

A photograph of a man in a light-colored, patterned shirt standing in a lush green forest. He is looking upwards and to the left, towards a thick, moss-covered tree branch. The background is filled with dense foliage and trees.

Agriculture systems and food security in Toko, Mundemba, and Nguti, in SW Cameroon

A research report by ACDIC

Greenpeace Africa Summary

Context

The global food riots of 2008 put food security and agricultural production onto the political agenda of governments across the world. Cameroon was one of the countries affected by this unrest and - in order to address the issue- has among other measures, adopted the high-risk strategy of transferring its agricultural land to foreign corporations. One example of this is the establishment convention promising a 99-year lease of 73,000 hectares of forest in Southwest Cameroon to US-based corporation Herakles Farms.

Rather than bolstering national food security, however, this project will deprive local communities of the farmland on which they depend. Greenpeace urges governments, industries and investors to act responsibly by defining and supporting alternative development strategies. To identify such an alternative, Greenpeace commissioned a report by the Cameroonian NGO ACDIC (Association Citoyenne pour la Defense des Interêts Collectifs), to assess the potential for community-based agricultural production that would ensure sustainable livelihoods for communities while also protecting the forests in the area Herakles proposes to develop.

Introduction

Southwest Cameroon is a region rich in natural resources. It has fertile soil, abundant forests, oil reserves, and its coastal waters are teeming with fish. It is an isolated area however, with poor infrastructure. The local economy is driven by offshore oil operations (which do not directly benefit local populations), and industrial oil palm, banana and rubber tree plantations. These developments have a long history of displacing people from their land and generating social conflict. The cultivation of cacao is a third major economic driver. This is done mainly by smallholders in agroforestry systems that boast robust economic performance and help protect forested areas. However they depend heavily on international prices and intermediaries.



Key findings of the research

1. The administrative history of the region, notably the shift from a colonial legal framework to a Cameroonian one, left many people without proof of ownership of their land. This has led to a general presumption of state ownership of land considered vacant and without owners. Consequently, in most of the area it is the state - rather than the communities who make a living from it - that owns the land.
2. Agro-industrial developments by CDC (Cameroon Development Corporation), Pamol, Delmonte and CTE (Cameroon Tea Estates) have resulted in large amounts of land coming under the control of corporations.
3. This has been coupled with a strong restriction on communities' access to infrastructure.
3. The creation of natural reserves such as Korup National Park has left people with little land to develop. Therefore the area claimed by Herakles Farms, in between several nature reserves, was identified by the Cameroonian government as a priority location for small-scale, low impact agricultural development.
4. 80% of the region's population lives in rural areas, where people make their livings principally from farming. This can include cacao, palm oil, subsistence farming and collecting non-timber forest products such as fruits or nuts. People also use the forest to hunt and rear chickens and cows.
5. Cacao production in the region is relatively high, supplying 70% of Cameroon's national output, despite modest yields. Cacao cultivation is carried out in agroforestry systems that have the advantage of also being able to supply many non-timber forest products and some food. Cacao must be grown under shade, so farmers retain valuable trees on their farm and ensure forest canopy continuity.

Division of sources of income in the Nguti area

	Women	Men
Subsistence farming	35	15
Gathering forest products	30	-
Cacao	25	65
Coffee	-	15
Palm wine	5	1
Other	5	4
Total	100%	100%

Key findings continued

6. The food security situation in Southwest Cameroon is not critical, as households are generally able to produce enough food to survive. The main problems are the lack of diversity and the high prices of food products. Farmers lack training and financing opportunities. The city of Mundemba relies heavily on supplies imported from the Toko district, Herakles' proposed concession area, since the land around it is so scarce – due to palm oil cultivation and protected areas – to produce enough food for the city.
7. The proposed Herakles Farms concession area is located within the Guinean Forests of West Africa, which is defined by Conservation International as a “biodiversity hotspot” of global importance, due to the exceptional range of plant and species found there.



8. A large scale palm oil plantation in the area would:
 - Reduce the availability of farmland. Thousands of people have farmland in the plantation area, so this would impact local food production and increase difficulties surrounding food access.
 - Drive up prices of food, housing, transportation and other basic commodities as workers are brought into the area to work on the plantation.
 - Restrict access to infrastructure, as previous Pamol and CDC plantations did not improve public infrastructure and restricted access to their own. It is feared that local people will not be allowed to use roads built by Herakles.
 - Affect farmers' incomes. The average income of a plantation worker equals the income generated by a 2 hectare cacao farm, whereas the average cacao farm area is 4 hectares. If given a fair choice, no farmer would give up farming to become a plantation worker. Current agricultural methods can be improved by training, better organization and market access, thus increasing yields and incomes.
 - Impact on biodiversity. A monoculture palm oil plantation cannot support the wide range of plant and animal species that are found in the natural forest and agroforestry farming in the area.

Based on the findings of this study, Greenpeace Africa's recommendations are:

- To support Cameroonian NGOs in their call for a moratorium on the allocation of new agro-industrial concessions in the country, until a new approach to the granting of land concessions is developed. This approach must take into account existing land rights and adopt clear preconditions, including participatory land use and conservation planning. Since the Herakles Farms palm oil project in South-West Cameroon does not meet these requirements, it must be stopped.
- For governments, institutions and investors to implement strong safeguards to promote projects that truly respect people's rights and preserve biodiversity and forest carbon stocks. Small-scale, low-impact activities by local communities that ensure sustainable development, such as ecological agriculture, should be supported as a priority in the area identified in the report.



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