

Herakles Farms in Cameroon

A showcase in bad palm oil production



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version 1.1

updated 03/05/2013

Previous version

Published February 2013 by

Greenpeace USA

702 H Street NW Suite 300

Washington, DC 20001

Tel/ 202.462.1177



Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper, made using chlorine-free processing, printed with vegetable based inks on a wind-powered press.

Front Cover Photo: The Fabe Nursery, run illegally by Herakles Farm through its subsidiary SGSOC (SG Sustainable Oil Cameroon). Despite a judge issuing an injunction in August 2011 ordering a halt to all operations on the nursery, Herakles Farms was continuing to operate it illegally in February 2012 when this photo was taken. All workers here were told they would be supplied with boots and hats, but had yet to receive them when Greenpeace visited in early 2012.

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Center Photo: Workers in an artisanal palm oil mill near Mundemba Cameroon.

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Executive Summary

LAND GRABBING IN AFRICA REPRESENTS A SERIOUS DANGER TO THE LIVELIHOODS OF SMALL FARMERS AND THREATENS MILLIONS OF HECTARES OF FOREST, CONTAINING RARE HABITATS AND HUGE QUANTITIES OF STORED CARBON. INCREASING GLOBAL DEMAND FOR PALM OIL¹ IS ONE OF THE MAJOR DRIVERS OF NEW LAND ACQUISITIONS. RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY GREENPEACE INTERNATIONAL IN 2012 FOUND THAT 27 PALM OIL PROJECTS WERE REPORTED IN CENTRAL AND WEST AFRICA, COVERING AROUND 2.6 MILLION HECTARES OF FOREST.²

Herakles Farms — setting a bad example

The palm oil project being developed by the US-owned company Herakles Farms in Cameroon demonstrates the threat posed by badly managed expansion of oil palm plantations. The project covers 73,086 hectares (180,599 acres)³ of forest and existing farmland and is home to an estimated 14,000 people,⁴ mostly small farmers. Residents are fiercely opposing the plantation, fearing it will deprive them of their farmland and access to forest products. International and Cameroonian NGOs and scientists are also critical of the project⁵ on the grounds of illegality⁶, social and economic injustice and environmental destruction.

Cameroon lies within the Congo Basin, home to the second largest rainforest in the world, and this project threatens to become a dangerous model for deforestation driven by palm oil across the entire area. Situated in the Southwest Region, the plantation would cover most of the land linking five protected areas including Korup National Park. This region is part of the Guinean forests of West Africa, identified by Conservation International as a “biodiversity hotspot” — one of the world’s top 25 critical areas for biodiversity conservation.⁷

Maps covering the Herakles Farms project area, compiled by Greenpeace, show it includes 62,433 hectares (154,209 acres) of dense natural forest,⁸ constituting 89% of the proposed concession.

Illegal forest destruction

In 2010, Herakles began illegally clearing forest⁹ to establish oil palm nurseries, in the absence of a presidential decree authorizing the concession, which is required by law.¹⁰ Herakles has also violated a court decision, made in the town of Mundemba, to suspend all activity of its plantation following a complaint filed by local people. Furthermore, the company was found guilty of illegal logging; forestry officials issued a report detailing these activities in April 2012.



A rainbow is seen above the coastal rainforest of Cameroon. This forest, at the fringe of the Congo Basin, is a biodiversity hotspot, home to endangered species including chimpanzees and forest elephants. It also provides hunting and fishing grounds, building materials, fuel wood and medicine for local communities. The forest, and the people and animals who depend on it, are being threatened by a proposed palm oil plantation that would flatten an area eight times the size of Manhattan. The corporation behind the proposed project, US-based Herakles Farms, is pressing ahead with forest clearance, despite widespread local opposition.

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Clearing of trees in a concession area of Herakles Farm for a palm oil plantation. Herakles is pushing ahead with its plans for a huge palm oil plantation with complete disregard for the opposition of local people, who fear they will lose their farms and their livelihoods to the US-based corporation.

© Greenpeace / Alex Yallop

Executive Summary



Oil palm nursery in a Herakles Farm's concession area. Herakles is pushing ahead with its plans for a huge palm oil plantation with complete disregard for Cameroonian law and the opposition of local people, who fear they will lose their farms and their livelihoods to the US-based corporation.

When residents protested against the plantation in June 2012 they were met with intimidation and arrests.¹¹ In August 2012, Nasako Besingi, the director of Cameroonian NGO SEFE (Struggle to Economize Future Environment), was physically assaulted by people associated with Herakles, while he visited the area with French journalists.¹²

In November 2012, while preparing a peaceful demonstration, Besingi and other members of SEFE were arrested at the organization's headquarters, and held without charge.¹³ They were released following international criticism, including an appeal from the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).¹⁴

Herakles has commissioned reports attempting to cover up the negative impacts of the project. Its environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) is inadequate. It acknowledges the project will have "major" impacts on livelihood¹⁵ but makes no provision for mitigation. Residents report that they were not consulted, and complain of verbal promises that have not been fulfilled and that farmland was demarcated without consent.¹⁶ The assessment of the High Conservation Value (HCV) forests in the project area claimed that only small patches should be preserved,¹⁷ yet an independent review of the data concluded that the report indicates that "most of the area should be dense lowland rainforest and therefore of high conservation value."¹⁸

Failing international standards and deterring customers

Herakles Farms say they are committed to "meeting or exceeding" Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and International Finance Corporation (IFC) standards.¹⁹ However, Herakles Farms withdrew its RSPO membership in August²⁰ 2012 after official complaints by NGOs accused it of not complying with standards.²¹ The project would also fail IFC Performance Standards on a number of criteria, including breach of national law.²² Major multinational buyers of palm oil such as Nestlé, Unilever, WalMart and McDonalds —the companies Herakles sees as potential customers²³—are adopting policies that, from 2015, they will only buy RSPO-certified palm oil, meaning Herakles' disregard for environmental and social issues is likely to exclude the company from one of its target markets.

The wrong project in the wrong place

Herakles Farms is imposing its plantation without the free, prior and informed consent of the communities that will be directly affected and in the face of opposition from the people who will be most impacted. The project would remove land and resources that are critical to the livelihoods of local communities and would disastrously impact biodiversity as well as produce millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

Following such as model would send Africa's forests down the path seen in Indonesia and Malaysia where oil palm plantations have caused millions of hectares of deforestation.²⁴ African countries and investors are at a crossroads. They can choose an alternative way by promoting small-scale agricultural investments. They can also prioritize investment in projects that not only respect people's rights and livelihoods but also preserve the forest's biodiversity and carbon stocks.

Introduction:

The great African land grab

Since 2000, foreign investors in agriculture have reportedly bought or leased over 56 million hectares of Africa: an area almost the size of Kenya.²⁵ Some are governments, particularly from the Middle East and China, while others are corporations, including plantation companies and speculators that view land as a good investment in a time of rising crop prices.²⁶

A recent analysis of land grabs found that “Reported land deals in Africa concern an area equivalent to 4.8% of Africa’s total agricultural area.”²⁷ This represents a serious threat to the livelihoods of small farmers and to food sovereignty in the often very poor countries where control of large areas of fertile land is being handed to foreign interests. Reports suggest the majority of land acquired by foreign investors will not be used to meet local needs or improve food security²⁸ but to grow crops for export—both food and biofuel feedstock.²⁹

Land grabs also threaten Africa’s forests, which contain rare habitats and huge quantities of stored carbon. Unabated land grabbing for commercial agriculture represents a massive new threat to biodiversity and an increase in greenhouse gas emissions. In the Congo Basin, logging companies already control some 44 million hectares of forest³⁰, while another several hundred thousand hectares are threatened by new palm oil ventures.

Palm oil is a major driver of new land acquisitions. The oil palm is native to west and central Africa and is widely cultivated in the region, but currently most oil palm production comes from Malaysia and Indonesia.³¹ Rapidly increasing demand for palm oil for food use and biofuels³² is leading to a new wave of industrial-scale planting in Africa. Research conducted by Greenpeace International in 2012 found that 27 palm oil projects were reported in Central and West Africa covering around 2.6 million hectares of forest.³³ Many of these are in the early stages of development. This huge area is likely to be cleared if the plantations are not stopped.

Herakles Farms— setting a bad example

The US-owned Herakles Farms’ palm oil project in the Southwest Region of Cameroon exemplifies the threat posed by ill-conceived expansion of oil palm plantations. It covers 73,086 hectares (180,599 acres)³⁴—an area more than ten times the size of Manhattan. Herakles Farms, through its subsidiary SG Sustainable Oils Cameroon (SGSOC), plans to plant around 60,000 hectares (148,200 acres) of oil palms.³⁵ The Cameroonian Minister of the Economy signed the establishment convention for the project in 2009 and the plantation is currently at the early planting stage. The project as a whole presents major social, environmental and legal issues.

The allocated land is home to at least 14,000 people, according to the company,³⁶ and lies on or near the borders of five protected areas, including Korup National Park. This is “an ecologically vital area—one of the largest surviving tracts of lowland forest in the Gulf of Guinea”, according to a group of leading scientists.³⁷ A 2012 study by Greenpeace International shows that the forest in the project area contains a high carbon stock, meaning the project threatens to produce millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions when the forest is cleared to make way for oil palm trees.

The area includes 62,433 hectares (154,209 acres) of dense natural forest³⁸ as well as farmland and agroforestry smallholdings. There is extensive local opposition to the project, which residents fear will deprive them of their land and access to forest products: like many farmers in Africa, most lack formal title to their land. A Greenpeace team documented that the setting up of one of the project’s nurseries at Fabe deprived people of access to a valuable collecting area for forest products,³⁹ and that cocoa farms have been taken without farmers’ consent.⁴⁰ Locals were not properly consulted before the establishment convention was signed. The convention gives Herakles Farms the exclusive right to farm in the area⁴¹ and includes no provisions for compensation of residents. The company claims “a huge outpouring of support from communities”, and says its project will not displace people,⁴² yet simultaneously communities have consistently objected to the plans by complaining to the government, signing petitions and organizing peaceful demonstrations.





Oil Palm Nursery in Cameroon
© Greenpeace / Alex Yallop

Cameroonian and international NGOs and scientists have also opposed the project⁴³ citing illegality, a lack of respect for people's rights, damage to local livelihoods and environmental destruction. Two local NGOs, the Centre for Environment and Development (CED) and Réseau de lutte contre la faim (Relufa) have laid out how the establishment convention violates both national and international law.⁴⁴ They have also shown that, although the agreement gives the company "exclusive use" of the land,⁴⁵ the area includes zones that had already been officially designated for a mining exploration permit, a logging concession (yet to be awarded), and two small-scale logging permits.⁴⁶ Such overlap in intended land usage could cause legal conflicts between Herakles Farms and other future permit holders. More importantly, they illustrate the confusion and damage unplanned land allocation is causing. Greenpeace supports the call from CED and Relufa for a moratorium on the granting of new concessions until Cameroon sets up comprehensive land-use planning and clarifies the processes for land allocation.⁴⁷

BETWEEN 2005 AND 2010 CAMEROON LOST MORE THAN 1% OF ITS FOREST EACH YEAR.⁴⁸ THE HERAKLES FARMS PROJECT LIES ON THE EDGE OF THE CONGO BASIN RAINFOREST, THE WORLD'S SECOND LARGEST AREA OF TROPICAL FOREST. LAND-GRABBING FOR OIL PALM PLANTATIONS THREATENS TO INCREASE DEFORESTATION ACROSS THE REGION: HERAKLES FARMS MUST BE STOPPED BEFORE ITS PROJECT CAN SET A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT FOR UNSUSTAINABLE PALM OIL DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT THE CONGO BASIN.



A land measuring about 3 hectares that has been recently cleared by Herakles Farms next to the Tallangaye oil palm nursery.

© Greenpeace



Oil palm nursery in a Herakles Farm's concession area.

© Greenpeace/ Alex Yallop



View of PAMOL oil palm plantation from the top of the hills near the town of Mundemba.

© Jan-Joseph Stok / Greenpeace

Undervaluing the forest

Residents

SGSOC's Environmental and Social Impact Assessment states that the project area is home to more than 14,000 people.⁵⁰ Greenpeace France and the Cameroonian NGO the Citizens' Association for the Defense of Collective Interests (ACDIC) have conducted research into farming systems in the districts covering the Herakles Farms project area. Most of the inhabitants are small farmers, growing cassava, palm oil, bananas and other crops for subsistence and to supply local markets. Some areas produce cocoa as a cash crop.⁵¹ Palm oil is mostly processed on an artisanal basis to supply unrefined (*red*) oil for local sale.⁵² Gathering forest products such as bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), monkey cola (*Cola lepidota*) and bush pepper is also important, particularly for women: forest products provide around 30% of women's cash income in the region.⁵³ Herakles' promise of plantation jobs may be of little help to local farmers: the researchers estimate that an average cocoa grower in the area currently earns around twice as much a year as an agricultural laborer at the Cameroonian company Pamol's nearby oil palm plantation in Ndian.⁵⁴ Farmers face an array of problems, ranging from a lack of formal land rights to exploitation by cocoa traders. Losing farmland and forest to the Herakles' plantation would only exacerbate these difficulties.



The chief delegation walk to meet with the local community, after their meeting with the Sub- Divisional Officer to ask why he banned their event.

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A biodiversity hotspot

The plantation would cover the majority of the land linking five protected areas: Korup National Park, Bakossi National Park, Mbanyang Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary, Nta Ali Forest Reserve and Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve. This area is part of the Guinean forests of West Africa, identified by Conservation International as a “biodiversity hotspot”—one of the world’s top 25 critical areas for biodiversity conservation.⁵⁵

The protected areas are home to many threatened species, including the Drill (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*), Preuss’s red colobus (*Procolobus preussi*), the Nigerian subspecies of the chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes ellioti*) as well as rare amphibians, birds and plants. Plans belonging to the management teams for Korup National Park and Nta Ali Reserve have indicated that larger animals, such as elephants, chimpanzees and the endangered Drill, use the forests in the Herakles project area to forage and move among the different protected areas.⁵⁶ The forests perform a vital function in linking populations of large threatened mammals. Aerial survey shows that the forest cover within the project area is very similar to that in neighboring Korup National Park, indicating the biodiversity value of the habitat.

The global climate

Greenpeace International carried out detailed satellite mapping and an aerial survey of the Herakles Farms project area in November 2012 and found the area contains 62,433 hectares of dense natural forest⁵⁷ —constituting 89% of the area surveyed.⁵⁸ If it were cleared for plantation, most of the forest’s carbon would be released—a massive yet totally avoidable addition to climate change.

Herakles Farms' illegal forest destruction

Herakles Farms began clearing land for its plantation in 2010, despite overwhelming evidence of the forest's global, regional and local importance.⁵⁹ The project has from the beginning, been conducted in violation of national law⁶⁰. At the time of writing, the company has not received a presidential decree authorizing the concession, which is required under Cameroonian law.⁶¹ In 2010, Herakles began creating nurseries for oil palms, without authorization for forest conversion and before being issued a "Certificate of Environmental Conformity" by the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development. In April 2012, ministry investigators confirmed illegal felling of trees and land clearance at the Talangaye site. They seized equipment and issued SGSOC with a summons to which⁶² Herakles Farms has reportedly failed to respond.⁶³ A month later, a visit by ministry officials and Cameroon's EU-financed Independent Forest Observer' confirmed illegal acts had taken place.⁶⁴ In early November, a flight over the area, organized by Greenpeace International, documented ongoing clearing.

Residents of the villages of Toko and Fabe organized a protest against the plantation during a visit of the regional governor in June 2012: they were met with intimidation and arrests.⁶⁵ In November 2012 activists from Cameroonian environmental group Struggle to Economize our Future Environment (SEFE), who have been organizing non-violent protest against Herakles Farms, were arrested and held for several days, without charges⁶⁶—part of a pattern of harassment against the organization.

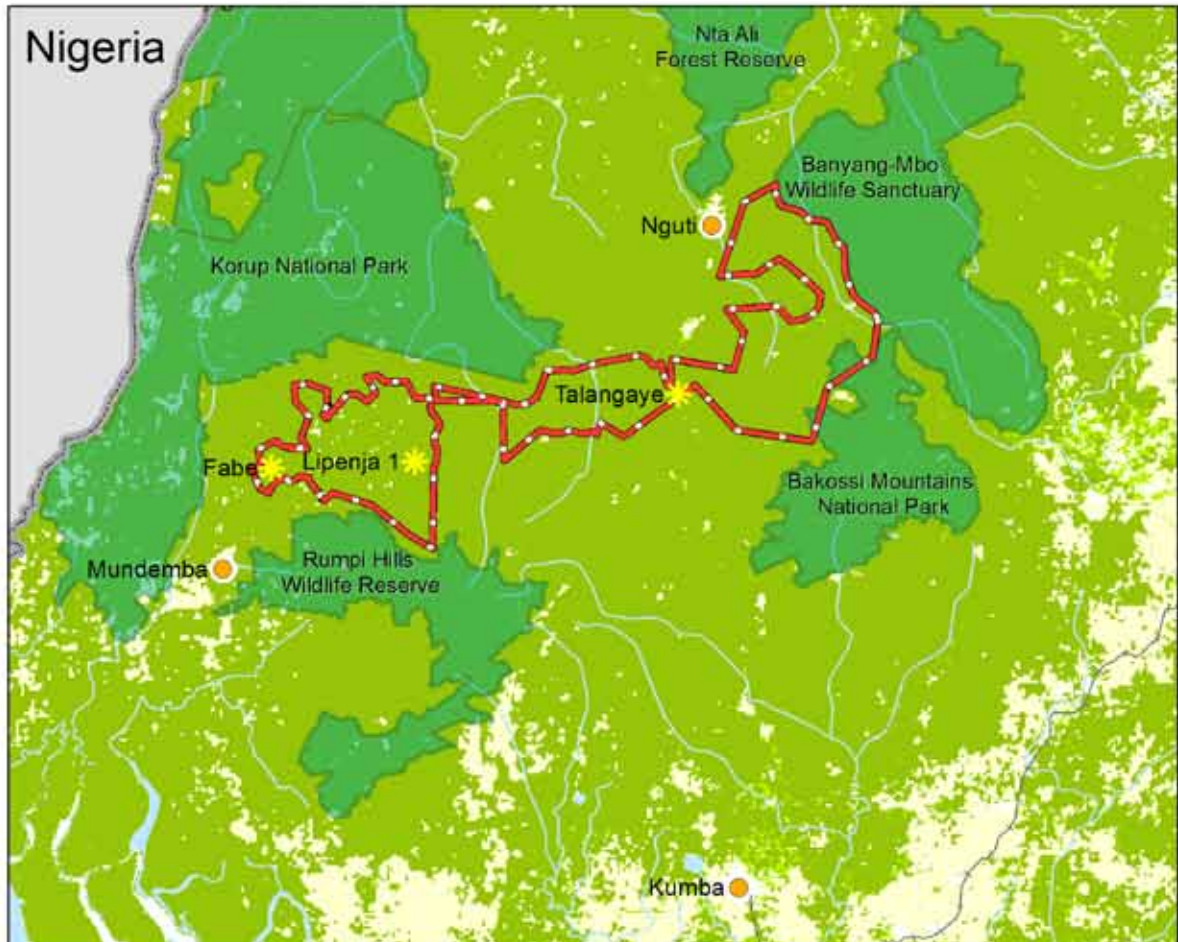
In September 2012, Herakles CEO Bruce Wrobel published an open letter denying illegality in relation to the project. The letter was issued in response to a report by the Oakland Institute in collaboration with Greenpeace International.⁶⁷ The letter repeats Herakles' claim that the project will create "tremendous economic, social and environmental benefits".⁶⁸ Wrobel claims that the forests in the project area have been "logged and farmed repeatedly" and are of little value, yet on the same page claims that Herakles will harvest timber so the government can sell it for "many millions of dollars."⁶⁹


Herakles Concession Area


Percentage forest cover



Herakles Farms Palm Oil Concession Area in the Southwest of Cameroon



 Planned Palm Oil Concessions

 Nursery


 Railroad


Natural Valuable Areas

 Protected Areas

Landuse and Forestcover*

 Croplands

 Open Forests (20-40% tree canopy density)

 Dense Forests (more then 40% tree canopy density)

* On the basis of Modis Vegetation Continuous Fields (Hansen, 2003) and GlobCover project (ESA, 2008)

0 10 20 km

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Herakles Farms' illegal forest destruction

Wrobel has set up a charitable organization, All For Africa, which, amongst other activities, claims to tackle poverty by establishing palm oil plantations. The organization's Palm Out Poverty initiative is subsidizing up to 1 million oil palm trees. However, All For Africa has taken money donated to it for charitable purposes to start and manage oil palm nurseries in Cameroon. Although the nurseries have AFA's name on them, they are being used to pave the way for the commercial development of the Herakles' plantation.

Herakles Farms has been unable to produce evidence of any proper authorization permitting either clearing or planting, despite several demands to do so by Greenpeace, and despite their own claims their activities are legal. They have been equally unable to demonstrate the alleged low value of the forest after their HCV assessment was called inadequate by the HCV Resource Network (a group dedicated to the improvement of the HCV concept).⁷⁰



Herakles Farms is a palm oil production company.

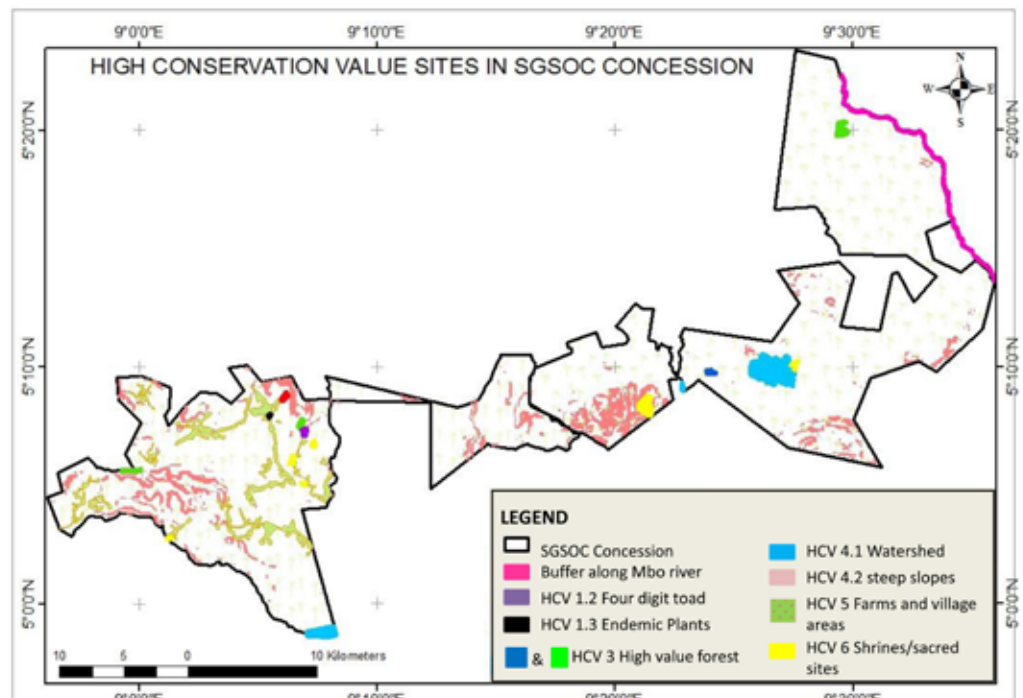
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Herakles Concession Area

Percentage forest cover



Map taken from:
Herakles Summary Report of
ESIA and HCV Assessments
SG Sustainable Oils Cameroon



Herakles Farms' illegal forest destruction

How Herakles Farms ignores High Conservation Value Forest

Herakles Farms has carried out an environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) of the project, as required by Cameroonian law. The government accepted the report despite criticism from scientists and NGOs. The methods used in the ESIA environmental surveys were inadequate: plant and animal surveys lasted only 22 days during the rainy season, when it is difficult to detect animals; and the surveys covered less than 0.003% of the project area,⁷¹ with many locations close to roads or settlements and hence less likely to find rare species.⁷² Although the ESIA refers to carbon emissions, it makes no attempt to assess the actual carbon stock of the land to be cleared or to quantify potential greenhouse gas emissions, merely noting that “The planting of oil palm trees and cover crops over most of the area cleared will offset the clearing of biomass, but the total biomass will not be restored.”⁷³

The ESIA also misrepresents the social impact of the project. It claims the “vast majority” of local people “had a favorable opinion of” the Herakles project.⁷⁴ Although acknowledging the project will have “major” impacts on livelihoods,⁷⁵ it makes no provision for a mitigation plan, recognizing only that “losses of some traditional livelihood opportunities, particularly those related to Non-Timber Forest Products and hunting” are to be expected.⁷⁶ By contrast, filming in the area by the Oakland Institute with the support of the organization SAVE-Wildlife demonstrates there was a lack of consultation with little benefit to locals.⁷⁷ Residents of Fabe village report that they were not consulted and have made no written agreements with Herakles Farms; they complain that promises made verbally have not been fulfilled. They point to a water pump installed by the company as an example; situated next to a large billboard advertising the company, they say it has not worked in 13 months.⁷⁸ In Ekita, villagers accuse Herakles of demarcating areas without the consent of farmers while they were absent and without their consent, marking farmland to be part of the plantation.⁷⁹

Herakles also commissioned an assessment of the High Conservation Value (HCV) forests in the area, required for meeting Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil standards. The HCV Resource Network peer-reviewed the assessment report and found that it was “not rigorous enough for a project of this scale and intensity...not adequate to comply with RSPO principles”.⁸⁰ It noted “major issues” with almost

all areas of the assessment, including: the survey techniques used, decisions on HCV status, and failing to protect HCV areas from conversion.⁸¹ An analysis of the HCV assessment data on plant and animal species by biologists specializing in the region led to the conclusion that “most of the area should be dense lowland rainforest and therefore of high conservation value”.⁸² By contrast, a map of HCV sites identified by Herakles shows only small isolated patches of forest, surrounded by massive blocks of plantation, and sites listed in a table are mostly less than 25 hectares, or on steep slopes unsuitable for oil palm cultivation.⁸³

At the time of writing this report, the HCV section of Herakles Farms' website is still displaying an “under construction” message.

WHAT ARE HIGH CONSERVATION VALUES AREAS?

- **HCV1. Areas containing concentrations of biodiversity values of global, national or regional significance (e.g. endemism, endangered species).**
- **HCV2. Globally, regionally or nationally significant large landscape level areas where viable populations of most, if not all, naturally occurring species exist in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.**
- **HCV3. Areas that are in, or contain, rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems.**
- **HCV4. Areas that provide nature with critical basic services (e.g. watershed protection, erosion control).**
- **HCV5. Areas fundamental to meeting the basic needs of local communities (e.g. subsistence, health).**
- **HCV6. Areas critical to the traditional cultural identity of local communities (identified in cooperation with such communities).**

Source: High Conservation Value Forests:
<http://www.hcvnetwork.org/site-info/The%20high-conservation-values-folder>

Herakles Farms' illegal forest destruction

Failing international standards

Herakles Farms claims it is “committed to meeting or exceeding RSPO Principles & Criteria, as well as the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards”.⁸⁴ The company is failing to meet these commitments.

The stated aim of RSPO is to promote the use of sustainable oil palm products that adhere to a set of global standards. In reality these standards are still too weak to be able to call RSPO-certified palm oil “sustainable.” Furthermore they do not prevent deforestation and peat land clearance⁸⁵, Herakles Farms does not meet even these imperfect standards. Herakles' subsidiary SGSOC was an RSPO member but left in August 2012⁸⁶ after official complaints filed by NGOs accused it of not complying with RSPO's standards.⁸⁷ Herakles claims it withdrew its membership because “the... grievance process is preventing the company from moving forward during a critical and time-sensitive period, in which we must move our first planting of seedlings from the nursery to the field”.⁸⁸ The company's real commitment to the RSPO Principles and Criteria can be judged by its decision to withdraw as soon as its failings were exposed and before the complaints were resolved. Meeting these standards was a major plank of Herakles' public relations strategy,⁸⁹ so the withdrawal indicates failure on the company's own terms.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards applicable to palm oil plantations are weak and full of loopholes. For example, they use language suggesting companies should “minimize”, “mitigate” or make “efforts to avoid” negative impacts on sensitive ecosystems and local communities.⁹⁰ However, it is clear that Herakles Farms' project would fail even these standards, in particular because the project is in breach of national law.⁹¹ The project also breaches more specific standards, such as by not limiting or even quantifying its greenhouse gas emissions (PS3, paragraphs 7-8) and by confiscating land with no provision for compensation⁹² (PS5 paragraphs 25-29). The IFC has told Greenpeace that since it has no investment in Herakles Farms, it has no duty to assess whether Herakles meets its standards.⁹³ In the absence of a credible independent assessment, Herakles' claims can be treated as pure PR.

These palm seeds are ready to be pressed. The fruit itself is made into palm oil while the nut is used for something called palm kernel oil. These are a local variety that are grown by smallholders, however in their recently granted concessions Herakles Farms plans to grow genetically selected varieties sold to them by IRAD, a national institute that has previously claimed via a controversial ecological assessment, that the Herakles planned palm oil plantation area constitutes only secondary degraded forest.

© Jan-Joseph Stok / Greenpeace



An old grown tree in the primary forest where an oil palm plantation is planned. Most of the area is covered with primary or high value secondary forest. While Herakles Farms state that it consists of “secondary heavily degraded forest”.

© Jan-Joseph Stok / Greenpeace



The Fabe Nursery, run illegally by Herakles Farm through its subsidiary SGSOC (SG Sustainable Oil Cameroon). Despite a judge issuing an injunction in August 2011 ordering a halt to all operations on the nursery, Herakles Farms was continuing to operate it illegally in February 2012 when this photo was taken. All workers here were told they would be supplied with boots and hats, but had yet to receive them when Greenpeace visited in early 2012.

© Jan-Joseph Stok / Greenpeace



Herakles Farms' illegal forest destruction

Who will have to blacklist Herakles?

Sourced through habitat destruction, through land grabbing from local people and through emitting millions of tons of carbon, Herakles Farms palm oil will fail ethical and ecological standards.

Delilah Rothenberg, the Herakles Farms project manager, told the Cameroon Professional Society in 2011 that, although the African market is the primary target, her company hopes to sell to major multinational buyers of palm oil: "Nestlé, Unilever, WalMart, McDonalds...We expect them to be our customers."⁹⁴ But in reality these companies could not buy Herakles' palm oil from Cameroon. All four, along with many other large consumers of palm oil, have adopted policies committing to only buying RSPO-certified palm oil from 2015 forward: a certification whose standards Herakles has failed to meet. Nestlé goes even further with its "Responsible Sourcing Guidelines", which require suppliers to "protect high carbon stock forest".⁹⁵ A 2010 commitment by the international business group the Consumer Goods Forum, to which WalMart, Unilever, and Nestlé belong, aims for zero net deforestation by 2020,⁹⁶ suggesting many companies are moving towards tighter criteria than those stipulated by RSPO standards.

Companies committed to buying sustainable palm oil



Nestlé

Nestlé: "By 2013, we are committed to achieve 100% RSPO certified sustainable palm oil."



Unilever

Unilever: "We will purchase all palm oil from certified sustainable sources by 2015."



McDonalds: "We are committed to sustainable palm oil and are focused on using only certified sustainable palm oil by 2015."



WalMart, "Today we're committing that we will require sustainably sourced palm oil in all of our private brand products globally by the end of 2015."

Conclusion:

The Wrong Project In The Wrong Place

Herakles Farms is imposing its version of development without consent in the face of opposition from the people who will be most affected. Instead of adhering to its own commitment to meet RSPO and IFC standards, Herakles is breaching Cameroonian law, denying the project's impact on biodiversity and ignoring the significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions it would cause.

The plantation would take almost all of the land currently used by communities, undermining local food sovereignty as people are forced into wage labor at a time of rising global food prices. Muyali Boya Meboka, the division member of parliament, for Ndian, has suggested Herakles wants to "buy off" local communities with token development.¹⁰¹

Internationally, while the market for "sustainable" palm oil is expanding rapidly and large buyers are beginning to tighten their standards on deforestation, Herakles Farms is pursuing an outdated model of environmentally damaging and ethically unacceptable production.

Both via its practices and its withdrawal from RSPO, Herakles has admitted that it fails to meet "international standards". Any customers of or investors in this kind of project would be at risk of association with legal, social and environmental scandals.

Following the Herakles Farms model would send Africa's forests down the disastrous path seen in South-East Asia, where unchecked expansion of industrial agriculture, including palm oil, has caused millions of hectares of deforestation.

FOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES, THE ALTERNATIVE IS TO PROMOTE INVESTMENTS IN PROJECTS THAT RESPECT PEOPLE'S RIGHTS AND LIVELIHOOD, PRIORITIZING SMALL-SCALE AGRICULTURE. SUCH PROJECTS CAN PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY AND FOREST CARBON STOCKS.

Cameroon and other African countries should establish a moratorium on **new large-scale land lease agreements for agro-industrial projects** until clear safeguards are established. These safeguards would protect the rights of land users as well as natural forests and other high-value ecosystems. Participatory land use planning should be used to reconcile economic, social and environmental factors and reduce the risk of conflicting land use.

Herakles Farms' Destructive Palm Oil Project in Cameroon Must Be Stopped

Greenpeace is calling for:

- **Herakles Farms to abandon their project.**
- **Investors, private or public, to not invest directly or indirectly in this project.**
- **All for Africa end your partnership with Herakles Farms on the Palm Out of Poverty project**
- **The Government of Cameroon to stop the project.**


GREENPEACE IS CALLING ON THE PALM OIL INDUSTRY AND INVESTORS TO ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT A "ZERO DEFORESTATION POLICY", THUS COMMITTING TO INVEST ONLY IN PALM OIL PROJECTS THAT ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF NATURAL FOREST, AND RESPECT THE RIGHTS AND LIVELIHOOD OF ANY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES WHO WILL BE AFFECTED BY PLANTATION OPERATIONS. THEY MUST ALSO STRIVE FOR MORE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

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An aerial photograph showing a wide, muddy-brown river meandering through a vast, dense green rainforest. The forest is composed of various types of trees, with some taller, thinner trees visible in the lower left. The river's path is irregular, with several bends and small islands of forested land within its course. The lighting suggests a bright day, with some shadows cast by the trees.

Area of natural beauty within the concession area leased by Herakles Farms in the coastal rainforest of Cameroon. Despite lacking a Presidential Decree granting the concession, as required by Cameroonian law. The concession area is in a biodiversity hotspot, home to endangered species including forest elephants and chimpanzees, and it provides a crucial migration corridor for these animals between five protected areas. Local people, who depend on the forest to provide food, medicine and building materials, have protested against the project and have faced intimidation and arrest as a result.


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Endnotes

- 1 Palm Oil HQ (2012)
- 2 Greenpeace International (2012a) Appendix 1
- 3 The exact area covered the project varies according to different sources. SGSOC's (2011) Environmental and Social Impact Assessment gives 73,086 ha (p41). This does not include the 3km buffer zone between the project area and Korup National Park.
- 4 SGSOC (2011): 4–122 records 14,600 inhabitants, p4-121 admits this may be an underestimate.
- 5 eg Linder et al, (2012), Greenpeace International (2012a), Oakland Institute (2012a)
- 6 CED (2012)
- 7 Conservation International website 'Guinean forests of West Africa' http://www.conservation.org/where/priority_areas/hotspots/africa/Guinean-Forests-of-West-Africa/Pages/default.aspx accessed 9 January 2012
- 8 'Dense natural forest' defined as greater than 20% canopy cover with trees over 5 meters in height.
- 9 Pro Wildlife et al. (2012) : 9
- 10 According to Article 7 of Decree No. 76-166 of 27 April 1976 to establish the terms and conditions of management of national lands, land grants in the "national" domain in excess of 50 hectares require a Presidential Decree <http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/cmr1270.pdf>
- 11 Oakland Institute (2012a)
- 12 Part of the assault can be watched in the video broadcasted by France24 in 2012: <http://www.france24.com/en/20121002-planet-hope-cameroon-palm-oil-rush-forests-development-agriculture-biodiversity-villagers-animals> from 4'20
- 13 Greenpeace International (2012b)
- 14 <http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/urgent-interventions/cameroon/2012/11/d22048/>
- 15 SGSOC (2011): xlv
- 16 Oakland Institute (2012b) from 9'00"
- 17 SGSOC (2012): Figure 2, Table 5
- 18 Kupsch and Waltert (2012)
- 19 Herakles Farms website, 'News: September 6 2012' <http://herakles-farms.com/news.html>
- 20 Farnan (2012)
- 21 RSPO (2012)
- 22 CED (2012), IFC (2012): ii
- 23 Rothenberg, D (2011): from 11' 30"
- 24 Nellesmann C et al. (2007)
- 25 Anseeuw et al (2012): 7
- 26 see for example 'GRAIN land grab deals' database which can be downloaded from GRAIN (2012)
- 27 Anseeuw et al (2012): 7 Note: these land deals do not actually cover 4.8% of Africa's agricultural land as some of them include land not currently in agricultural use, such as forests.
- 28 Anseeuw et al (2012): 28
- 29 Anseeuw et al (2012): 26–27
- 30 World Bank Group. (2012); 5
- 31 USDA FAS (2012) 87% in 2011.
- 32 Palm Oil HQ (2012)
- 33 Greenpeace International (2012a) Appendix 1
- 34 The exact area covered the project varies according to different sources. SGSOC's (2011) Environmental and Social Impact Assessment gives 73,086 ha (p41). This does not include the 3km buffer zone between the project area and Korup National Park.
- 35 SGSOC (2011): 1–2
- 36 SGSOC (2011): p122 records 14,600 inhabitants, p121 admits this may be an underestimate.
- 37 Linder et al (2012)
- 38 Greenpeace mapping analysis
- 39 Greenpeace field research October–November 2012
- 40 Oakland Institute (2012b) from 9'00"
- 41 Government of Cameroon/SGSOC (2009) Sections 3.1b, 4.2
- 42 Hance and Butler (2011)
- 43 eg Linder et al, (2012), Greenpeace International (2012a), Oakland Institute (2012a)
- 44 CED (2012)
- 45 Government of Cameroon/SGSOC (2009) Section 3.1b
- 46 CED, WWF, RELUFA (2012): 8
- 47 CED (2012): 30
- 48 FAO/ITTO (2011): 61, Annex Table 4
- 49 Government of Cameroon/SGSOC (2009) Section 13.5
- 50 SGSOC (2011): 4–122 records 14,600 inhabitants, p4-121 admits this may be an underestimate.
- 51 Njonga et al (2012)
- 52 Njonga et al (2012): 46
- 53 Njonga et al (2012): 44
- 54 Njonga et al (2012): 60 Approx US\$1400 per year for a cocoa grower and US\$835 for a Pamol worker

Endnotes

- 55 Conservation International website 'Guinean forests of West Africa' http://www.conservation.org/where/priority_areas/hotspots/africa/Guinean-Forests-of-West-Africa/Pages/default.aspx accessed 9 January 2012
- 56 Management plans for Korup National Park and Nta Ali reserve, cited in Linder et al (2012)
- 57 'Dense natural forest' defined as greater than 20% canopy cover with trees over 5 meters in height.
- 58 The area surveyed covered 70,237 ha, ie slightly less than the entire project area as listed in SGSOC (2011): 41.
- 59 Pro Wildlife et al. (2012) : 9
- 60 CED/Relufa (2012)
- 61 According to Article 7 of Decree No. 76-166 of 27 April 1976 setting out the arrangements for management of land, concessions in excess of 50 hectares are granted by Presidential Decree <http://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/cmr1270.pdf>
- 62 Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (2012)
- 63 Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (2012)
- 64 Observateur indépendant au contrôle forestier et au suivi des infractions forestières au Cameroun (2012)
- 65 Oakland Institute (2012a)
- 66 SAVE Wildlife Conservation Fund (2012b) ; Greenpeace International (2012b)
- 67 Oakland Institute (2012a)
- 68 Wrobel (2012)
- 69 Wrobel (2012)
- 70 HCV Resource Network (2012)
- 71 Linder et al, (2012), and SGSOC (2011):
- 72 SAVE Wildlife Conservation Fund (2012a): 28
- 73 SGSOC (2011): 191
- 74 SGSOC (2011): 135
- 75 SGSOC (2011): xlv
- 76 SGSOC (2011): 154
- 77 Oakland Institute (2012b)
- 78 Oakland Institute (2012b) from 10'30"
- 79 Oakland Institute (2012b) from 9'00"
- 80 HCV Resource Network (2012): 4
- 81 HCV Resource Network (2012): 11
- 82 Kupsch and Waltert (2012)
- 83 SGSOC (2012): Figure 2, Table 5
- 84 Herakles Farms website, 'News: September 6 2012' <http://herakles-farms.com/news.html>
- 85 RSPO (2007)
- 86 Farnan (2012)
- 87 RSPO (2012)
- 88 Farnan (2012)
- 89 Rothenberg, D (2011)
- 90 IFC (2012) eg PS6, para 25.
- 91 CED (2012), IFC (2012): ii
- 92 Government of Cameroon/SGSOC (2009), Oakland Institute (2012b) from 9'00"
- 93 Letter from Mark Constantine, IFC Principal Strategist, to Greenpeace US, 19 December 2012
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The Sakbayeme river within the coastal rainforest of Cameroon. This forest, at the fringe of the Congo Basin, is a biodiversity hotspot, home to endangered species including chimpanzees and forest elephants. It also provides hunting and fishing grounds, building materials, fuel wood and medicine for local communities. The forest, and the people and animals who depend on it, are being threatened by a proposed palm oil plantation that would flatten an area eight times the size of Manhattan. The corporation behind the proposed project, US-based Herakles Farms, is pressing ahead with forest clearance, despite widespread local opposition.

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Published February 2013 by
Greenpeace USA
702 H Street NW Suite 300
Washington, DC 20001
T. 202.462.1177



Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper, made using chlorine-free processing, printed with vegetable based inks on a wind-powered press.