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Environmental justice and investments affecting forest lands in Cameroon

By

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Presentation outline

- Background on environmental justice concept and land use in Cameroon (1);
- Methods used for this study (2);
- Main findings: overview agro-industrial investments history affecting local communities land rights in Cameroon (3);
- Situation analysis of local communities: socio-ecological inequalities (4);
- Concluding remarks (5)

1. Background on environmental justice and land use in Cameroon

❑ **Concept of environmental justice** (Kuehn, 2003; Schlosberg, 2007):

- Distributive justice;
 - Procedural justice or political justice;
 - Corrective justice/restorative justice;
 - Social justice.
- It is this perspective that injustice is associated to socio-ecological inequalities – where the lack of sustainability enables governments and multinational corporations to exploit local communities and indigenous peoples (Kuehn, 2003; Pye *et al.*, 2008; Chancel, 2020)

❑ **Agro-industrial investments in Cameroon are/have generated** (Nguiffo & Sonkoue Watio, 2015):

- A common form of land use;
 - Land use conflicts;
 - Driver of deforestation;
 - Land grabbing;
 - Land inequalities;
- ❑ And it is one of the main Axis of the Macroeconomy Policy of Cameroon

1. Background: statement

In the framework of this paper, we affirm that State and foreign investments affecting forest lands from colonial times to the present day, have caused and contributed to socio-ecological inequalities with regard to local communities and indigenous populations bordering agro-industrial plantations in Cameroon

2. Methods used in this study

☐Phase No 1:

- Published literature and documents review;
- Consultation of national archives, notably from the colonial periods;
- Land legislation review;

☐Phase No 2:

- Interviews with NGOs, staff of Agro-industries, technical administrations (agriculture, land tenure, plan & investment, environment), project staff, local communities leaders (25) in Southwest, Littoral and South Regions of Cameroon, to deeply understand the relationships between local actors and agro-industries.

- ☐Phase No 3: local communities and indigenous people perceptions were gained from focus group discussions in 12 villages of 3 regions, on collectives facilities gained from agro-industries; land access and related issues; other benefits provided by agro-industrial complexes; their perceptions on a future of their relation with/against agro-industries;

☐Additional information from literature:

- **Work done by** SNJP (2016); FERN (2018); RADD (2019);
- **And also the following papers published** (Assemble-Mvondo *et al.*, 2013; Assemble-Mvondo *et al.*, 2015a; Mayers *et al.*, 2019).

3. Overview of agro-industrial investments history in Cameroon

□ Agro-industrial plantations during colonial period:

▪ German Agro-industrial plantations (1884-1918):

- More than 90 000 ha around the Mt Cameroon to 3 companies (*West Afrikanische Pflanzung Victoria*, *West Afrikanische Pflanzung Bibundi* and *C. W. Afrikaus* or *Woërmann*), *Banana*, rubber, cocoa;
- **5 000 ha** of the first palm oil industrial plantation in the South of Edea;
- **15 000 ha** to *Plantagen Geschallft Kamerun*, in Dipikar island south of Kribi for rubber, palm oil and cocoa;
- **More than 2000ha**, in Bomono and Tapa (palm oil);
- **More than 3000ha** for Amba Bay Trading, Mundemba

▪ British Colonial Plantations (1918-1961) after the WW1, Cameroon has divided in two territories, West Cameroon was under trustees of the British:

- British Government confiscated all back the German estate from the Custodian enemy property;
- They created the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) which later became **Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) on the 90 000 ha around the Mt Cameroon plantations;**
- **3000ha of palm oil Amba Bay Trading have been transferred to United Africa Corporation and later one Pamol Ltd Cameroon**

3. Overview of agro-industrial investments history in Cameroon

■ French Colonial Plantations (1918-1960)

	Plantations names	Plantations areas in ha	Commodities	Sites	Remarks and dates
1	Compagnie des Palmeraies du Cameroun (CPC)	1 000	Palm oil	Bomono & Tapa	Former German plantation, 1911
2	Compagnie Agricole et Forestière du Cameroun	7 000	Rubber, Coffee, Cocoa, Palm oil	Dipikar-Campo	1911, former German plantation
3	Caoutchoucs et Cacao du Cameroun (CCC)	7 000	Rubber, Cocoa, Palm oil	Campo	1911, former German plantation
4	Société des Plantations de Foumban (SPF)	810	Coffee	Koutaba	1930
5	Plantations de la Sanaga (Cameroun)	6 700	Rubber	Dizangue	1911, former German plantations
6	Compagnie des Tabacs du Cameroun (CTC)	540	Cocoa, Palm oil, Coffee	Nyombe	1922
7	Bongola Lokundje Nyong	1 000	Rubber, Cocoa, Coffee, Palm oil	Campo	1911, former Plantagen Geschallft Kamerun.
8	Société Africaine Forestière et Agricole (SAFA)	7 800	Rubber	Dizangué (main site) with Sangmelima, Ngoulmakong and	1904, former German plantations

How local communities land rights have been affected by the colonial Agro-industrial investments?

- **German followed by the British and French administration authorities have violently alienated Bakweri, Bakossi, Bassa, Bakoko, Nyassa, Mpongo and Abo tribes ancestors lands by eviction and dispossession without any compensation (Meek & Oxon, 1957 ;Michel, 1970; Courade, 1981; Konings, 1993);**
- **The native of those tribal communities being reduced to a forced and abused workforce in the various farms owned by European companies (Michel, 1970; Konings, 1993);**
- For example, the German Governor (Jesko von Puttkamer, 1887-1906), promulgated legislation, each native family was assigned an area of about 1.5 ha for habitation and cultivation around the Mt Cameroon (Njoh, 2013);
- the Bakweri Land Committee (BLC) passionately fought for their land rights, sending dozens of petitions to the British Crown. The BLC was granted an oral hearing at the UN in 1947 but could not honour it because of a lack of funds.

3. Agro-industrial plantations after the independence

- After the independence followed by reunification of two parts of Cameroon in 1961, all the Agro-industrial plantations were nationalized and postcolonial authorities created the new ones'
- Overview of list of State Owned agro-industries in 1979 (Courade, 1984)

Commodities	Agro-industrial names	Planted areas	Production in Tones
Palm oil	1)CDC	16 632	19 171
	2)SOCAPALM	18 332	12 241
	3)PAMOL		
Rubber	4)CDC	14 395	11 615
	5)HEVECAM	4 200	-
Banana	6)CDC	637	14 718
	7)OCB	1 600	30 000
Tea	8)CDC	948	2 015
Wheat	9) SODEBLE	4 850	104
Sugar cane	10) SOSUCAM	7 186	28 465
	11) CAMSUCO	7 444	15 641
Rice	12)SEMRY	18 420	60 000 (for all three plantations)
	13)SODERIM	200	
	14)UNDVA	2 900	

3. Agro-industrial plantations from 1987- till today: *from the capitalistic state to the privatization of the Agro-industrial portefolio*

- The Cameroonian economic crisis was a downturn in the economy of this country from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s. Therefore, the Cameroonian government has been forced by the Bretton Woods institution to privatize its Agro-industrial portfolio:

Agro-industrial acronym	Date of privatization	Purchaser	Nationality	Commodities
CAMSUCO	22/12/1998	SOMDIAA	French	Sugar cane
HEVECAM	9/12/1996	GMG International, then in 2009 by Sinochem	Singapore Chinese	Rubber
CDC Tea spinneret	18/10/2002	BROBOM Finex Limited	South Africa	Tea
OCB	15/02/1992	Compagnie fruitière de Marseille (CFM)	French	Banana
SOCAPALM	12/02/1999	Palcam then in 2001 by Bolloré Group	French	Palm oil
SODEBLE	-	MAISCAM	Cameroon	Wheat
SFPS	1/05/1993	Fadil Group then in 2001 by Bolloré Group	Cameroon French	Palm oil

3. Agro-industrial plantations from 1987- till today: *from the capitalistic state to the privatization of the Agro-industrial portefolio*

- In addition to those groups of economic operators' post-privatization, new agro-industrial groups were added at the beginning of the 2010s, particularly in rubber (Chinese) and palm oil (Cameroonian), and the extension of existing plantations (Banana, rubber and palm oil);
- Instead of an appeasement resulting from a tripartite land negotiation between the State, investors and local communities bordering agro-industries, on the contrary, we are rather witnessing a worsening of situations in which villagers lose their access rights, related compensation and other livelihoods assets;
- **The agro-industries created between 1961-1980, allowed to the state to continue to alienate the ancestral lands of certain tribal communities without any adequate and fair compensation to communities victims;**
- **Hence the generalization of many open and latent conflicts opposing local actors on the one hand, and the state and economic operators on the other;**
- **These conflicts are responses against the process that Harvey (2006) has called “accumulation by dispossession”**

4. Situation analysis of local communities: socio-ecological inequalities

❑ Evidences of Socio-economic inequalities:

- Ancestor lands dispossession without compensation since the colonial time till nowadays;
- Land, rivers and forest resources access restrictions;
- Human rights violation in terms restriction of freedom of movement inside some villages;
- Political/administrative and economic operators Elite hijacking grassroots opportunities;
- Water (with chemical)

❑ Evidences of Ecological inequalities:

- Forest ecosystems and habitats destruction;
- Increasing of deforestation rate;
- Loss of biodiversity species, notably w
- Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) lost;
- Soil pollution (chemical);
- Loss of soil fertility;
- Loss of habitat for cultural and beliefs activities for indigenous People (Pygmies);

5. Concluding Remarks

- ❑ This case demonstrates that agro-industrial investments in forest lands in Cameroon, whatever their nature (state-owned or foreign investors), produce and perpetuate socioeconomic and ecological inequalities with regard to local communities and indigenous people
 - Such a situation characteristic of environmental injustice has its causal roots in colonial policies and administrative authoritarian practices
 - The postcolonial political authorities do not break this trend, contrary they behave as “*Comprador* government”

- ❑ Faced with the worsening situation of injustice, civil society and local communities have called on the government to acknowledge injustices and take corrective action to:
 - **Social justice:** Recognize customary tenure through the allocation of customary land concessions
 - **Procedural justice:** Require *Free and Prior Informed Consent* (FPIC)
 - **Restorative justice:** Establish a Compensation Fund for victims of expropriation
 - **Distributive justice:** Ensure a fair share of benefits to local communities living in/around agro-industries
 - **Restorative justice:** Engage in negotiations with the former colonial powers (Germany, British and France) to require forms of financial or material compensation to the descendants of victims of land expropriation during the colonial period;
 - **Procedural justice:** Implement transparent monitoring and grievance mechanisms to govern agro-industries

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