law grants single women a piece of land that they can use their whole life; but if a woman decides to get married, this land returns to her family of birth.

On the other hand, a married woman acquires access to land through her husband, and she has the freedom to choose how she will use the land; the majority grow food. Generally, married women only have usufruct rights of the land they use. The marital regime usually does not apply in rural areas, where most couples have common-law or polygamous marriages. Nevertheless, it is necessary to understand a woman's marital status to understand the degree of access and control she has to land because of these interactions between different sets of laws — be they religious, customary, civil or otherwise.

A widow's situation varies depending on whether she has children. If she does not, the family she married into might expel her and take away her land. Thus, having children is a necessary condition for her to continue using land. For example in Ndikibil —a village in Ndikinimeki —as in many other regions in Cameroon, when a woman loses her husband it is common for the family to take away her lands. Even if she has had children, the decision often depends on the greed of her late husband's family members, who can argue that she only had daughters, or that her sons are too young to claim their right to their father's lands.

The fragility of rights is thus a consequence of applying customary norms, which are justified by citing the need to preserve traditional heritage. Traditional authorities allege the following reasons, among others:

- A woman's situation is not stable, in the future she ought to get married;
- A man prevails over a woman as head of the household;
- Traditional practices only grant women the right to work the land but not be its owners;
- A woman who owns land could easily be deceived and give her lands away to the man she falls in love with.

Thus, according to those who protect tradition, excluding women in matters of land succession is a way of preserving the family heritage.

The relationship between territorial law and customary law for women

In terms of ownership, women living in cities have a different situation from those living in rural areas. Even if the land traditionally belongs to men—who are entitled to inherit and administer it—women who live in the city and have the financial means to do so, can buy land, just like men. This is increasingly common in cities for single as well as for married women with separated property holdings among spouses. However, in rural areas this does not happen, because village societies are patriarchal; and it is men who inherit the land and decide how to use it. This situation persists in spite of the 1996 Constitution that guarantees the right to land ownership regardless of sex. This shows how important customary rights regimes are when it comes to tenure rights in



rural areas, even as the common law seems to restrict its influence by advocating non-discrimination and equality for all.

Rural women's situation summarizes all study of their patrimonial rights, as they live under permanent tutelage. The customary rights regime in Cameroon today does not recognize women's rights to own land. Women's opinions on territorial issues matter very little because, according to proponents of traditional law, a woman's status is constantly changing [because with marriage she would switch family, and thus move onto land elsewhere]. Furthermore, there is a clear difference between young single women and married women: in some sense a young single woman is held in higher esteem and more likely to be granted usufruct rights to a plot. A married woman is always considered an outsider by the family she married into; believed to never fully separate from her family of birth, and is always ready to abandon the land in the event of divorce or her husband's death.

Conclusion

In light of the analysis of women's land tenure in Cameroon, it seems clear that we must find a way to reconcile customary law and common law so that women can enjoy secure access to land, and at the same time, take precautions to prevent their villages from losing their traditional heritage. Certainly we must look beyond political reforms and adopt a real change in both men and women's behavior vis-a-vis women's right to land; given that women's right to land is essential not only for themselves, but also to ensure collective food security.

Michèle ONGBASSOMBEN, michelebatende@yahoo.fr

Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement (CED), www.cedcameroun.org

(1) Quoted by G. Baladier in "Sociologie de l'Afrique noire", PUF, 1955.

(2) MINADER / DESA / AGRI-STAT N° 16, <http://www.minader.cm/uploads/DESA/AGRI-STAT%2016.pdf>



DRC: Communities mobilise to free themselves from a hundred years of colonial oil palm plantations

Oil palms are native to the forests of Central and West Africa and inseparable from the region's peoples and their cultures. Communities in this part of the world have relied on oil palms for thousands of years— as a source of food, textiles, medicines and construction materials.

Most of the world's oil palms, however, are cultivated far away, in Southeast Asia, and not in forested palm groves, but on massive monoculture plantations where tropical forests used to stand. These oil palm plantations are a product of Europe's brutal colonial legacy.

When the European colonizers invaded Central and West Africa during the nineteenth century, they came to understand (in a very narrow way) the possible wealth that could be generated from oil palm cultivation. They began taking over the local people's large oil palm groves and tearing down forests to set up plantations. One of the pioneers of this effort was Britain's Lord Leverhulme, who, through a campaign of terror against the local people, took over community palm groves and turned vast swathes of the Congo's forests into slave plantations. His company's oil palm plantations would eventually expand throughout West and Central Africa and then to Southeast Asia, and provide the foundation for the multinational corporation Unilever, one of the world's largest food companies. Unilever sold off its global oil palm plantations about a decade ago but to this day it remains one of the world's biggest buyers of palm oil.

The communities living next to and within Unilever's former plantations are amongst the poorest in Africa. At a recent gathering of leaders from African communities struggling against the expansion of oil palm plantations, held in Mundemba, Cameroon, participants on a field visit were shocked by the living conditions of the people in N'dian Town— a community within one of Unilever's former oil palm plantations in Cameroon, now run by the Cameroonian company Pamol (1). Decades of oil palm plantations had brought only poverty to the community.

The lands of Unilever's plantations across the Congo Basin have not been returned to their inhabitants. They have instead been sold at a profit to a new batch of companies: some of them domestic, most of them foreign; some of them multinationals with



plantations in other countries; some from other business sectors having no experience with plantations. The latter is the case with some of Unilever's original oil palm plantations— in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

After 100 years in what is now the DRC, Unilever sold three of its oil palm plantations in 2008 to a company called Feronia, registered until recently in the Cayman Islands. This company, listed on the Stock Exchange in Toronto, Canada and now majority owned by European development funds, had no previous experience in agriculture. Through its sale of these DRC plantations, Unilever made around USD 14 million dollars in cash and left behind around USD 10 million dollars in liabilities to the new owners.

In October 2015, 12 leaders from communities located within the various concessions of Equateur and Oriental provinces in DRC where Feronia operates its plantations (Yahuma, Boteka, Basoko, Yaligimba, Yalifombo, Mosité, Lokutu) gathered in Kampala, Uganda, to share experiences and chart a course of common action to liberate their communities from the occupation and exploitation that they have endured for generations. The meeting was held in Kampala for security reasons.

It was also a moment for the Congolese NGO RIAO-RDC and its international partners to provide the communities with information about Feronia that they were not aware of. Prior to the meeting, Feronia and its main shareholder, the UK development finance institution CDC, had issued statements maintaining that Feronia was improving the lives of workers and the local communities and that it was in full compliance with national and international laws and standards with regards to its land concessions and labour practices. (2)

The community leaders were outraged by the claims made by the company and the CDC. After having shared their experiences, they issued a collective statement to make clear the reality in their communities. The leaders rejected the claims made by Feronia and the CDC, dismissing them as “lies”. They said that the situation for the communities had deteriorated since Feronia took over the plantations in 2008. Their homes, schools, clinics and roads were in awful condition, and contrary to what the company maintains, no new infrastructure or worker homes have been built.

The CDC claimed that the average salaries of plantation workers were increased to US\$4 per day, but the leaders say that workers are frequently not paid at all and when they are it's only at a rate of US\$1.5 per day. In response to the company's claim that workers were receiving “bonuses”, the leaders said that this must be a newly invented word, since the concept was unknown on Feronia's plantations.

The leaders challenged the CDC to come see for itself what Feronia has been doing to local people. “The money that you give to Feronia does not reach the workers and the local communities,” they stated.

What the leaders say the communities want, more than anything, is to get their lands back from the company. They have suffered long enough, and they are tired of false promises.



At the close of the meeting, the leaders established a new alliance of communities affected by Feronia, and pledged to work together to advance their demands.

In January 2016, Feronia became majority owned by the CDC and several European development banks, through their investments in the African Agricultural Fund. This Fund is a Mauritius-based private equity fund financed by bilateral and multilateral African development finance institutions. Its Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) is funded primarily by “the European Commission and managed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The TAF is co-sponsored by the Italian Development Corporation, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)”. In addition, development banks from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands are also involved as investors (3).

Colonialism has come full circle, and once again this exploitation is being justified as “development”, as if the horrors of the colonial plantation system never existed. If European governments are really interested in making amends, they should focus on reparations and support the communities in their demand to bring the occupation of their territories to an end and ensure expiry of concessions in the near future is used to hand the land back to the communities.

RIAO-RDC and GRAIN

(1) Link to statement: <https://www.grain.org/e/5426>

(2) <http://business-humanrights.org/en/dem-rep-of-congo-report-raises-concerns-about-land-grabs-inadequate-consultations-compensation-by-feronia-unilever>

(3) http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578007/EXPO_STU%282016%29578007_EN.pdf (pages 20, 21)



Agribusiness, a step towards increased food dependency in Africa

The village of Yalifombo, on the banks of the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), was an essentially agricultural community. In this village it is possible to observe how the local economy, which revolved around traditional cultivation of oil palm, has collapsed from the dramatic increase in industrial plantations. Throughout the Congo Basin sub-region, whether in Mundemba (Cameroon) or Mboma (Gabon), we see agribusiness increasingly competing with local agricultural economies. The system that certain public policies promote today is destroying systems that have been beneficial to peasant communities for a long time.

African peasant farmers' organizations and NGOs continue to assert that the future of farming is not in industrial agriculture but in peasant farming, which is feeding the world and is capable of cooling the planet through agroecology and a respect for biodiversity. (1)

For example, in the report “Unlocking the Potential of Family Farms,” the National Rural Coalition (CNCR, for its French acronym) in Senegal shows that family farms—not agribusinesses—are perfectly capable of feeding the country, and indeed currently do. Family farms provide the main source of food for the Senegalese population, meeting 70% of its needs in both rural and urban areas. (2)

However, powerful pressures continue to impose the agribusiness model.

After promises made during the 2003 African Union Summit in Malabo (Equatorial Guinea)—to allocate at least 10% of their national budgets to agricultural investment by 2008—African States are still expecting financial institutions to develop agriculture that will feed their citizens.

Headed by the World Bank with its “win-win” theories, these international financial institutions are trying to redefine African agriculture based on their own programs and a strong complicity with the world of finance, its instruments and the uncertainties that these bring.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a pilot country for these policies, the first of a promised 20 Agroindustrial Parks opened in 2014. Congolese peasant farmers soon



denounced this presidential initiative (3), which was an initiative of NEPAD— the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (4).

The allegations concern the lack of consultation, transparency and participation by peasant farmers' organizations. They also reveal that this program, cheered on by the World Bank, promotes agribusiness. Far from contributing to national development and poverty reduction, Agroindustrial Parks will likely cause forced displacement of communities and land-grabbing.

Thus Congolese peasants are confronting a system which, through tax relief and promotion of certain kinds of crops, is clearly designed to favor foreign investment and not themselves.

In Gabon, another playground for agribusiness, a program entitled GRAINE (5) has formed a public-private partnership between Singaporean group OLAM International and the Republic of Gabon in order to “develop agriculture.”

This program aims to create 30,000 jobs (through self-employment) and occupy 200,000 hectares of farmland. It has already begun to take over land from communities in Mboma in the state of Woleu. (6)

Meanwhile, the best cut of the GRAINE program goes to the US-based company Caterpillar, thanks to a 140 million-dollar contract for the acquisition of 475 bulldozers. Yet, what communities are requesting is simply to retain their lands so that they can grow the food they need.

SIAT is another company heavily involved in the agribusiness sector in Gabon, Ivory Coast and other African countries.

Dedicated to growing oil palm and rubber, among other activities, this company also uses artificial insemination techniques to increase the number of cattle in Gabon. Based in Brussels (Belgium), SIAT owns several concessions and occupies some 15,000 hectares in Gabon.

While SIAT claims to have strong social responsibility, there are doubts as to the credibility and veracity of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment carried out in 2012 in the Bitam/Minvoul region. (7)

These examples from the Congo Basin show that, although foreign investment projects in agriculture and the agribusiness model are presented as “responsible investments” creating “win-win situations,” it would be more useful for African countries to invest in small-scale farming to guarantee their food sovereignty.

Despite all the facilities granted to it, peasants continue to resist agribusiness. Investments in large-scale agribusiness must be curbed for the sake of communities and peace in the region. It is time to stop promoting policies like the G8's New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (NASAN), the European Union's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), or the US's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which are forcing African countries to change their policies on land and seeds.



Food sovereignty goes hand in hand with people's freedom to produce based on their free and informed decisions; it is not subject to the demands of the world food and agriculture commodities market.

Agribusiness is promoting exactly the opposite: that we must produce rubber, teak, or eucalyptus monocultures.

GRAIN, <https://www.grain.org/fr>

- (1) <http://fsm2015.altermondes.org/le-monde-est-nourri-a-90-par-lagriculture-familiale/>
- (2) http://www.cncr.org/sites/default/files/cncr_rapport_suivi_des_efa.pdf
- (3) <https://www.sosfaim.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/s2-PAI-plaidoyer-AgriCongo.pdf>
- (4) <http://www.nepad.org/>
- (5) <http://graine-gabon.com/>
- (6) <http://www.farmlandgrab.org/25462>
- (7) <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section3/gabon-new-study-warns-of-impacts-of-the-expansion-of-oil-palm-and-rubber-tree-plantations/>



Protected Areas in the Congo Basin: Failing both people and biodiversity (1)

The creation of “protected areas” throughout the world is mainly based on a philosophy that originated in the United States (US) in the late 1800s, which gave birth to a movement of national park establishment with the purpose of preserving areas of scenic beauty and natural wonders free from human intervention. This US vision of “wilderness” - which often ignored the critical role of native peoples in the management of landscape and has racist undercurrents - has been applied in many parts of the world, often with devastating effects on local populations living within forests. Despite these local realities, top-down “guns and guards” wildlife protection continues to be the norm, where large areas are set aside and local populations are prohibited access to and/or use of the natural resources they have long depended on. Conservation planning continues to be dominated by natural scientists and international conservation NGOs, often completely disregarding local histories, knowledge, livelihoods, and land and usufruct rights. There are numerous accounts from around the world of intolerant and coercive approaches of park managers towards indigenous peoples living within park areas.



Protected Areas in the Congo Basin

The area under Protected Areas status in the Congo Basin has increased considerably in the past decade and is set to continue increasing, as governments scramble to meet internationally set targets. Gabon and DRC, for instance, have integrated these targets into national policy, and in Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the rainforest area under protection already exceeds the international goal of 17 per cent. However, this setting aside of huge areas for conservation in reality poses a direct threat to the traditional territories of indigenous and other forest-dependent communities and thus also to their main means of subsistence.

None of these countries effectively recognises community land ownership rights (although all of them recognise some kind of usage rights, but in practice these are very poorly enforced). Most Protected Areas in the Congo Basin are formally state owned, even if the actual management of them is almost entirely dependent on local communities and their customary practices. Designating spaces for conservation effectively entails some form of dispossession for the people who depend on those forests, the most common being displacements and outright evictions as well as restrictions to livelihoods and cultural activities.

From a political perspective, the creation of Protected Areas has been an instrument of territorial control which started in colonial times, when hunting areas were created for the benefit of elites. Local populations were either driven out or severely restricted in their use of these lands. This trend continued under national governments after independence, when many of these hunting areas were officially recognised as Protected Areas. Many of these areas are now designated as National Parks, thereby imposing restrictions in terms of access and resource use, while extremely few are community reserves or indigenous and community conserved areas.

Colonialism, donors and conservation NGOs

Governmental agencies in charge of Protected Areas depend heavily on international donors and big conservation organisations for strategic orientation, and technical inputs, not to mention funding. Two examples from DRC illustrate this point well. Virunga, Africa's oldest national park, was established by the Belgian King in 1925 "largely from the tireless lobbying of an American biologist", according to the park's official website. The second is the proposed Lomami National Park, an area which is currently in the process of being classified, also as a result of successful lobbying by US scientists. The recent example of Lomami, which is similar to the way in which most Protected Areas were more recently designated in the region, shows the persistence of this basic setup: "western" conservationists playing a hugely influential role in bringing Protected Areas into being.

Although the United States and the European Union are the most important donors for conservation in the Congo Basin, there are other very relevant players, including Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI), which is pushing for the implementation of REDD+ programmes in the region, the German and French governments as well as the World Bank. International conservation NGOs are



prominent recipients of these funds (beyond the funding that they acquire through other means, notably through individual and corporate sponsorship). The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) are by far the two organisations with the strongest presence in the region, although they are not the only ones. These NGOs have huge control over information flows and are able to influence the wider national and regional conservation strategies. Despite the hundreds of millions of US dollars allocated to conservation projects in the region in the past decade, there is still little evidence of tangible conservation achievements. Protected Areas are failing to reach their own conservation objectives, raising questions about the sustainability of the current conservation model in the region.

National governments and local NGOs have had a limited participation in designing and operating conservation projects controlled by large foreign conservation NGOs. Thus, involvement of local communities has been even more limited. Local communities around these areas are aware of their clout and their relationship with these actors is often characterised by mistrust and conflict. According to a testimony from an indigenous person in South Cameroon: “Dobi-dobi” [WWF] people have more money than anyone here. They work with all the local big people, the évolués [elites/wealthy], extractive industries, safaris and even with ministers in Yaoundé. And the whites are behind them, even the Prince of England (sic) and the World Bank.”

Protected areas and extractive industries

The conservation model co-exists with a development model based on resource extraction with clear devastating impacts. Conservation programmes have often been explicitly designed not to contest these extractive activities, – notably logging, mining and oil concessions and agro-industry, with increasing expanses of forest being converted into oil palm and rubber plantations.

The study “Protected Areas in the Congo Basin: Failing both people and biodiversity?”, recently published by the Rainforest Foundation UK, shows how from the 34 Protected Areas examined in the region, more than half have mining concessions, close to half have oil concessions, and one reserve has three logging concessions within its boundaries.

Current approaches show significant shortcomings in tackling direct and indirect impacts of extractive activities bordering protected areas. For instance, migrant workers are commonly identified with significantly increased hunting and fishing pressure, and road building with increased illegal logging. Still, the most important international NGOs publicly defend their partnerships with corporations and rather than looking at this as a contradiction (as they also widely acknowledge their impacts), they portray it as a means to reach their own goals. Both WWF and WCS, for example, have “partnered” with some of the largest logging operations in the region.

What are the main problems that forest-dependent peoples and communities face when Protected Areas are set up in their territories?

- **Protected Areas threaten local livelihoods and wellbeing:** Without exception, all communities where field research took place for the Rainforest Foundation UK study



associate Protected Areas with increasing hardships. Diminished access to food (in severe cases even leading to malnutrition) as well as to forest products is directly affecting the wellbeing of local people. In no case has any compensation been given (or reported) for either displacements or loss of livelihoods.

- **Human rights disrespected in conservation initiatives:** There is an enormous gap between the human rights obligations, principles and commitments of national governments, donors and NGOs, and what is taking place on the ground. There is consistent neglect and in some cases outright violation of instruments offering local and indigenous communities rights to lands, livelihoods, participation and consultation.
- **Conflicts and human rights abuses around Protected Areas are widespread:** Communities around several Protected Areas throughout the region report abuse and other human rights violations, particularly at the hands of park rangers or “eco-guards”, besides the influence of an overarching trend of militarization in the region. The abuses are generally associated with aggressive anti-poaching, whereby local communities are targeted for hunting, although the impact of subsistence hunting is negligible compared to hunting for domestic urban centres or international markets. Conflictual relations with eco-guards are not only related to the restrictions they impose, but to their often brutal behaviour towards local communities, including torture, cruel punishments, arbitrary detention and confiscation of property, forced entry, intimidation and rape. Accounts of abuses including physical violence and destruction of property have also been widespread in relation to evictions taking place when parks were created.
- **While local communities face severe restrictions on their livelihoods, extractive industries are tolerated:** Whilst conservationists have tended to perceive local populations as the greatest immediate threat to Protected Areas, much more damaging large-scale extractive industries are widely tolerated by national governments and international conservation NGOs.
- **Indigenous peoples suffer disproportionately:** Indigenous peoples appear to have suffered the most, probably due to their reliance on hunting and extent of their territories. The areas inhabited by indigenous peoples are often precisely those today perceived by foreign conservationists as holding greatest “biodiversity value”. This position of vulnerability means that they are also particularly exposed to the impacts of the conservation model. Most of the cases of displacement found for the study involved indigenous peoples.
- **Participation and consultation with local communities almost non-existent:** In only about a third of the Protected Areas analysed in the study have local communities been consulted, and only a handful have involved them in management decisions. For the most part, the approach has predominantly been one of imposing strict top-down restrictions in terms of access to and use of forest resources, without integrating customary conservation practices or traditional knowledge. Large scale REDD+ projects are being planned in the Republic of Congo and in the DRC, which cover at least partially the Odzala-Kokoua National Park and the Tumba Lediima reserve, respectively. However, in both cases serious concerns have been raised that these plans are going forward without anything like adequate consultations with local communities and both apparently contain provisions that might actually end up dispossessing these peoples even further.

Conclusions

Conservation efforts in the Congo Basin are mostly failing to protect forests and biodiversity and are having serious negative impacts on local populations, and are



therefore far from what could be considered just or sustainable. A fundamental shift is needed in the way in which conservation is conceived and practiced in the Congo Basin. Strong engagement with local peoples in securing their own capacity to conserve nature should be a priority. Local and indigenous communities in the Congo Basin have detailed ecological knowledge and traditional conservation practices, and strong links to the rainforest. Local governance institutions should be recognized as crucial, and the multiple ties that connect such institutions (i.e. livelihoods, culture, spirituality, identity) to their environments should be nourished, not dismissed.

Simon Counsell, simonc@rainforestuk.org and **Aili Pyhälä**, aali.pyhala@helsinki.fi
Rainforest Foundation UK, <http://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org>

(1) This article is based on the report “Protected Areas in the Congo Basin: Failing both people and biodiversity?”, published by the Rainforest Foundation UK, which presents a study of 34 protected areas across Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Republic of Congo, assessing their impacts on people and biodiversity. For the full report, see: <http://www.mappingforrights.org/files/38342-Rainforest-Foundation-Conservation-Study-Web-ready.pdf>



Infrastructure, development and natural resources in Africa: A few examples from Cameroon (*)

In a world characterized by sluggish economic growth, Africa is often presented as the continent of the future, with average growth of around 5% annually that has remained constant, even during the global financial crisis. Indeed, the continent has considerable potential, with a diverse range of natural resources that are as yet scarcely exploited: extractive resources, timber, arable lands, etc. However, if the continent hopes to attract investors, it will be necessary to develop infrastructure. Inspired by the example of the economic dynamism of the newly industrialized countries of Asia, South America and even Africa, numerous countries on the continent now aspire to reach the status of emerging economies themselves in the span of a generation. With the assistance of financial institutions and/or private investors, these countries have embarked on ambitious infrastructure construction programmes, in the telecommunications, energy and transportation sectors. In a 2010 report entitled *Africa Infrastructure: A Time for Transformation*, the World Bank conducted an in-depth assessment of the situation on



the continent. Among other observations, the report stated that over half of the increase in growth in Africa could be attributed to infrastructure, and that this percentage would rise in the coming years. It also estimated that, in order to develop the infrastructure it needed, the continent would have to invest USD 93 billion dollars annually, a third of which would be required for maintenance.

The impacts of this strategy on the environment and on the rights of the poorest sections of the continent's population, who very often depend on natural resources for their survival, are not always sufficiently considered, and it is likely that rural communities will end up paying a very high price for infrastructure development. The aim of this article is to illustrate, through two infrastructure projects in Cameroon, some of the far-reaching implications of these projects and the risks associated with them.

The Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline (1)

Initiated in 2000 to transport the crude oil produced in southern Chad (the Doba Basin) to Kribi, on the Atlantic coast of Cameroon, this 1,000-kilometre pipeline was at the time the biggest infrastructure project ever undertaken in sub-Saharan Africa. The countries that received this investment, Cameroon and Chad, had no prior experience in conducting and monitoring environmental and social impact assessments for projects of this scope. Due to the participation of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the project's financial partners, the criteria applied for the impact assessment, the compensation scheme for local communities, the appeal mechanisms, etc., were those of the World Bank. And despite the particular attention paid to the project by international public opinion due to the controversies surrounding the preparation and approval phases, it eventually became clear that the social and environmental mitigation measures did not function as foreseen, and that these shortcomings had led to negative impacts, sometimes unforeseen but already irreversible. As an example, we could mention what happened to the small fishing community of Ebomé, a village in the district of Kribi, located at the point where the pipeline reaches the Atlantic Ocean. This formerly prosperous community saw its local economy destroyed when a reef rich in fish stocks located two kilometres off the coast was blasted by dynamite. Apparently, this reef had not been identified when the impact assessment for the project was carried out, and its destruction did not give rise to any immediate compensation, despite the protests from the fishermen. Five years later, an artificial reef was created in the same spot, but the fish never returned. It should be noted that, for the community of Ebomé, the reef was also a sacred site, the home of the "mami wata" or water spirits, who were responsible, among other things, for attracting the fish and putting them at the disposal of the village. The destruction of the reef was believed to have angered and driven off the spirits. This was not an isolated case, and more than ten years after the celebration of the arrival of the first barrel of oil, numerous unresolved problems continue to arise as a consequence of the pipeline. Two complaints were filed with the World Bank Inspection Panel (2), another two are currently pending before the IFC Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman, which demonstrates that the environmental and social impacts persist until today (3).

Although it is a massive infrastructure project in itself, the Chad-Cameroon pipeline is merely the backbone of a vast network of pipelines that will be gradually constructed around Lake Chad to transport the oil from the interior of the country to the Atlantic Coast. None of the oilfields would be economically viable if each required an individual



pipeline to carry the crude from the oil-producing area to the ocean. Therefore, economic viability can only be achieved by sharing part of the construction costs of the transportation infrastructure. This is why the pipeline between Chad and Cameroon is of such great strategic interest: it makes it possible to promote oil exploration and drilling in all of the regions located a reasonable distance from its path. And this is undoubtedly why the World Bank provided decisive assistance for the construction of the pipeline, granting the needed financing but also the indispensable insurance against political risks, without which the project would not likely have been undertaken, given the political instability in Chad at the time. Almost all of the new oil licences are in vulnerable areas: within the Lake Chad Basin, inside Waza National Park, on the Waza-Logone floodplains, on both sides of the border between Chad and the Central African Republic, etc. These projects, as well as another that is much further advanced, located in southeast Niger (see the map below), have not been subject to environmental and social impact assessments conducted in accordance with the criteria of the World Bank. Nevertheless, an agreement has already been reached between the government of Niger and COTCO, a consortium led by Exxon, which manages the pipeline. The execution of these projects will have a multiplying effect on the environmental and social impacts, which will be much greater than those of the initial project. At the time of the construction of the pipeline, some of the undertakings now planned had already been foreseen by some but were not taken into account in the impact assessments. The NGOs monitoring the project had observed that the pipeline was much larger than necessary for the volume of oil reserves in the Doba Basin. It would therefore appear that, from the beginning, there were plans to use the pipeline to transport crude oil from other fields, besides those of the Doba Basin. Aware of this fact, and to prevent the pipeline from facilitating oil drilling activities near the coast, where they would be especially polluting, some NGOs had demanded the inclusion of a clause in the contract between the World Bank Group and the other partners (the governments of Cameroon and Chad and the consortium led by Exxon) that would require them to only transport oil produced in compliance with the same social and environmental requirements established for the initial project. Article 4.05 of the loan agreement signed on March 29, 2001 between the Republic of Cameroon and the World Bank states: "The borrower shall ensure that any oil developed outside the Doba Basin Oil Fields, which is proposed to be transported through any part of the Transportation System in Cameroon, is developed in accordance with the principles set forth in the EMP [environmental management plan] with respect to environmental analysis and protection, consultation, information disclosure, resettlement and compensation, and with the equivalent legal and administrative processes specified therein and applied with respect to the oil developed in the Doba Basin Oil Fields."

On October 30, 2013, the governments of Niger and Cameroon signed an agreement for the transportation of 324 million barrels of crude oil from the Agadem oil field in Niger through the Chad-Cameroon pipeline. The government of Niger will construct a 600-kilometre pipeline from the oil field to connect with the existing pipeline (4). This situation gives the unfortunate impression that the promoters of the pipeline made promises they had no intention of keeping, solely to achieve the construction of the initial infrastructure, after which the others could be built without the need to seek restrictive new financing from international public agencies.



The North Congo-Kribi railway and the Kribi deepwater port

While these are different types of infrastructure, they can be viewed as forming part of an integrated system, built by different entities but aimed at the same goal: connecting the depths of the equatorial rainforest and its rich oil reserves with the Atlantic Coast.

The high-speed train railway forms part of a project for the exploitation of the iron ore reserves in Mbalam (Cameroon) and Nabeba (Republic of Congo) (5), in the heart of the equatorial rainforest, and TRIDOM, a vast forested area shared by Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of Congo. The mining concessions will impact on forests, some of which are home to exceptional biodiversity and provide the habitat and livelihoods of numerous communities, while others are targeted for large-scale logging operations. The new railway, stretching over 500 kilometres, will be used to transport iron ore from the two mining concessions to the port in Kribi. As can be seen on the map below, the south of Cameroon and north of the Republic of Congo and Gabon are brimming with reserves of iron ore and other minerals, whose exploitation will be facilitated by the railway. In this case as well, as in that of the pipeline, the basic infrastructure will serve as the basis for the development of a network of secondary railways, in order to join various scattered concessions to the main line stretching from the Congo to the ocean, facilitating the exploitation of mineral resources throughout the forested area along the equator. And once again, the impact assessments were limited to the main mining area and railway line, without taking into account the other infrastructures that will inevitably be added to those initially constructed.

What can we learn from these two examples?

While many lessons can be drawn from these examples, we will mention only a few.

1. Many infrastructure projects are planned, but not all of them have the same significance: some bring about more environmental destruction and rights violations than others; likewise, some are more strategic, meaning that they will serve as the basis for the development of many others.
2. While regulations around environmental and social impact assessments have improved since the construction of the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline, they still do not adequately deal with the growing complexity of projects, particularly those involving the construction of large-scale infrastructure and the exploitation of natural resources, which imply long-term coexistence with local communities and endanger the foundations of their survival and cultural rights.
3. The fragmented nature of environmental and social impact assessments does not allow for an accurate measurement of the accumulative impacts of the various infrastructure projects. This fragmentation leads to a downplaying of the repercussions of these investments on local communities and the environment, and thus makes them more acceptable.
4. Governments participate in the development and operation of these infrastructures in pursuit of competitiveness, a crucial advantage for attracting investment. But in order to do so they incur debt, and those who benefit are the multinational corporations, because the infrastructure facilitates their exploitation of natural resources. It is the citizens who will have to repay the debt, while the corporations take away the bulk of the income generated by the exploitation of



resources. And the portion of income that falls to the state is distributed unequally, to the detriment of the poorest, who are precisely the ones who are hardest hit by the impacts of the infrastructure projects. In the case of Cameroon, for example, we are witnessing a massive re-accumulation of debt for these purposes, with much of that debt owed to China. It is more than likely that natural resources will be used to repay that debt.

5. These projects have an especially high cost for the climate: in addition to the greenhouse gas emissions directly associated with infrastructure construction, we must also take into account the emissions caused by the exploitation of resources and, in the case of oil, its subsequent usage.

6. Due to a lack of planning, these infrastructure projects will impose limitations on future land use management and planning efforts. In the end they are not profitable for all, and even less so for the poorest sectors of the population. Moreover, they are particularly harmful to the environment. And while these projects may be carried out in pursuit of “development”, it would certainly appear that, in the long run, they result in more problems than solutions.

Samuel Nguiffo, CED-AT Cameroon,
 snguiffo@cedcameroun.org; snguiffo@yahoo.fr

(* This article was originally published in WRM’s Bulletin N.203 from June 2014.

(1) For more information on the project see

<http://ewebapps.worldbank.org/apps/ip/Pages/AllPanelCases.aspx>.

(2) The Inspection Panel is an independent complaints mechanism for people and communities who believe that they have been, or are likely to be, adversely affected by a World Bank-funded project.

<http://ewebapps.worldbank.org/apps/ip/Pages/Home.aspx>. For more information on the two cases presented to the Inspection Panel in connection with the Chad-Cameroon petroleum development and pipeline project, visit the following links:

<http://ewebapps.worldbank.org/apps/ip/Pages/ViewCase.aspx?CaseId=52> y

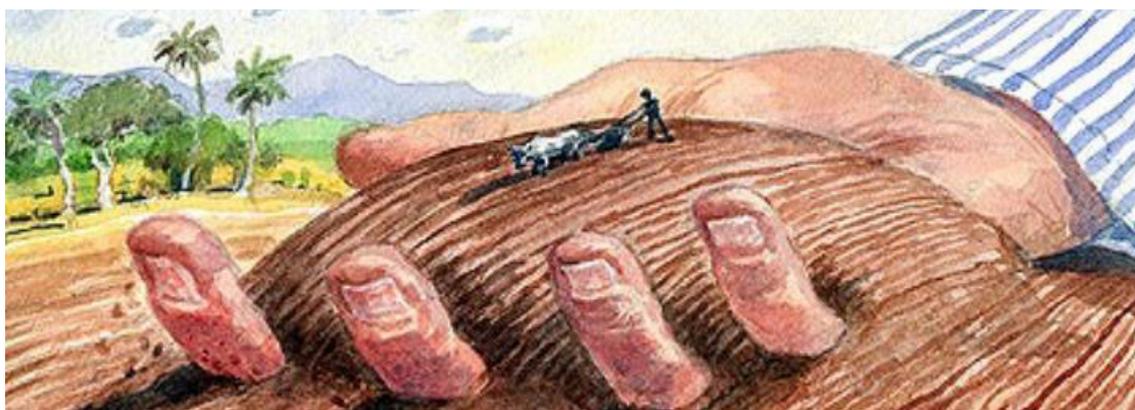
<http://ewebapps.worldbank.org/apps/ip/Pages/ViewCase.aspx?CaseId=59>.

(3) For more information on the cases filed with the IFC Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman, visit the following links: http://www.cao-ombudsman.org/cases/case_detail.aspx?id=168, <http://www.cao-ombudsman.org/cases/document-links/links-168.aspx>, http://www.cao-ombudsman.org/cases/case_detail.aspx?id=179, <http://www.cao-ombudsman.org/cases/document-links/links-179.aspx>.

(4) <http://economie.jeuneafrique.com/regions/afrique-subsaharienne/20378-le-brut-nigerien-transitera-par-le-pipeline-tchad-cameroun.html>.

(5) For more information on this project, see

<https://sundanceresources.com.au/IRM/Company/ShowPage.aspx/PDFs/2783-99911791/PresentationCameroonTradeandInvestmentForum>



Land grabbing: Tactics used by European actors abroad (1)

Current land grabbing practices include the capture of control of relatively vast tracts of land through a variety of mechanisms. In the process, land use acquires an extractive character, irrespective of whether the land grab is motivated by international or domestic (food security) pressures, capital investors searching for new investments with quick returns, climate change policies or other purposes. For indigenous peoples and traditional and peasant communities for whom the land and forests provide a livelihood, such large-scale land grabs result in a loss of control or access to food, water, medicines, shelter and many other local forest and land uses. This loss of control or access jeopardizes and often destroys community livelihoods, cultures and/or their autonomy as traditional or indigenous peoples. Land grabs imply direct and/or indirect violence towards local populations opposing the inevitable loss of land and forests such large-scale land grabs involve.

The study “Land grabbing and human rights: The involvement of European corporate and financial entities in land grabbing outside the European Union”, prepared for the European Parliament subcommittee on Human Rights, analyses the global land rush within a human rights framework. The study examines the implications of particular land deals involving European Union-based investors and their impact on communities living in areas where the investments are taking place.

The study also looks at the role of the state in creating, in cooperation with corporations and international development agencies, the impression that land use and property regimes on the lands targeted for land grabs are inefficient, destructive, or both. Thus, territories used by peasants engaging in shifting cultivation and small-scale agriculture, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, and forest peoples relying on forests for their livelihoods are most often targeted by such large-scale land grabs.

European Union actors and key land grabbing mechanisms

European Union (EU) corporate and financial entities involved in land grabbing may be implicated in a variety of human rights abuses. Actors - financial and corporate, private and public - involved in land grabs are linked to each other and to the EU in different ways. It is important to understand the main tactics used by these entities for grabbing land:



1. How EU-based private companies assume control over land

A company that has its headquarters or substantial business activity in an EU member state can be involved in a land deal at different points of the investment web. It can be a financial institution or company that provided a loan or acquired shares in a land deal. It might be a company that is involved in the implementation of a given project (coordinating or exercising), or a main client of the produced goods. In some cases, the operations on the ground are managed and/or carried out by a locally registered company, usually a subsidiary of the EU-based company (the subsidiary may have other shareholders), but business operations are coordinated from the company's headquarter or parent company. The land may have been acquired by the local company or by the EU-based company through purchase, lease or concession. The EU-based company may benefit from support by its home country, through intervention by the embassy or via financial or technical support from development agencies for the land acquisition.

The case of Luxembourg-based company Socfin

Socfin (Société Financière des Caoutchoucs), with the French group Bolloré as main shareholder, is an agro-industrial group specialized in oil palm and rubber plantations. The Socfin group is a very complex web of cross investments and shareholdings. Financial holdings of the group are based in Luxemburg; operational companies are based in Luxemburg, Belgium and Switzerland; and subsidiaries for the management of the plantations are established in a dozen Sub-Saharan and Southeast Asian countries. Although Socfin is a very old company with operations dating back to the colonial Belgian rule in what was called Belgian Congo, the company has gone through a significant expansion of its operations in recent years, benefiting from the growing world demand of palm oil for industrial food and agrofuels. Socfin largely relies on self-financing and commercial loans for the expansion of its operations, although it has on several occasions benefited from financial and technical support of Development Financial Institutions like the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group or the German Investment Corporation, DEG. Severe environmental, social and human rights impacts of Socfin's land investments have been denounced. In different countries this has led to land conflicts, social unrest and criminalisation of local leaders (See recent Action Alert).

2. Finance capital companies from the EU involved in land grabbing:

Finance capital companies include institutions as diverse as banks, brokerage companies, insurance firms, financial service providers, pension funds, investment funds and firms and venture capital funds (investments in high risk businesses). Finance capital companies have been increasingly involved in land deals since the beginning of the financial crisis and the food price spike in 2007-2008. Since then, land became a target for financial capital investors who needed to find new opportunities for creating quick returns on investment or to find a safe investment for money that could not be invested elsewhere in more lucrative ways. This trend is increasing the importance of financial markets, financial motives, financial institutions and financial elites in the land acquisitions. Financial actors may not always be very visible in a land deal, as they may be financing land grabs indirectly: Banks may provide credit to companies involved in land deals, or pension funds or private and corporate investors might be part of an investment fund that does not disclose where its investments come from.



3. Land grabbing via public-private partnerships:

In public–private partnerships (PPPs), public funding is used to reduce investment risk for or facilitate investment of private sector, usually corporate players. The partnership can involve one or more governments and one or more private sector companies. In the context of large-scale land deals, the public sector ensures an environment that facilitates land acquisitions and subsequent business activities by private corporations through specific policy interventions. PPPs blur the lines between public and private actors and mix up their respective roles and responsibilities and they thus carry the risk that the state abdicates its public responsibilities and obligations. Indeed, PPPs allow corporations to evade many risks involved in investments in land when governments lower investment risks or twist rules and regulations to their advantage.

The Chad-Cameroon pipeline

Initiated in 2000 to transport the crude oil produced in southern Chad to the Atlantic coast of Cameroon, the 1,000 km pipeline is one of Africa’s largest public-private partnerships. Project ownership is comprised of a three-company oil consortium (Exxon/Mobil 40%, Petronas Malaysia 35% and Chevron US 25%) and the governments of Chad and Cameroon, which hold a combined 3% stake in the pipeline portion of the project. The funds used to secure the investment share of the two countries were provided in the form of a loan by the World Bank (2). As Samuel Nguiffo, from CED-AT Cameroon, argues in his article re-printed in this bulletin (“Infrastructure, development and natural resources in Africa: A few examples from Cameroon”), it is clear that the governments incur debt, and those who benefit are the multinational corporations.

4. EU Development Finance involved in land grabbing:

Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) are important actors in land grabbing, namely as enablers of land deals and investment projects. DFIs are specialised development banks that are usually majority owned by national governments and contribute to the implementation of the latter’s foreign development and cooperation policy. However, information on the activities of DFIs is not always easily available. DFIs largely invest money they raise on capital markets; some may source additional capital from national or international development budgets. The scale of private sector financing from International Finance Institutions (IFIs) and European DFIs has increased dramatically. In some cases, involvement of different DFIs can result in the majority of a company’s shares being in the hands of DFIs.

Feronia’s oil palm plantations in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Feronia Inc., a company listed on the Toronto stock exchange, operates industrial oil palm plantations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In January 2016, Feronia became majority owned by CDC, the UK’s Development Finance Institution, and several other European development banks, through their investments in the African Agricultural Fund. This Fund is a Mauritius-based private equity fund financed by bilateral and multilateral African development finance institutions. Its Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) is funded primarily by “the European Commission and managed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The TAF is co-sponsored by the Italian



Development Corporation, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)”. In addition, development banks from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands are also involved as investors. See article in this bulletin: “DRC: Communities mobilise to free themselves from a hundred years of colonial oil palm plantations”.

5. Land grabbing through EU policies:

The following EU policies are particularly relevant to the context of land grabbing:

Investment policies:

The current international investment regime as promoted by the EU and EU member states contributes, among other serious human rights violations, to an enabling international environment for land grabbing. Investment treaties are by nature one-sided and only investors can invoke the treaty protections and put claims forward against states, even suing them.

Development policies:

In recent years, the EU has increasingly shifted towards a private sector-led approach to development, arguing that private sector engagement and funding is an indispensable complement to EU development assistance.

Bioenergy policies and the EU Renewable Energy Directive (RED):

The RED was adopted in 2009 and entered into force in 2010, and aims at reducing greenhouse gas emissions through the significant scaling up of forms of energy classed as renewable, including agrofuels and production of energy from burning wood. Civil society organisations have repeatedly pointed to the direct link between land grabbing and documented the human rights abuses and the EU agrofuels and bioenergy policies, as well as the involvement of European companies as important actors in land grabbing in this context. (3)

Trade policies:

With regard to land grabbing, a central concern relates to the incentives created through EU trade agreements for large-scale land acquisitions in countries outside the EU to produce crops for the EU market.

Climate policies, agreements and treaties:

Agreements made at the United Nations Convention on Climate Change and related events have direct effects on national legislation. Many industrialized governments and multilateral agencies have started programmes and funds to jump-start carbon markets in the countries of the global South, especially those with tropical forests. Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative, for example, which is pushing for the implementation of REDD+ programmes in the Congo Basin region, the German and French governments as well as the World Bank are some of the relevant players. Large-scale REDD+ projects are being planned in the Republic of Congo and in the DRC, with serious concerns over the lack of adequate consultations with local communities and both apparently might actually end up dispossessing these peoples even further. See article in this bulletin: “Protected Areas in the Congo Basin: Failing both people and biodiversity”.



6. Land grabbing through forest conversion:

Converting forests to other land uses that serve corporate interests is another way of land grabbing. In the last decade, the Congo Basin has experienced an unprecedented growth in demand for land to develop large-scale commodity plantations, particularly of crops such as palm oil. This demand is continuing at a rapid rate. A substantial proportion of land allocated for large-scale agriculture production in the region, particularly for oil palm, is being deforested. Oil palm plantation companies are targeting forests also to generate profits from the timber they can sell, further threatening tropical forests and forest-dependant populations. On top of this, the ongoing forest conversion is exacerbating regional deforestation rates and is highly correlated with land rights abuses and a range of other social impacts (4). As a result of these new developments, in 2013, industrial agro-conversion may already have become the largest driver of deforestation in the Congo Basin (5).

Oil palm expansion in Gabon

The SIAT group, a Belgian agro-industrial company, has operations in Nigeria, Ghana, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire. The group's main international bankers are: KBC Group (Belgium), BMI/SBI (Belgium), DEG (Germany), the African Development Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) from the World Bank. As a result of a privatisation exercise implemented by the Government of Gabon in 2003, SIAT acquired the until-then state companies Agrogabon, Hévégab and the Ranch of Nyanga. In 2004 the take-over convention for these enterprises was signed and SIAT Gabon was created. The company owns oil palm and rubber plantations and allied processing industries such as palm oil mills, palm oil refining. Much of the areas chosen for the company's expansion plans are almost entirely forested (6).

A pivotal struggle for forest and peasant communities is the one against land grabs and concentration of land ownership, which profoundly affects communities who depend on lands and forests for their survival and livelihoods. This struggle has become even harder, not only due to the expansion of agribusiness, mining, oil and gas, monoculture tree plantations, hydroelectric plants, climate-related projects, etc., but also because of the further interest of financial actors in acquiring land.

(1) This article is based on the study "Land grabbing and human rights: The involvement of European corporate and financial entities in land grabbing outside the European Union", requested by the European Parliament subcommittee on Human Rights

([http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578007/EXPO_STU\(2016\)578007_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578007/EXPO_STU(2016)578007_EN.pdf)), unless stated otherwise.

(2) <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/sipa/martin/chad-cam/overview.html#project>

(3) <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section3/open-letter-on-eu-biofuels-policy/>

(4) <http://eia-global.org/blog/eia-leads-discussions-on-illegal-commodity-driven-forest-conversion-in-cong>

(5) http://www.forest-trends.org/documents/files/doc_4718.pdf

(6) http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Etude_sur_limpact_Plantations_palmiers_a_huile_et_hevea-sur_les_populations_du_Gabon.pdf



TRICKS AND DECEPTION THAT PROMOTE LAND GRABBING



Strategies and tactics companies use to promote the expansion of oil palm plantations in the face of resistance from surrounding communities

From January 28-31, 2016, in Mundemba in southwest Cameroon, two international meetings took place on the expansion of oil palm cultivation and the global oil palm industry, in particular in Africa. The first meeting was a discussion workshop among women focused on the impacts of oil palm monoculture on women and their families, as well as current and possible strategies they could develop to defend their interests. The second gathering, called a “global workshop,” examined the strategies and tactics that companies use to increase their industrial oil palm plantations, and how communities react to defend their lands.

These workshops brought together fifty leaders from communities near industrial oil palm plantations, as well as representatives of national and international NGOs from four continents. Participants came from Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Gabon, Guinea, Nigeria, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Indonesia and Switzerland, to exchange their experiences.

Strategies and tactics to increase expansion of industrial oil palm plantations

The workshops in Mundemba identified several strategies and tactics companies use to defeat, even by force, opposition to their expansion projects. To do this, they:

- pressure local authorities to refuse to register community organizations or unions that oppose their plans to expand, and convince them to intervene and confiscate small machines that farmers use to produce their own oil palm;
- control communities by organizing “dialogues” with traditional leaders and important people, and at the end of the meeting, give them envelopes with money; those who do not accept are not invited again;



- arrive in communities, and to obtain their support, offer bribes to chiefs and local leaders, or other gifts (drinks, food, motorcycles, etc.) especially to women; or they propose to dig wells;
- sometimes they perform cadastral surveys of the land without obtaining consent or informing the local population;
- organize meetings concerning the project and then attach a false list of participants to the meeting documentation, making it look like a community accepts the project;
- say that the project has the President's support and can no longer be stopped; they claim that, in the absence of land titles, the lands belong to the government and therefore communities do not have the rights that would enable them to stop the project;
- employ a "divide and conquer" strategy: for example, they convince one family to give up their land, while the rest of the community is opposed to the project;
- offer jobs and contracts to important people within the population, and later use them as project spokespeople;
- propose miserable compensation to the poorest communities;
- stop buying from small farmers, who traditionally were suppliers for the company;
- intimidate community leaders who oppose the project, and sometimes even jail them or pass them off as 'terrorists';
- try to market their plantation projects as a way to combat climate change and generate wealth;
- register under different names in order to confuse communities and make them think the company belongs to a local group;
- seek dialogue with (international) NGOs but not with communities, so that the NGOs are responsible for negotiations and opening doors.

These multiple tactics and strategies confront different forms of resistance on the part of communities, whose actions are conditioned by the specific environment in which they are built.

Creating conditions for community resistance

The gatherings in Mundemba enabled community members to define actions they can take to defend their lands.

First of all, the struggles must be based on communities' customary rights to land. Additionally, the solutions must come from united communities, in which women, youth and men speak as one. This is how communities obtain great power. United and strong, communities can strengthen that power by cooperating with other organizations and communities locally and internationally. Together, such alliances can define their own plans, different from the companies', the governments' or bodies such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).

It is important to ensure that the whole community participates in decision-making. For this, it is important to avoid decisions made behind the scenes. It is also necessary to strengthen the economic autonomy of local leaders and personalities, to prevent them from being tempted by bribes, since they are the preferred targets of investors. It was agreed that poverty and the continuing lack of roads and other basic facilities that the



government should provide make communities vulnerable to companies' promises of "development".

During the meetings, participants insisted on the need to form alliances to take joint actions in places or countries affected by the same company, as in the case of Unilever or Socfin / Bolloré, or create an international tribunal to ensure the protection of human rights, and in which communities can seek redress.

The idea to pressure food companies sourcing palm oil from industrial plantations was also noted, as well as the importance of influencing in the political arena, in order to achieve legislative and institutional reforms.

Both workshops concluded with strong statements. One summarizes the women's gathering under the framework of "Women and the expansion of oil palm and industrial palm oil." The other, from the "global workshop," is a manifestation of solidarity with the communities in the state of Ndian, Southwest region of Cameroon, who struggle daily to defend their lands.

Both final declarations can be accessed at these links:

<http://wrm.org.uy/other-relevant-information/mundemba-declaration-and-statement-of-solidarity/>

Marie Crescence, radd2009@yahoo.fr

The aforementioned meetings were organized by three local organizations:

SEFE (Struggle to Economize Future Environment)

RADD (Réseau des Acteurs du Développement Durable)

With advice from CED (Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement),

In cooperation with the international organizations WRM and GRAIN, and with funding from Pain pour le Prochain.

ACTION ALERTS

“Conservationists, are you listening?” Baka Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon

In southeast Cameroon, Baka Indigenous Peoples and their neighbours continue to be illegally evicted in the name of conservation, most recently for a game reserve set up in 2015 with the support of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). A video made by Survival International shows the testimonies of Baka men and women revealing the violence they have suffered at the hands of anti-poaching militias backed by WWF. This debunks WWF's claims that the situation seems to have improved. Other victims have written open letters to protest at their unfair treatment. "They beat us with machetes here in the village... We want those involved to stop this... The forest is all we know. We don't want to be forced to stay in the village".

See the video: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/films/baka>



Survival International has also denounced WWF for partnering with French logging company Rougier, which is destroying indigenous Baka's forests

The company is an official partner of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) even though it has been denounced for its activities in Cameroon, which include illegal price-fixing of timber, illegal logging outside a concession, felling more trees than authorized, and illegally exporting rare timber. Under Cameroonian law, the Baka are often criminalized as “poachers” when they hunt to feed their families. In a map produced by Rougier, all Baka forest camps within one concession are labelled as “poachers’ camps.”

Read an article by Survival International denouncing the case at:

<http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/11276>

Peasant mobilizations in Cameroon

Socapalm and Safacam are two companies controlled by SOCFIN, a multinational agribusiness specialized in the cultivation of oil palm and rubber. The group has financial and operating companies in Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland, which manage plantations in a dozen African and Asian companies. The group's aggressive expansion policy has led to land-grabbing, causing serious impacts on local communities' living conditions. This has sparked many reactions from directly affected community members, as well as international NGOs. On June 1, 2016, hundreds of villagers—men, women and children—peacefully mobilized to disrupt Socapalm and Safacam's activities in five plantations (Mbambou, Mbongo, Dibombari, safacam, Kienké) and to challenge the company administration. Simultaneously, villagers of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cambodia joined Cameroonians to denounce the same abuses in their countries.

Read the press release from Synaparcam (National Peasant and River Populations Association of Cameroon) which brings together over 1,000 members from five different plantations.

Also, we invite you to access the **first edition of the quarterly “Union Line Magazine”** (in French) produced by the associations that defend the rights of Cameroonian river populations living adjacent to Socapalm's plantations. Its main objective is to inform actors in the oil palm sector of—and expose to the outside world—the daily reality of this activity, in order to facilitate coordinated actions through exchange.

RECOMMENDED

Under the radar: A brief summary of the situation of environmental defenders in Central Africa

This report aims to draw attention to violations and threats that environmental justice defenders in Central Africa are facing, specifically in the Congo Basin. The report is based on two studies. The first concerns the legal framework for the protection of



environmental justice advocates in Central Africa. The second focuses on the inclusion of communities' rights in Central African countries.

Read the report in French:

http://www.cedcameroun.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CED_SOUS-LE-RADAR_light.pdf

“12 Replies to 12 Lies about Oil Palm monocultures plantations” booklet available in Swahili and Lingala

This booklet produced by WRM aims at strengthening the struggles of all those who are opposing large-scale oil palm plantations in the global South. After expanding in Indonesia and Malaysia for decades, large-scale oil palm plantations have more recently been expanding in rural areas in countries in Africa and Latin America. These expansions of industrial oil palm plantations once again jeopardize the way of life of rural communities as well as their proposals for how land be used in ways that improve their well-being.

The booklet is now also available in [Swahili](#) and [Lingala](#)

You can access it in English [here](#)

“10 things communities should know about REDD” booklet available in Swahili and Lingala

The main goal of this booklet is to inform communities about the serious problems that a REDD project can cause for the communities involved. WRM has visited a number of these communities over the past years. All of them, without exception, have a lot to say about REDD. This is what motivated us to produce this booklet: to share their experiences with other communities who also run the risk of being affected by a REDD project.

The booklet is now also available in [Swahili](#) and [Lingala](#)

You can access it in English [here](#)

Collection of videos about the impacts of large-scale industrial oil palm plantations

The WRM, together with GRAIN, prepared a collection of videos on the impacts of large-scale industrial oil palm plantations. The videos have been produced by several partners from around the world working against expansion of industrial oil palm plantations and they describe the impacts that local communities suffer when the expansion takes place on their territories. The collection is aimed at providing information for grassroots organizations, movements and activists, particularly in Africa –where the expansion is more recent and taking place at alarming rates.

Access the videos here: <http://wrn.org.uy/videos/collection-of-videos-about-the-impacts-of-oil-palm-plantations/>

REDD Realities: two publications that show what REDD means for communities

Two publications show how REDD undermines forest peoples' rights, fails to address deforestation and puts the blame for deforestation and emissions on peasant farming practices while undermining local food systems.



The WRM publication “*REDD: A Collection of Conflicts, Contradictions and Lies*” presents summaries of reports from 24 REDD projects or programmes with a common characteristic: They are all known to have caused harm and given rise to grievances from communities in the project area.

<http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/redd-a-collection-of-conflicts-contradictions-and-lies/>

The joint publication by GRAIN and the WRM “*How REDD+ projects undermine peasant farming and real solutions to climate change*” shows why REDD+ is not a solution to climate change that can help peasants reduce emissions, adapt their farming practises to a changing climate and increase yields, as its proponents claim. It reinforces the corporate food and farming system that is largely responsible for climate change, has robbed many communities and forest peoples of their territories and undermines the food and agricultural systems of peasants and indigenous peoples that can cool the planet.

<http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/how-redd-projects-undermine-peasant-farming-and-real-solutions-to-climate-change/>

West African women defend traditional palm oil

A video produced by GRAIN shows how rural women in West Africa are working to protect traditional palm oil production in the face of the destructive expansion of industrial oil palm plantations.

See the video at: <https://www.grain.org/es/article/entries/5467-west-african-women-defend-traditional-palm-oil>

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This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese

Editor-in-Chief: Winfridus Overbeek

Managing Editor: Joanna Cabello

Editorial Assistants: Elizabeth Díaz, Jutta Kill, Flavio Pazos, Teresa Perez

WRM International Secretariat

Avenida General María Paz 1615 office 3. CP 11400. Montevideo, Uruguay

Phone/Fax: +598 26056943

wrm@wrm.org.uy - <http://www.wrm.org.uy>