

SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES IN THE CAMEROON BANANA SUPPLY CHAIN

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Introduction

Cameroon is a country endowed by nature. It has a large natural resource potential such as soil, hydrology and minerals that predisposes it to be a true Garden of Eden in the agro-pastoral domain. As a result, the bulk of its economic strength was built on this agropastoral potential. The political and institutional authorities who controlled the commands of state power since independence in 1960 and 1961 have indeed made agriculture a major axis of Cameroon's economic development (Bella 2009).

The option of organizing the economic development of Cameroon around agriculture as a preferred mode of development enabled both the private and public authorities to have a valuable source of financial income, while making sure the rural populations, whose key pursuit is agriculture, equally benefit from this activity as a source of income. Improving living conditions of rural populations was a key element in the establishment of a planning policy that targeted a substantial increase in agriculture, food and agro-industrial productivity. Since then, this sector has employed between 50 and 60% of the working population in Cameroon (Atanga, 2006). In 2003 agriculture generated close to 1,300 billion CFA francs of gross domestic product (GDP) or about 20% of global GDP and more than one-third of foreign exchange earnings for the country (Bella 2009).

Banana cultivation has long been a key aspect of agricultural development in Cameroon, actually taking advantage of this incentive impetus created for agricultural development. In the late 1970s, the Office Camerounaise de Banane (OCB), a state parastatal was put in place to regulate the banana industry in Cameroon. It received the mandate to

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organize the marketing chain of Cameroonian bananas (UNECA 1981). To better realize this mission assigned to her by the State, OCB was endowed with financial autonomy guaranteed through the allocation of public subsidies, ensuring the channeling of production, supervision of producers and access to credit and agricultural inputs to operators in the banana sector in Cameroon. The attractive and enticing prospects of a booming banana market and opportunities for land acquisition in a banana field that was seen as terra nullius aroused the interest of many international operators for the Cameroon banana sector. Until 1988 the banana sector in Cameroon was organized around coexistence between food crops and industrial cultivation. Since 1988, the organization of the productive system changed with the dissolution of the OCB in 1993—effectively signaling the end of small banana farms (Anania 2014, 173). Consequently, the field was left free to banana agribusiness consisting of giant multinational corporations. Under the impetus of these large industrial groups, Cameroon's banana industry experienced tremendous growth. Thus, the industry pointed to the first largest export crops in Cameroon, imposing itself as a crucial economic activity (Atanga 2006).

The Cameroonian banana industry was among the world top producers. It had ambitions of posing as a major banana exporter in the Africa - Caribbean - Pacific (ACP) region. This sector was one of the main providers of employment in Cameroon. In 2011, close to 297,210 tons of bananas were exported while the business generated about 170 billion CFA francs per year for an average production of 300,000 tons. At the heart of the activity of the banana sector in Cameroon are land concessions exploited by major agro-industrial groups operating in the Mungo Division in the Littoral region and Tiko in the Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon (Anania 2014, 179).

The implication of these regions in the banana industry was motivated by their fertile volcanic basements, mild climate, availability of plantation labor, as well as a long entrenchment of culture of plantation economy that was installed since the colonial era. These areas were the chosen lands of the banana agro-industries in Cameroon: both have a long and rich economic history for banana cultivation with major plantation activities (Anania 2014, 182). For several decades, Njombe-Penja and Tiko have served as host to many operators engaged in the cultivation and exportation of bananas. The main actors in this sector were the Cameroon Development Corporation, with plantations in Tiko and *Plantation de Haut Penja (PHP)*, which is an affiliate of the french fruits giant, *Compagnie Fruitiere* with plantations in Njombe-Penja. While this activity has generated a lot of benefits to the multinational corporations that operate the plantations, the labourers

and the communities in which these plantations are found have suffered injustices in the hands of the companies. It is against this backdrop that this paper sets out to make an appraisal of some sustainability issues that have gone a long way to affect the lives of both the workers and the communities.

To understand some of the sustainability issues in the Cameroon banana industry, this study will rely on oral interviews documentaries like, *The Big Banana* that critiques the human and environmental impact of banana plantations in Cameroon. The documentary begins by presenting an aerial view of the Njombe-Penja community where the banana wealth goes to the multinational company, Plantation du Haut Penja (PHP), while most members of the community remain poor. PHP workers are shown as they labor to cut down the bananas and transport them to the processing station. The profit generated by company came at the expense of the workers, who were paid paltry wages in contrast to the high salaries and benefits of the expatriates. It is therefore not surprising, that European consumers of the bananas are appalled upon hearing the actual wages of the laborers who produce the commodity. A consumer in the UK aptly calls the situation “slave labor,” while another expresses her “disgust” at the laborers’ working conditions (The Big Banana 2009). These workers are not only underpaid; their health is at risk from exposure to toxic chemicals (pesticides, fungicides, fertilizers, and other agro-chemicals). The film indicates that four out of five farmers suffer from eye problems due to PHP’s toxic materials and features a former worker who has become blind. He was fired by PHP because of his disability and without adequate compensation.

The health of members of the larger community was also endangered by PHP’s operations, specifically, the aerial spray of chemicals, which is detrimental to humans, plants, animals, and bodies of water. One community member recalls having been sprayed and admitted to the hospital for some days; unsurprisingly, PHP refused either to pay the hospital bill or compensate the victim. Another lamented how the aerial spray contaminated their food. The banana processing system washes off the chemicals, but the soiled water was not disposed of properly and as such, contaminated the sources of potable water supply in the locality.

Displacement of the people was another trepidation of the plantation’s procedures. As a multinational corporation, PHP succeeded in stifling competition from smaller companies. The company’s low-cost production and export-friendly incentives enabled it to crush the local farmers. While some of them were pressured to sell or lease their lands to PHP, the more resilient ones witnessed their lands being forcefully expropriated by government officials who conspired with PHP. Chief Daniel Nsuga epitomized the corrupt elite evoked here. Throughout the film, he

downplayed the adverse consequences of the plantation, while indicating that the community is happy with PHP. In addition to the issues raised in the film, this section will provide an overview and appraisal of some recurring sustainability problems that affect the banana sector in Cameroon. These issues were identified through a review of existing literature, documentaries and oral interviews with labourers and corporate experts who are directly or indirectly involved in the cultivation and exportation of bananas in Cameroon.

Theory of plantation agriculture as applied to Cameroon

In-depth analyses of the existing literature reveals that the major theories on plantation production, such as modernisation, dependency and the articulation of modes of production schools, have tried to evaluate the role of plantation production in processes of capital accumulation as well as its relationship with peasant production and societies (Konnings 1993). A short discussion of these theories might contribute to our understanding of the dominant role of the agro-industrial sector in general and the banana industry in particular in Cameroon's political economy.

The *modernisation school of thought* has always advocated the diffusion of western capital, know-how, technology and values as a necessary prerequisite for development and capital accumulation in developing countries (Long 1977; Varma 1980). It claims that plantations are economically efficient units of production that benefit from considerable economies of scale and technical progress, and should be seen as significant agents of development and capital accumulation (Graham & Floering 1984; Goldthorpe 1985). However, it should be noted that these claims have often been disputed. For example, de Silva (1982) and Rote (1986) have convincingly demonstrated that most plantations have barely undergone any technological innovations and have largely preserved their labour-intensive production techniques. Of considerable importance to the study of plantations was the *dual society and dual economy theory*, a well-known variant of the modernisation theory (Boeke 1953; Lewis 1954). It argues that there is the near absence of any linkages between a dynamic capitalist sector and an enclaved pre-capitalist sector. Some of these theorists (Lewis 1954) did not, however, exclude the possibility of an adverse effect of the modern plantation sector on the traditional peasant sector (Konnings 1994). This theory has been severely attacked by the dependency and articulation of modes of production schools.

Most studies on plantation agriculture in Cameroon have been either implicitly or explicitly written from a modernisation point of view (Epale

1985). Epale's book on the history of plantation production and the CDC in Anglophone Cameroon was clearly inspired by the dual economy theory. The special circumstances of Western Cameroon, and the introduction of a modern plantation enclave in the relatively backward and inarticulate economy of the region at the turn of the 19th century and the development of that enclave to its present-day state, had, in balance, a salutary effect on the economy (Epale 1985, 7).

Unlike the modernisation theory, the *dependency theory* argues that the promotion of capitalist plantation production in the 'periphery' inevitably led to growing underdevelopment and dependency on capitalist countries of the North (Frank 1967, 1969; Leys 1975). This dependency perspective of plantations as agents of underdevelopment and exploitation has been elaborated on in specialist studies of plantation production in Latin America (Oxaal 1975; Benn 1974), Asia (de Silva 1982; Bagchi 1982) and Africa (Brett 1973; Leys 1975). The most influential work in this school of thought has undoubtedly been Beckford's: *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World* (1972). He characterises plantations as enclaves due to their domination by western multinational corporations that are interested in the drain of capital from the periphery to the industrialised countries. Their exclusive specialisation in export commodities has resulting in monocultural cropping patterns, neglected food production and a dangerous dependence on world market prices.

According to Beckford (1972, 215), this enclaved nature of plantations caused a number of underdevelopment biases in the domestic economy and society and also created a chronic dependency syndrome that manifested itself as a value system characterised by dependency and low motivation as well as by strong authoritarian traditions. Strikingly, several studies (Epale 1985; Molua 1985; Jua 1990) of plantation production in Cameroon have tended to support his negative assessment of the consequences of plantation systems for local societies, economies and the development of a chronic dependency syndrome among the local population.

The dependency school's perspective on plantations seems to be able to overcome some of the shortcomings of the modernization theory. It helps us to situate the study of plantation production in a historical and international context, with its introduction during the colonial period as an important locus of metropolitan capital accumulation, its (former) domination by foreign capital and management, and its vulnerable dependence on world market commodity prices. However, the dependency theory has not paid sufficient attention to the changes that have occurred in plantation production in the wake of transformations in the world

capitalist system and the independence of colonial states. On the one hand, multinational corporations now control the capitalist world market and trade in plantation products. They also control much of the necessary processing, though they have tended to disinvest in the (risky) production of plantation crops *per se* (Barker 1984).

On the other hand, post-colonial states have attempted to establish a larger measure of control over their national economies. They increasingly intervened in the control, regulation and stimulation of plantations and tried to integrate smallholders further into the plantation system, thus challenging the dependency school's thesis of the existence of a comprador political class in newly independent states and the impossibility of a more autonomous capitalist development on the periphery (von Muralt & Sajhau 1987; Sajhau & von Muralt 1987). In some cases, post-colonial states have taken measures that have led to either complete or partial nationalization (Bolton 1985), while in other cases, they have acted as partners in joint ventures with foreign or local private capital. However, following the liberalisation of the economy of Cameroon in the 1990s, plantation activities have been dominated by MNCs both at the level of cultivation and exports. Given that the main quest of these enterprises is profit maximisation, exploitation has become the order of the day as we shall see subsequently (Awang 2011, 2013).

A third school of thought that has made a significant contribution to the study of the role of plantation production in capital accumulation and its relationship to peasant production and societies has been the so-called *theory of the articulation of modes of production* as propagated by scholars such as Laclau (1971), Meillassoux (1972, 1975, 1977), Rey (1971, 1973, 1976, 1979), Terray (1969, 1975, 1979), Wolpe (1972, 1980) and van Binsbergen & Geschiere (1985). They do not accept the dependency view that pre-capitalist societies have been destroyed or fully transformed following incorporation into the world capitalist system. Instead they argue that pre-capitalist modes of production have at least been partially preserved since colonial rule, albeit in subordination to the dominant capitalist mode of production. Some of them, particularly Meillassoux (1975) and Wolpe (1972, 1980), have emphasised that this (partial) preservation of pre-capitalist modes of production might be beneficial to dominant capitalist sectors such as mining and plantations. Capital accumulation by plantations is dependent on, and safeguarded by, the domestic community's supply of cheap land, labour and commodities. Plantation owners can shift the costs of reproducing their labour force onto domestic communities and in this way lower their costs of production.

Most of these scholars claim that the establishment of capitalist

domination and the subordination of pre-capitalist modes of production have not always been easy or automatic processes in African social formations. Rey (1971) in particular asserts that the 'lineage mode of production' offered (initial) resistance to capitalist domination in defence of its own autonomy and that capitalism faced considerable obstacles in its attempt to take root in pre-capitalist modes of production. He tries to demonstrate the existence of a variety of mechanisms for integrating pre-capitalist modes of production into the capitalist system, mechanisms that occurred in different forms and combinations and account for the huge variations in the processes of articulation in Africa: (initial) state violence, class contradictions within pre-capitalist mode(s) of production, the establishment of alliances between the dominant classes within the capitalist and pre-capitalist sectors, and the (gradual) operation of market forces (Geschiere 1978, 1985).

Contrary to the modernisation and dependency schools, the modes of production school has been able to demonstrate the problems that accompanied the subordination of autonomous pre-capitalist societies to the imperatives of capital accumulation and to provide a more detailed picture of the varied impact of capitalist plantation production on the surrounding domestic communities. By moving from the level of exchange to that of production, it has been able to explain the continuing existence of pre-capitalist modes of production which, rather than being destroyed, are reshaped and subordinated to capitalist modes of production.

These three schools of thought provide a useful starting point for examining the continuing interest of some post-colonial states in plantation production. The agro-industrial sector in Cameroon has become one of the main pillars of the post-colonial state's agricultural policies. Courade (1984) and Konings (1993a) have convincingly demonstrated that the Cameroonian post-colonial state has continued to allocate a substantial proportion of its agricultural budget to the expansion of the agro-industrial sector, in particular to the creation and expansion of agro-industrial parastatals, which accounted for nearly 60% of its agricultural budget during the country's third and fourth five-year plans (1971-1981).

Modernisation theorists would see the Cameroonian post-colonial state's support of agro-industrial expansion as a clear expression of the political elite's selfless and detached commitment to the modernisation of agricultural production. The latter's promotion of plantation production was more likely to contribute to increased output and capital accumulation than 'archaic' peasant production. However, with the drastic fall in prices of agricultural commodities in the early 1980s, the state of Cameroon was rendered powerless and was forced to undergo a structural adjustment that further eclipsed the state from major decisions concerning the

commercialisation of agricultural produce (Ngoh 1998).

The dependency theorists (Molua 1985), on the contrary, argue that the Cameroonian post-colonial state's encouragement of agro-industrial expansion reflects the political elite's class interests. They allege that the ruling class is collaborating closely with foreign capital in stimulating agro-industrial expansion as it has its own stake in a project that will inevitably lead to deepening dependency and underdevelopment.

The theory of the articulation of modes of production is also potentially able to help explain the Cameroonian post-colonial state's interest in agro-industrial expansion. This school assumed that state intervention was only required in the *initial* process of the articulation of modes of production (Rey 1971, 1973; Meillassoux 1972, 1975). Initial state intervention helped to establish the supremacy of the capitalist mode of production and the ultimate subordination of pre-capitalist modes to the imperatives of colonial capital accumulation: the supply of land, labour and agricultural commodities to the capitalist sectors, especially the plantation sector. It seems to have overlooked the possibility that the post-colonial state's interest in expanded production and capital accumulation led to renewed state intervention so as to incorporate the relatively autonomous domestic communities further into the capitalist mode of production (Hyden 1980; Konings 1986a).

These three major theories help to explain the role of plantation production in processes of capital accumulation, its relationship with pre-capitalist societies and the continuing interest of some post-colonial states, like Cameroon, in its expansion. The sustainability issues raised by this study are a continuation of the exploitative motives that led to the emergence of capitalism and the eventual colonization of the African continent. These exploitative tendencies, as expressed by the dependency school, were very visible in the Cameroon banana industry supply chain.

The political economy of the banana industry in Cameroon

The banana sector is a key cubicle and major agro-exporter in the political economy of Cameroon. It is a circuit of both profits and power. This section will lay emphases on the place of banana in the global economy through an examination of is often referred to as the banana wars, analyse the colonial origins of banana industry in Cameroon and finally, it will make an appraisal of the key actors which are the Cameroon Development Corporation, Del Monte and Plantation du Haut Penja which is a subsidiary of *La Compagnie Fruitiere* in France.

Production and international banana trade

Banana, as an agricultural commodity, is one of the flagship products of world trade. It occupies an important place in the agricultural trade after cereals, sugar, coffee and cocoa. This is one of the main sources of food for people in developing countries. Banana has a growing importance on the geopolitical chessboard, as shown in the paragraph below, at national and international levels to which countries that are producers, are being inserted. Banana is based on an economy whose structure symbolizes the persistence of neo-imperialist or neo-colonial dynamics in the globalization of the agricultural economy.

Six countries (India, Brazil, Ecuador, the Philippines, Indonesia and China) dominate the economic map of the world banana output (55%). However, the international banana trade is a globalized tradie dominated by three large multinationals corporations (Chiquita Brands, ex - United Fruit, Del Monte and Dole Food Inc.). This trio has control of 65% of world banana exports, while featuring as a global oligopolistic power. The global banana industry is marked by some countries, like India and Brazil, which are among the main banana producers, but are hardly involved in international trade. The argument for local consumption is regularly invoked to justify this fact, confirming the predominance of yellow fruit in the diet of populations. The banana sector is a very dynamic industry. World production has more than doubled since 1990, from around 47 million tons to 107 million tons in 2013; bananas traded internationally show a similar growth, increasing from 9 million tons in 1990 to 20 million tons in 2013 (Anania 2014, 183).

In 2013 the six main producers of bananas accounted for almost two thirds (62.4%) of global production; they were, in order of importance: India (27.6 million tons), China (12.1), the Philippines (8.6), Brazil (6.9), Ecuador (6), and Indonesia (5.4). The largest net exporters of bananas and their ranking do not coincide with those based on production, as India and China, the two largest producers, are a marginal international trader and a net importer (504 000 tons in 2013) respectively. The largest net exporter in 2013 was Ecuador (5.5 million tons, 27.7% of total world exports), followed by the Philippines (3.2, 17.2%), Guatemala (2.0, 16.3%), Costa Rica (1.9, 9.8%) and Colombia (1.6, 8.2%). In 2013, the top five exporting countries alone accounted for 79% of the world market (Anania 2014, 185).

Market concentration for imports is even higher than for exports. The European Union, with 4.9 million tons of bananas imported in 2013 (25% of the world market), is the largest importer, followed by the US with 4.3 million tons (22% of the market). Other important net importers were

the Russian Federation (1.3 million tons), Japan (1 million tons), Canada (557 000 tons) and China (Anania 2014, 187). Banana trade flows show a clear pattern of regionalisation. At least in part, this is the result of past and current EU import regimes for bananas. Virtually all exports from the group of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries are directed towards the EU, while Latin American countries export bananas to Europe, Russia and North and South America. Virtually all US and Canada imports of bananas come from Central and South America, and over 95% of the bananas imported by the Russian Federation in 2013 come from Ecuador alone. The Asian market is largely characterised as a regional market separated from the rest of the world with a very large share of imports satisfied by exporters from within the region itself. For example, in 2013, Japan, the largest importer in the region, imported 93% of its bananas from the Philippines (FAO 2014).

Countries in the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific region (ACP) in 2010, accounted for about 23 % of the total exports of the international banana trade. ACP bananas are exported, primarily for the countries of the European Union, mainly because the products from this area were given preferential access since 1993 (FAO 2014). This privilege, which operates against the current of competitive rules organizing international trade in the neoliberal framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), is due to the bonds of colonial origins.

The Colonial Origins of the Cameroon Banana Industry

Three arguments have been advanced to indicate with authenticity the origin of banana cultivation in Africa. The first argument holds that banana was introduced in Africa by Portuguese sailors in the 16th century. The second considers that it was the Arabs and Persians who are responsible for the introduction of banana in Africa around the 8th century AD. The third view, according to Norman Simmons, banana was introduced around the 10th century. Archaeological discoveries have hinted traces of banana cultivation to some 2,500 years ago.

It is with the establishment of the Cameroon plantation economy by the Germans (1889-1916) that we can date the organization of industrial cultivation of banana in Cameroon. The development of the Cameroonian territory under German protectorate (Schutzgebiet), based on agricultural and infrastructural plans came to materialize the German settlement enterprise. In this context of domination and colonial exploitation, large plantations of export products such as coffee, rubber, palm oil, cocoa and banana were set up in order to supply the metropolis. This agricultural

economy that was based on concessions encouraged land appropriation and dehumanizing working conditions. These phenomena led to revolts in the plantations around the Douala region and equally triggered a tax strike. However, the German colonial rule was not challenged. Even with the advent of the mandate system that emerged following the defeat of the Germans during World War One, agricultural concessions were still maintained, despite the move to mandate plans (1914-1946) and trusteeship (1946-1960), by corporate interests located in the lap of the new colonial powers that were France and Britain (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) 1984).

With the advent of French Cameroon's independence in 1960 and the subsequent reunification with British Southern Cameroons a year later, there emerged a dynamic economic and political transformation of agro-industrial landscape. Against this backdrop the new post-colonial authorities instructed public authorities to make agriculture a lever for growth and development of Cameroon. In so doing, it limited the colonial regimes of exploitation and management of the banana industry (Kaptue 1986). This was followed by cohabitation between industrial private operators in the banana sector and local producers (small holders) coordinated by a state body known as *Organisation Camerounaise de Banane (OCB)*. This coexistence was challenged with the dissolution of the OCB in 1988, thus leading to the extinction of peasant production.

The disappearance of the OCB marked a radical change in the banana sector in Cameroon towards a liberalized regime of production and trade. This is because, the Cameroon Banana Association (ASSOBACAM), created in 1988 to substitute OCB, could not take over the coaching duties of peasants production (ASSOBACAM 2015). Against this backdrop, the peasant operators were doomed to disappear since they were unable to meet the challenges of liberal competition that brought giant multinational corporations involved in the banana industry to the lime light. The disappearance of the OCB left the door open to private operators, who in most cases were large foreign industrial groups. Large foreign companies, specialized in the production of bananas, benefitted from the situation to strengthen their hold on the existing banana plantations in Cameroons. This move promoted the fact that certain areas of production, like that of Njombe-Penja became the exclusive preserve of the PHP group. This large group increased its concession over vast hectares of land in and around Njombe-Penja, producing mainly bananas and pineapples to the EU market, and pepper sold in local markets. The Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) came with a project that allowed Del Monte to manage the Likomba banana plantations in Tiko.

Actors in the Cameroon Banana economy

The production of dessert bananas in Cameroon is extremely concentrated; in the recent past, four firms produced virtually all bananas exported from the country: *the Société des Plantations du Haut Penja (PHP)*, Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), BOH Plantations Limited (BPL) and the *Société des Plantations de Mbanga (SPM)*.

The Plantation du Haut Penja group is the largest operator, with 57% of total Cameroon banana exports in 2010, and a share that remained above 40% between 1994 and 2003. The group is a combination of two companies, PHP itself and SBM. PHP is entirely owned by the *Compagnie Fruitière*, a French-American company owned by the French Fabre family (60%) and by Dole (40%). PHP controlled 51% the SBM Company, with Cameroon investors and the Italian firm Simba owning the remaining 13% and 36% respectively (ASSOBACAM 2015). *Compagnie Fruitière* has been present in Cameroon since the early 1980s. It is a major player in the banana sector in other countries in the region, mainly Ivory Coast and Ghana (www.compagniefruitiere.com). Though the main activity of PHP remains the cultivation and exportation of bananas, it was also involved in the exportation of flowers and pepper from Cameroon. According to the Corporate Social Responsibility Report of La Compagnie Fruitière, all PHP bananas are GlobalGAP and ISO14001 certified while 800 out of the 3 300 hectares it farms and four of its packing facilities are Fair Trade certified; PHP bananas also meet Tesco's 'Nature's Choice' quality standards, a private standard that is more strict than GlobalGAP in terms of the chemicals that can be used. PHP is strongly pushing for the introduction of an 'African' label for high-quality bananas from the West African region (Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Ghana), an umbrella quality assurance certification to be used in conjunction with private firm labels. PHP pays its employees a salary that is significantly above the minimum wage. *Compagnie Fruitière* owns ripening facilities in several European countries and in African Express Line (AEL), a sea shipping company operating a reefer fleet. PHP is in the process of expanding banana production by increasing its farmed land by almost 25%. PHP is currently providing, on a contractual basis, CDC and BPL, the only two other firms producing bananas in the country, with technical assistance in the field. In addition, *Compagnie Fruitière* handles, on a commission base, all BPL exports and part of those by CDC (Ouma & Jagwe 2010).

On her part, the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) accounts for around 40% of Cameroon banana production and exportation. Low productivity and the liberalization of the agricultural sector in Cameroon

prompted the takeover of the banana project of the CDC by Delmonte in 1992. CDC is one of the largest firms in the country in the agro-industrial sector with the largest number of employees after the state. Its operations are concentrated in agriculture, mostly in producing and exporting bananas, palm oil and rubber. CDC banana plantations cover close to 3 900 ha (16 000 ha are devoted to palm oil production, 24 000 to rubber). The government made efforts to privatise CDC since 1998, without success and this left CDC management with a very uncertain medium-term scenario that had negative effects on investment decisions, including those related to banana rotation plans and drainage management, thus leading to low productivity. A large portion of CDC plantations were characterised by relatively poor soil quality and high rainfall, which created conditions favourable to the spread of black sigatoka. Between 1988 and 2011, thanks to the partnership with Del Monte, CDC employed 6 500 labourers in its banana operations. Workers receive a salary 36,700 that was slightly above the minimum wage 28,000 they were entitled to by law (Ntube, 2013). From 1988 until 2011, CDC was active in close partnership with Del Monte Fresh Fruit, which provided technical assistance in the area of production and was exporting most of the CDC bananas at a fixed, pre-determined free on board (FOB) price out of the Douala port. Following the expiration of the agreement, and De Monte's unwillingness to renew the agreement, CDC was obliged to seek technical assistance first from SPM and later PHP. Bananas sold through Del Monte were labelled 'Del Monte Cameroun'. Some CDC exports were also taking place under the label 'CDC banana' (Azengela 2013). CDC launched its own brand of high-quality bananas in 2010 labeled 'Makossa'. Since 2011, CDC has been able to market 3 000 000 boxes of bananas (the equivalent of 54, 400 tons) per year via Del Monte at a pre-fixed FOB price that is set on an annual base while the rest of the production, including the Makossa-labelled high-quality bananas, are exported through *Compagnie Fruitière* on a commission basis (Azengela 2013).

The Makossa bananas are sold mostly in Southern France, where consumer recognition of the label is highest. All CDC bananas are certified GlobalGAP. In the past, CDC has used refrigerated containers to ship its bananas, when it was offered a good deal by Maersk, who needed return cargo in lieu of empty containers back to Europe. While CDC did not consider obtaining the Fair Trade certification for its bananas in the past – Del Monte never saw this as a strategy worth pursuing (Anania 2014, 189).

Sustainability issues within the Cameroon banana supply chain

The sustainability issues within the Cameroon banana supply chain are roughly divided into labour rights issues, fiscal delinquency, land rights issues, health/safety issues and environmental degradation. This, however, should not be seen as an exhaustive list of sustainability issues affecting the cultivation, production and commercialisation of bananas in Cameroon. For a better understanding of some sustainability issues witnessed in the Cameroon banana supply chain, we have opted to treat a particular case study of the principal banana producer in Cameroon. To this effect, the Plantation du Haut Penja (PHP), an affiliate of *Compagnie Fruitiere*, will be analysed. The research conducted for this case study focuses on working conditions at PHP without bothering to examine what happens within the last knot of the supply chain that deals essentially with commercialisation. In addition, it brings to the fore information from communities around Njombe Penja plantations who accuse the company of grabbing their ancestral land which they had been using for subsistence agriculture. This case study presents findings from interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015, and assesses all changes and developments that occurred during the research period.

The Place of Labour in the Cameroon Banana Supply Chain

Analyses under this heading are going to focus more on the category of labourers, working hours/overtime and remuneration. PHP outsourced most of its plantation work to contractors who engage in a bidding process, and then recruited their own workers who, did not get to sign any written contracts. This category of workers was referred to as agency workers. The actual number of agency workers is unknown, but there are more than ten contracting companies that supply workers to PHP. Agency workers do not belong to the workers' union and do not enjoy any benefits. They are not entitled to free medical services, food allowances, free housing or bonuses. Whenever they get sick or injured, even at PHP plantations, these workers have access to PHPs clinics but are required to pay the medical bills themselves, which many workers cannot afford (Nzimbi 2014).

According to some anonymous agency workers interviewed, the contracting companies only write down the names of the people who offer themselves for employment, give them necessary equipment and deploy them where they are needed. These workers are the most vulnerable group.

They are not unionised and have no job security. In the absence of a contract, these workers are at increased risk of unfair dismissals and hindered from obtaining any redress as they have no proof of employment (Chief Nsonga 2014).

Working hours and overtime

In Cameroon, according to the labour code (*Code de Travail* 1992), a normal working week consists of 40 hours and five working days. Any hours worked in excess of 40 hours are treated as overtime and should be paid at the rate of at least 150% of normal hourly wages. During the interviews conducted in 2013, workers reported that they were expected to work on Sundays. Although overtime was paid, providing a much needed supplement to workers' income, those who refused to work on Sundays could expect disciplinary actions or even dismissal. PHP claimed that workers accepted Sunday shifts voluntarily, and that the Industrial Relations Court even turned down a worker request for an order to be allowed to continue working seven days a week (Pigeaud 2009).

Recent interviews (August – September 2015) revealed some major changes regarding working hours and overtime work. The most significant one is the removal of overtime work and payments in almost all departments. In addition, information provided by the workers surveyed suggests that PHP has made this possible by shifting some of the work previously done by its permanent and seasonal workers to its agency workers (Oxfam 2009).

For all permanent and seasonal workers compulsory overtime on Sundays is no longer required; workers now enjoy a day off on Sundays. In addition, the working week has been reduced to five days. However, working weeks for permanent and seasonal workers still add up to 48 hours. Three days a week; they work 8 hours a day, while two days a week they work for 12 hours a day. The Cameroonian Labour Code (1992) is silent on this practice of subjecting workers to 16 hour shifts. The emphasis is on 48 hours per week; hence employers may take advantage of this loophole (*La Nouvelle Expression* Fevrier 2012).

According to the permanent and agency workers interviewed, this removal of overtime has significantly reduced their monthly income. The company notes that it has introduced a 'shift allowance' to compensate for loss of overtime payments. Still, the fact that there was no reference to this measure in the interviews suggests that this measure is not fully making up for the income loss derived from less overtime work. Workers complained that the removal of overtime work and payments has forced them to find

alternative additional sources of income. According to them, they are now depending on informal money lenders who may charge 100% interest for any amount of money borrowed just for a month (Ewane 2015).

Working hours among agency workers often exceed eight hours a day, and they are required to complete daily targets. For instance, banana harvesters have to complete a daily target of 100 to 150 bunches before they receive the daily wage of 400 Francs CFA (€ 0.88). If the target is not met, the worker can choose to continue working or the task will be added to their target for the following day. Those who fail to meet the target are eventually penalised by having part of their wages deducted (Manu, 2015). Since plantation work is very tough, most workers, especially women, fail to reach the targets and hence they suffer from wage cuts or even loss of jobs.

Remuneration

Through field trips to the plantation, we found out that wages at PHP were below the legal minimum wage of 28,700 Francs CFA (€ 36) per month at that time. In 2013, average monthly basic wages of PHP workers were around 24,000 francs CFA (€ 29, based on 48-hour working weeks). In addition, agency workers received 4,000 francs CFA (€ 7) in overtime payments a month (overtime hours were remunerated at 150 francs CFA (€ 0.30) per hour while permanent workers received 5,200 francs CFA (€ 11) as food allowance. The average monthly net pay between 2009 and 2012 including overtime wages and food allowance was about 36,000 francs CFA (€ 50) (Ekane 2014).

In January 2012, the legal minimum wage in Cameroon was adjusted from 300 francs CFA (€ 0.50) to 520 Francs CFA (€ 0.88) per day. The minimum monthly wage was thus increased to 33,326 (€ 57) per month. In response PHP increased wages (up to 28%) for all workers hired directly by the company (both permanent and seasonal workers). Average daily wages for PHP workers stood at 900 Francs CFA (€ 1.43) a day and the monthly basic wage was around 31,000 (€ 47). The average monthly net pay in 2015 for a permanent worker was about 33,000 francs CFA (€ 55). This is slightly above the legal minimum wage (Simeu 2015).

Workers acknowledged that there has been some improvement when they compare their pay package in 2013 to what they earned in 2015, a number of developments have been observed. For instance, the food allowance was adjusted from 5,200 francs CFA in 2013 study to about 6,000 (€ 13) in 2015. In addition, the house allowance of 4,353 francs CFA (€ 7) was introduced into the earnings of those workers who did not live in

free company houses. However the most significant change is that there are no longer overtime payments or attendance bonuses for PHP workers. Indeed, while basic wages increased, net total monthly payments decreased by about 10%, as permanent and seasonal workers no longer earn overtime wages or an attendance bonus (Njume 2015).

All the permanent and seasonal workers interviewed complained about the removal of overtime work and overtime payments. According to them, the removal has significantly reduced their monthly income. It is not clear why PHP removed overtime payments and even introduced an extra day off in addition to Sunday, but it is likely this was done to save costs (Ndifor 2015). According to some company officials who were interviewed, there are no overtime payments because PHP has transferred some of the tasks previously carried out by permanent and seasonal workers to agency workers.

Further, it was observed that despite the fact that permanent and seasonal workers receive equal allowances (house allowance, food allowance, etc.), differences in monthly incomes exist within the two categories. According to the seasonal workers, they all belong to the same grade and receive equal payments. In contrast, permanent workers are graded, and they therefore receive higher remuneration.

Another observation is that although PHP payments were slightly above the government minimum wage, and also above average wages in other sectors, they were not enough to sustain a worker and his/her family for the whole month. The daily living wage for a rural Cameroonian as of January 2014 was calculated at 1,531francs CFA (€ 2.63) for workers without in kind benefits, 1,408 Francs CFA (€ 2.42) for workers with some in kind benefits and Francs CFA 1,193 (€ 2.05) for workers receiving most in kind benefits. Workers on PHP's pay roll receive a number of benefits and their average daily take home pay stood at 1,192 francs CFA (€ 1.90) in 2015. Hence wages at PHP are somewhat below the living wage. According to the company, entry level wages are well above the living wage level. It is, however, unclear exactly how the company comes to this conclusion.

A field trip at PHP for interviews with agency workers established that the 2015 wage increments only affected workers directly hired by PHP. Agency workers who constitute the majority of the workforce at PHP were not covered by this wage increment.

The agency workers interviewed indicated that they receive a daily wage of 851 francs CFA (€ 1.15) for an eight-hour working day, which is equal to the legal minimum wage and far below calculated daily living wage levels. As noted before, their eight hour working day only exists on paper, as in

practice they may work much longer to reach their target. Agency workers receive their wages once a month but do not receive pay slips. Unlike other categories of PHP workers, agency workers do not enjoy benefits such as free housing, medical services and food allowances. They rent houses in the surrounding villages which are about 3-5 kilometres from the plantations. Most of them commute from their homes to the agency's offices, and are transported from there to their designated work stations (Big Banana 2012).

Clearly, agency workers earn much less than workers hired directly by PHP, and they also lack job security altogether. In its reaction to some accusation leveled on its activities, the management of PHP stated that 'independent contractor' employees were required to be paid the equivalent of PHP's 'negotiated wage rates', and that where contractors pay their workers based on completion of tasks, 'this requires monitoring from a human rights perspective'. However, from the worker interviews it becomes clear that, taking into account the number of hours worked, agency workers are often paid below the legal minimum wage and clearly earn less than those workers hired directly by PHP. There seems to be a clear gap between company policy and practice in this regard. Cameroonian workers earn little but they work, however, a lot to supply French and British markets, which represent the main consumers for Cameroon's banana exports. Work starts at six in the morning and finishes around 5 or 6pm. But for a Cameroonian banana worker it is not uncommon to stay until 10pm in periods of high demand. Salaries are not based on an hourly rate but rather on the task assigned by managers each day. If the set quota is not achieved, pay is withheld. The gap between official salaries (starting at 31,777CFA for an unqualified worker) and the actual wages received can be significant. Therefore many, like Caroline, end up earning less than the legal minimum of 28,000 francs. On top of this, health problems often restrict actual working hours. At the same time, the workers' protection in the workplace is highly insufficient. Even though the European label GlobalGap, ensuring social and environmental standards of Cameroon's banana production, forbids aerial fungicide spraying – this practice is still used whilst workers are in the fields. Obligatory protective equipment is not always used. Most banana pickers explain that they have to buy new boots regularly themselves, necessary for protection from deadly snakes in the plantations. In the conditioning unit, where bananas are treated before being packed, women spend their working hours with their hands soaked in chlorine, often without gloves... except during inspection visits which are, of course, announced in advance. Medical provision is supposed to be completely covered by the banana company, yet in practice, workers must regularly purchase their own medicine (Rigobert, 2015).

But at least, banana workers in Cameroon have union freedom. The Fako Workers Union (Fawu) (Fako is the division in the South Western region where the CDC mostly operates) has 4,000 members, of which 2,000 work in the banana industry. This independent union, formed in 1947 at the same time as the CDC, is purely financed by contributions from its members (1% of their salary). Its small team of seven employees deals with many legislative infractions regarding work in the banana production: from abusive dismissals to age discrimination cases (FAWU 2011).

Their relationship with the company board remains proper however, says Charles Mbide Kude, in charge of legal affairs at Fawu: “Six cases out of ten are amicably settled. When a complaint goes to court, we win 90% of the cases because they are often due to people ignoring the work code” (FAWU 2011).

Cameroon’s Social legislation provides for equal work for equal pay with no gender discrimination but the SMIG and SMAG salary structure is still applicable. The legislated minimum wage as at 2008 is set at 28.216FCFA. The various economic sectors employer’s Associations and the Trade Union Confederations improve on the legislated minimum wage through Collective bargaining. The Collective Bargaining for the Agricultural sector to which banana plantations fall, set the Agricultural minimum wage at 30.777FCFA. The provisions of the Collective Agreement in the Agricultural Sector regarding the minimum wage and the legislated minimum wage are not respected, and by way of ambush the workers are paid less than both minimum wages. The ambush is carried out through payment by results, which entails pro-rate payments. This system disadvantages banana workers in general and female workers in particular whose take home pay due to pro-rata is usually 40% - 50% lower than the legislated minimum wage (Gibbon 2011).

Because they are not paid a living wage they suffer consequences such as: Inability to educate their children up to high school; Inability to provide for themselves and family at least two balanced meals a day; Inability to hire proper accommodation resulting to overcrowding in single room accommodations, due to the fact that 25% of their basic salary paid to them as Housing Allowance is grossly inadequate; and lastly, 25% of 30.777FCFA gives 7.675FCFA and a single room of cardboard cost 12.000FCFA.

This is stack contradiction with the National Collective Agreement of Agricultural Undertakings which provides for the advancement of workers from one category echelon to the other bi-annually on merit basis. The appraisals of female workers performances for purposes of merit increments by their Sectional Heads is a tool for sexual harassment while Line Headmen use pro-rata payments as a tool for sexual harassment as well (Emilia 2015).

Poor Working Conditions

Apart of the wage levels that are low, other key concerns for workers are their working conditions. Issues included the lack of proper breaks; the absence of transparency concerning the recording of the number of hours worked on payslips; a lack of sanitation, such as toilet facilities (the use of which is only with the permission of a senior manager who holds the key) without toilet paper or soap, and the culture of reckless irresponsibility in the storage and application of agrochemicals. The theme throughout was one of worker reports conflicting with management claims, this disparity often backed up by what the delegation witnessed during plantation visits.

Health and safety

According to PHP officials, daily safety briefings were undertaken to enforce and bolster safety measures; constant efforts are applied to inculcate an awareness of safety issues throughout all areas of the business. In addition, in-company theatre plays are used to highlight safe behaviour. Visible signage has been introduced in strategic locations as a constant reminder of a safety-first culture. However, our visit to the plantation in 2013 revealed that despite all these efforts to ensure safety, safety malpractices are still common. We witnessed a nine month pregnant woman, only a few days from starting maternity leave, using a plastic lid to apply fertiliser by hand, and plastic gloves were her only protective equipment. She told us she had been working for 4/5 hours in the tropical heat without a break. She was working alongside a male colleague who was mixing large amounts of the fertiliser for application, again without proper protective equipment. It was this casual handling of agrochemicals, apparently endemic throughout PHP operations, which was so shocking. The level of awareness of the dangers of handling and applying a range of fungicides, fertilisers, nematicides and pesticides appears woeful at management level, with a sense that these chemicals are a symbol of progress and development (Bonte 2011).

Although we appreciated seeing workers in the Garage wearing improved Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), most workers in other areas reported either having no PPE or having new equipment only once a year when the plantation receives visitors. Many field workers reported having to buy their PPE, with boots, for example, costing 5000 CFA francs. Deleafers in particular reported not being given gloves, resulting in repeated wounds on their hands. Workers stated that although designed for one use only, their protective clothing is worn many times before being disposed of

and is rewashed for use. Although denied permission to visit the laundry facilities, we deduced the workers washing protective clothing for reuse are doing so without gloves or other protective clothing themselves. We witnessed workers unloading and opening packages of blue bags lined with Chlorpyrifos, an organophosphate, without any protective equipment. This included pregnant women opening the packs of bags by hand despite the prenatal risk of impaired neurobehavioral development. There also appears to be a lack of consultation with workers about the appropriateness of the PPE provided given the tropical conditions in which people are working. Quality was also questioned with the boots that some had, lasting only 3-4 months before needing replacement. We witnessed women working in only flip flops slipping over on the rough ground of the plantation (Yamileth, 1998).

As far as aerial spraying of bananas to protect against Black Sogatoka, we were told by PHP management that spraying only takes place in the mornings (because of wind patterns) and that farms are informed well in advance to ensure that workers are removed from the field for the 2/3 hours that spraying can take. One management claim was even that spraying only took place on Sundays. However, we filmed the cycle of a spraying application, from the plane being refueled and reloaded with pesticide at the PHP-owned airbase, to the application of this pesticide on the field. Signs may clearly warn that aerial spraying takes place, but our experience showed that when it does, no effort whatsoever is made to stop people entering the plantation. For example, workers finishing for the day passed through as the plane sprayed overhead, as did other people, carrying food, possibly intended for sale. We witnessed workers working in the field whilst spraying took place, these workers telling us, as many others did in interviews off site, that they simply sheltered under banana leaves (Dole 2012).

One of the most shocking aspects of the visit was the denial by senior medical staff employed by PHP of any negative health impacts from the handling of agrochemicals. Given the extensive research in this area and that many chemicals used in the banana industry are classified as 'hazardous' by WHO, this was quite astonishing. It is therefore difficult to understand how effective treatment can be if there is not transparency about the possible causes of health problems for the plantation workers.

All workers are supposed to receive quarterly training, including advice on how to handle chemicals. However there seems to be a cultural ignorance and inertia throughout the management structure about the dangers posed by the handling, storage and application of toxic agrochemicals to workers or the environment. There, for example, appeared to be an absence of buffer zones around water courses on several PHP

plantations. At every turn the blatant lack of safety in the handling and application of agrochemicals was denied at management level, as were any negative health impacts by medical staff.

PHP provided health care as specified in Section 98 of the Labour Code with a hospital that serves workers their families and the community, offering a range of services including ante and post natal care and a vaccination programme. Workers expressed a wide range of concerns about the healthcare provided. There were many complaints of insufficient supplies of drugs and workers taking incomplete doses or combinations of drugs due to irregular supplies. This pushed workers to buy their own drugs and are not subsequently being reimbursed. There was a first aid post on each plantation but these are only staffed for a few of the hours when workers are on site. There are no drugs available when the posts are not staffed.

Workers reported 1-2 workers collapsing a month and being taken to the clinic. Many workers worried that there were insufficient ambulances available to transport ill or injured workers to the clinics. Healthcare contributions of 800 CFA francs were deducted from low wages but workers also had to pay a consultation fee of 300 CFA francs and have other associated costs, such as paying for food for hospital patients. Workers expressed fears that they were being given insufficient sick leave to recover from illness which would also contribute to poor productivity if workers in poor health have to return to work. Nursing staff also shared a number of concerns, notably the delay in laboratory investigations, non-functioning sterilizing units (autoclaves) (leaving one clinic to use a two ring gas stove) and the lack of drying room which is a particular problem in rainy season. They also emphasised their belief that there was a need for 24 hour clinic provision.

Gender Issues

At PHP, 23% of workers are women with a ratio of 60:40 women to men in the pack house. This is a far higher rate of women being employed on plantations than in Latin America. Women begin their four month maternity leave three weeks before the delivery date. Social insurance covers maternity pay. Nursing mothers are given a 1 hour break per day for breastfeeding which can be taken at the beginning or end of the day. They are also entitled to start work at 8am, but these rights are not respected. Nursing mothers are given field tasks when they return to work so that they finish earlier. However, undertaking the demands of, for example, deleafing soon after childbirth had severe health impacts for women, including

abdominal pains. Management described removing women from certain tasks in response to their being hospitalized with lower abdominal pains. Pregnant women could work six hours without a break, applying fertiliser, deleafing or even cleaning drainage canals. Women felt strongly that - if consulted - they could propose better jobs for pregnant women and nursing mothers during their first 6 months back at work that would allow women to work seated, such as material preparation and the washing of plastics and foam. Women employed in the pack house also suffer a range of health complaints including back pains and irregular menstruation (Nsoh 2011).

Unfortunately, the long hours that women spend working in the pack house, especially in the evenings, means they are often absent from the home and the incidence of domestic violence appears to be increasing as a result. In addition, if women refuse sexual favours to their supervisor, they fear that their hours of pay may be cut or continual employment threatened.

Implication of PHP in Fiscal Delinquency

Companies operating in the banana sector in Cameroon had real power of influence, corrupt and manipulate government officials for purposes of collusion to free themselves from their tax obligations. Njombe-Penja hosts the activities of two of the three major private operators in the Cameroon banana industry: they are the PHP and SPM groups with annual turnovers of more than a billion CFA francs. Yet, despite the presence of these giant banana corporations, the local communities in which they operate retained an amazingly low budget, while they have on their territory such productive structures able to significantly develop their potential for tax revenues that could be used to develop the communities.

Given the paradox of a low budget plan provided to the municipality, despite the presence in the spring of old structures that are PHP / SPM groups Kingué Eric Paul (then mayor of the said town) decided to employ the services of a tax firm, based in Yaoundé, in order to obtain a reliable assessment of fiscal possibilities of his municipality. The study of the issue by the consulting firm revealed that the municipality of Penja lost nearly two billion seven hundred and fifty million (2.750.000 000) CFA francs of communal taxes and other taxes due to the fiscal delinquency practiced by PHP, PMS and CAPLAIN Group, that failed to fulfill any of their tax obligations for close to 30 years. The efforts made by Mayor Kingué to redress the situation created by this tax delinquency, only led to a slight increase in the budget of the municipality, which increased from 150 million CFA francs to 256 million francs CFA in 2008 (Oxfam 2009).

From a personal point of view, the exemption that was granted to agro-industrial companies operating in the Moungo area was based on complacency, revealing the existence of collusive maneuvers that had an adverse effect on tax resources. Exemptions unduly granted to agro-based industries in Penja violated the legal provisions laid down in Article 160 of the General Tax Code, which subjects the above companies to license. However, the non-payment of this patent, that is wholly owned by the municipality of Penja, in accordance with Article 156 of the Tax Code, prevented the eligibility of the municipality to the deferred deduction of 3% of the balance of municipal surcharges provided for in Order No. 0013 / MINAT of January 13, 1999.

Apart from the obvious, 13 other direct municipal taxes and two communal deliberations were not paid by the operating companies. At this juncture, it can be deduced that these companies have a long history of tax delinquency, which drastically reduced the tax potential which the town of Njombe-Penja could use to ensure a stabilized budget that could be exploited to jump-start development projects in the community. The recurrence of these tax delinquency practices reveals serious shortcomings of the companies who have exercised their obligations in terms of governance, the fight against corruption and corporate social responsibility, and the likelihood of harmful collusive and corrupt links for the municipality of Penja (Afite 2008).

To see more clearly in this case, Paul Eric Kingue decided to seek the consent of the General Manager of PHP through a written correspondence. This request for information made by the mayor of Njombe-Penja sparked a response in the form of corrupt deals initiated by the banana companies. Notified of that they should clarify their tax position vis-à-vis the council of Penja, PHP and SPM, instead chose to protect their tax evasion strategy, seeking to conclude a pact of corruption with former mayor of the municipality of Penja, then in office.

Land Use in Njombe-Penja

Three categories of actors were identified by respondents as the originators of land-related conflicts in the Njombé- Penja community. They include: elites, plantation owners and small-holder farmers. Elites who desire land for commercial agriculture (as a source of revenue during their retirement period) use their wealth and power to forcefully acquire vast expanses of land, including the farms of some small-scale producers for the cultivation of predominantly oil palm. Small-scale farmers, who are poor and politically powerless, are usually left landless, especially if they are not

compensated or given alternative farmland. This situation accounted for 16.9% of land-related conflicts in Njombé. The presence of agro-industrial plantations such as PHP with a surface area of approximately 1250 hectares of land in Njombé (Boa 2007, 29) is another cause of land disputes in the area. While PHP uses large expanses of land for the production of bananas pineapples), and ornamental flowers for export, their desire to expand their production area directly or indirectly leads to land conflicts. About 11.3% of all land disputes in Njombé directly result from the appropriation of small-holders' land, especially lands which border the big plantations such as PHP, without fair compensation. This leads to disputes between small-holder farmers and plantation owners as each actor is trying to protect his/her land interest. The expansion of PHP indirectly results in land scarcity and increased population pressure on land, due to the influx of migrants to work as plantation labourers. This aggravates the conflict situation of the area. These conflicts, according to the farmers, will continue as long as the plantation is expanding and appropriating their land.

Land use pattern in the area is a direct effect of the past and therefore how land is used today is determined by how it was used in the past (colonial period). Land in Njombé is used for various purposes including subsistence agriculture, commercial agriculture, experimental trials, plantation agriculture, real estate and other developmental projects. The presence of the agro-industrial plantations in the centre of the town makes access to farmland difficult as small-scale producers are forced to go far into the forest in search of farmland.

Although small-scale producers account for over 80% of domestic food production (IFAD 2008, 4), the presence of agro-industrial plantations in the centre of Njombé has some negative consequences on the livelihoods of small-scale producers. For instance, farmers were of the view that the presence of plantations undermines access to and control of resources of the local population now and/or in future, as it takes up the best lands pushing the rural people to cultivate on marginal lands that are hardly productive enough to feed them and secure surplus for market. This therefore affects their rights to adequate living standards and increases their vulnerability to hunger and poverty as they rely heavily on land for their livelihood (Pemunta 2014).

Secondly, farmers were of the view that plantation estates displace local producers (small-holder farmers) who often have the knowledge of producing sustainably, and would be in a position to do so with even higher yields if they were provided with an enabling agricultural policy environment. Furthermore, respondents remarked that their health is threatened as aerial spraying of banana crops leads to air pollution. River

water, formerly used by the inhabitants, is now confiscated and used for irrigating plantations. Irrigation channels of these plantations are being emptied into the residential areas leading to water-borne diseases especially during the rainy season. This reduces the farmer's capacity to invest in other productive activities as they say "health is wealth".

Conclusion

The consumption banana is increasing worldwide. However there is much less attention in the media for the often problematic environmental and socio-economic conditions associated with sugar cane production. This paper aimed to raise awareness among sourcing companies, such as supermarkets, of these sustainability concerns and outline suggestions for better company policies. Recent reports on different important banana producing countries indicate that working conditions in the industry are often problematic: forced labour, child labour, lack of job security, low wages, and health and safety problems. The banana industry, as indicated in the paper, is also linked to a range of harmful environmental impacts, including loss of animal habitats and biodiversity and pollution of land and water. Land conflict is one of the biggest problems associated with the production of banana. In Cameroon cases of land grabbing were reported. The inventory of reports this paper has consulted shows that such sustainability issues were widespread. A case study of banana cultivation and exportation at Njombe Penja by the *Haut Plantation du Njombe-Penja* unearths many of the same problems and also brings new issues to the table.

This paper concludes that among banana-consuming countries in Europe and North America, there is little awareness of, or interest in, the origin of the banana they buy. This raises doubts about the willingness and ability of banana-selling companies to verify that the sustainability policies they may impose on their suppliers are effectively implemented. Leading European and North American supermarkets generally have policies to mitigate the risk of unsustainable practices in their supply chains. However, addressing the range and complexity of the sustainability issues affecting the production of bananas requires more ambitious policies.

For banana producing and exporting countries like Cameroon to benefit from this activity, the paper has come with various recommendations. Given the companies involved in the production of banana have made exploitation of workers and local communities a principle within their supply chain, this paper proposes the following recommendations to supermarkets involved in the commercialization of bananas to final consumer:

- Supermarkets are advised to commit to sourcing sustainably certified bananas, as a first step in properly implementing human rights due diligence;
- Investigate human rights and negative environmental impacts in their banana supply chains; Identify banana plantations at the origin of their supply chain; Verify compliance with their policies at the origin of their banana supply chain;
- Mitigate negative human rights and environmental impacts in their supply chain through a targeted and coordinated engagement with different stakeholders including local communities, NGOs, trade unions and governments in producing and importing countries;
- Support banana producing companies that have been identified by the company as having specific negative human right and environmental impacts in their remediation efforts that engage affected communities and workers and finally;cxcx
- Publish the names of the companies that produce the bananas they sell, so that their responsibility can be publicly examined, and their progress can be independently evaluated.

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APPENDIX INTERVIEWS

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- Chief Nsonga, Njombe Penja, 21 October 2014.
- Emilia Lima, Tiko, 20 April 2015.
- Ewane Robert, Tombel, 26 February 2015.
- Ndifor Ransome, Njombe-Penja, 10 April 2015.
- Njume Epie, 16 March 2015.
- Nzimbi Moses, Loum, 11 October 2014.
- Rigobert Ndjimma, Melong, 12 March 2015.
- Simeu Alexandre, Loum, 11 March 2015.

ABSTRACT

Bananas are a major staple as well as an important cash crop in developing countries and the most eaten fruit in Europe and Northern America. For decades, the banana economy has been a key example of trade injustice. The concentration of power in the hands of a few multinational companies has negatively affected the lives of thousands of banana workers and small farmers. While this activity has generated considerable profit for the multinational corporations that operate the plantations, the labourers and the communities in which these plantations are found have suffered injustices in the hands of the companies. It is against this backdrop that this paper sets out to make an appraisal of some sustainability issues that have gone a long way to affect the lives of both the workers and the communities in the Njombe-Penja area which is one the key banana producing area in Cameroon.

KEYWORDS

Multinational corporations; sustainability; supply chain agriculture; development.

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