

Agro-industries in Cameroon and Welfare-related Services to Non-labourers in Operational Neighbourhoods: The Case of the Cameroon Development Corporation and the *Societe Camerounaise de Palmeraies*, 1968 - 2019

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Abstract: The agro-industrial sector in Cameroon remains an important part of the country's life wire as it produces for both local consumption and export thereby bringing revenue to the country and contributing to the welfare of its citizens. While attention is often drawn to production, the role of labour and the subsequent exportation of raw materials, very little attention is accorded to the auxiliary activities of agro-industrial complexes such as the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and the *Societe Camerounaise de Palmeraies* (SOCAPALM) towards the socio-economic advancement of the areas or neighbourhoods in which they carried out their operations. This paper accordingly, focuses on the contribution of two important agro-industries in Cameroon, the CDC and SOCAPALM, in the socio-economic welfare of the populations in the vicinities in which they operated. Using a historical method of analysis, it reveals that several persons or groups (non-labourers of the companies) benefitted, and in some instances, even more than the labourers, because of their proximity to the companies' estates and installations.

Keywords: Agro-industry, Cameroon Development Corporation, Neighbourhoods, Non-labourers, *Societe Camerounaise de Palmeraies*, Welfare.

INTRODUCTION

The agro-industry is often considered as part of the bedrock on which the economies of many developing countries stand. In Cameroon, like in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the agricultural sector turns out to be the nourishing breast of the economy as the exportation agricultural produce like cocoa, coffee, banana; palm oil and rubber keep the economy afloat in spite of the fluctuation of prices in the world market. There is no doubt therefore that this sector attracts various stakeholders in the production and distribution and/or exportation process. To this effect, the Cameroon government created and encouraged the functioning of agro-industries such as the CDC and SOCAPALM (PALMCAM since 2000 following its privatization but we shall maintain the old name for the sake of uniformity) These companies in turn employed a large number of persons to work on their plantations. These companies were obliged to provide welfare facilities such as houses, pipe borne water and health services to their employees. It is important to point out here that this paper is not intended to focus on the polemics or evaluation of the facilities provided to plantation labourers and other employees within the frame work of agro-industrial

settings for much has been done in this area already. We intend to shift our focus to persons or populations who were not employed by the companies but who derived lots of benefits because of their habitation within the vicinities of the estates of these companies. This is why allusion is often made to the CDC, for example, that "if Egypt derives its existence from the Nile, if Egypt only lives by the Nile, the CDC is the lung of the South West Region. There is no South West without CDC" (Elat and Feintrenie 2013, p.26).

BACKGROUND

The colonization of Kamerun (Cameroon) by the Germans in 1884 was subsequently followed by the expropriation of vast portions of fertile lands at the foot of Mount Cameroon and other parts of the coast for the establishment of plantations. By the end of 1897 German trading firms such as Woermann and Jantzen und Thormahlen had successfully established the first set of plantations at Mabetta and along the River Ombe (on the Tiko plain) and Victoria (Epale, 1985:23). By November 1902 the number of plantations had increased as they were engaged in the cultivation of crops such as cocoa, coffee, cotton, kola nuts, rubber, oil palms, tobacco and tea. Even after the ousting of the

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Germans from Cameroon in February in 1916, the British and French who partitioned the territory continued with plantation production in their various spheres of influence.

The politics of the British attempts to sell the former German concessions and the return of German planters to Cameroon after the First World War and their definitive ejection from the territory could be gotten from other related publications. Suffice it, however, to mention here that in 1946 the British authorities announced that the plantations would be leased to a newly established statutory corporation, the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

The Nigerian ordinances were later modified by Law No. 100/58.120/59 and after the independence of Cameroon by a number of progressive laws such as Law No. 51/60 of East Cameroon and the Federal Law No. 66/LF/19 which were adjusted by laws on state corporations (*sociétés de développement*) No. 68/LF/9 of 11 June 1968 and by decree No. 73/597 of 26 September 1973 which transformed the “C” of Commonwealth to Cameroon. This decree was modified another decree No. 82/038 of 22 January 1982 which also put in place a board of directors which represented the state in the corporation (Elat and Feintrenie, 2013, p.10). The CDC lands covered about 98,000 hectares out of which about 36,559 hectares had been cultivated by the mid-1980s (Epale, 1985:137-139). By 1947, the labour force stood at about 16,646 workers (Konings, 1993, p.64). In 1985, the CDC had over 20 plantations with close to 15,500 employees making the corporation second largest employer in Cameroon after the government [1].

In the French speaking part of Cameroon, some of the German plantations fell under French administration and were later reorganized and maintained while new ones were also created. For example, in 1924, the French company Société BLAT bought over the Kompina Palm Grove that was owned and managed by the German company Kamerun Eisenbalm Gesellschaft (KEG). Between 1930 and 1937, it passed from the hands of the Société Africaine Forestière et Agricole du Cameroun (SAFAC) to those of the Société des United Palm Groves of West Africa (SPROA). Likewise, the Palm Grove of Nkapa which covered an area of 1,031 hectares and managed by the K.E.G., was taken over by the French Compagnie des Oléagineux du Cameroun (C.O.C). It owned an oil mill and a soap factory which closed in 1950. Between 1951 and 1953, the French constructed the Dibombari-Beach oil mill after that of Nkapa was closed. It was managed from 1955 by a private company, SOCFINOL, and later by the Société Africaine de Prévoyance (SAP) until it was closed in 1962 (Elong J. Gabriel, 2003, p.2).

Another experience in terms of boosting oil palm cultivation in Lower Moungo was the initiative of an experimental nursery by the Secteur de Modernisation des Palmeraies (SMP) on 12 hectares of land ceded by the population. From this point, the SMP went on to create plantations in Bomono-Gare (84 hectares) and in Nkapa and Souza (182 hectares). The proceeding oil palm products later became the basis of regular supply to the Dibombari Oil Mill (Ibid., 2003, pp.2-3). Over time, as part of the government efforts to better organise the economy of the young Cameroon state, some of the palm plantations were revamped and placed under the Société Camerounaise de Palmeraies (SOCAPALM), a new state corporation established by Law No. 68/LF/9 of 11 June 1968, of the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Bank for Reconstruction and Development – World bank, 1977,p.2). SOCAPALM remained under direct state control until 2000 when it was privatized.

SOCAPALM was and still remains an agro-industrial undertaking having 06 estates specialized on cultivation of over 32,000 palms for the production of palm oil and other related products. The estates were spread over various parts of the present Littoral Region covering a total of 58,000 hectares (of which 32,000 was planted) employing over 1600 persons. The 06 estates cut across more than 32 villages in the Littoral Region. The estates included; Mbongo (in Sanaga Maritime), Eseka (in Nyong et kélé), Dibombari (in Moungo), Mbambou (in Sanaga Maritime), Kienke (in Ocean) and Edea (in Sanaga Maritime). Its annual production of crude palm oil was estimated at 800,000 tons of which close to 70 percent was sold in the local market making SOCAPALM “the uncontested leader of Cameroun’s palm oil supply” (SOCAPALM, 2012, p.2).

Welfare-Related Actions of the CDC and SOCAPALM

The notion of welfare and the welfare state has been a subject of multiple interpretations among economists, philosophers and political analysts. Generally, it is believed that it whirls around the guarantee of some minimum level of wellbeing as being the responsibility of the state. The word “welfare” itself revolves around “rights,” “needs,” “equality,” and “justice.” The economist’s map of welfare focuses on the satisfaction of the “actual desires [of people] whatever they may be.” In incorporating social welfare to this, it must be understood that the ethical value or the “goodness” of the social state or society could depend on individual welfare (Hamlin, 2008,pp.1-3). In Cameroon, state corporations like the CDC and SOCAPALM had the moral duty to accompany the state in the promotion of the wellbeing of the workers and to participate at efforts towards national development.

¹CDC Annual Report for the Year Ending 1985.

From their inception, the CDC and SOCAPALM were stakeholders that accompanied the Cameroon government in its development drive especially in the provision of social welfare and other related services to workers and non-workers in the areas where they operated. Given that SOCAPALM unlike the CDC only saw the light of day a few years after independence, the basis of discussion here would mostly focus on the post-colonial era in order to put both on the same historical platform and context. Both were involved in the provision various welfare services to workers and non-workers in the areas in which they carried out their activities. Though the presence of these plantations was at times greeted with a lot of fanfare as they were considered engines of socio-economic and infrastructural development, they were at times criticized for failing to meet up some of these expectations. According to Kimengsi, Lambi and Gwan (2016, pp. 1-2), the living conditions of the majority of labourers in major plantation systems in the world reveals that the basic human development indices (food, shelter, water and clothing) for development appear deficient. Most plantation economies have been characterized by growth that does not benefit the masses. The misgiving of these authors could be understood when it comes to analysing the input-dividend ratio that accrues to workers in plantation undertakings especially in Africa and Asia.

On the contrary, an attempt will be made to show how non-plantation populations benefited from some welfare services provided by the CDC and SOCAPALM as they had a substantial bearing on their lives. SOCAPALM, for example, had emphasized on its commitment to integrate the communities which played host to their installations in its development agenda by declaring that:

Our investments have not only targeted our own employees but also the surroundings. We recognize that

the communities in which we operate are an integral part of our activities. Therefore, we invested in easier access to visible progress on the terrain and we are proud of our achievements so far. (SOCAPALM, 2012, p.2).

Education

The CDC had established over 13 primary schools to cater for the children of workers and non-workers in areas where it operated such as Bota Middle Farms, Ebonji, Ekona, Idenau, Mabanda, Mabonji, Mbonge, Molyko and Tiko. In Molyko for example, the CDC established a primary school which did not only educate the children of the labourers of the Ekona Banana (Molyko section) plantation but also embraced children of non-CDC workers living in nearby villages such as Bokova, Bokwai, Bonduma, Molyko and Muea (see plate 1). Most of these schools were later handed over to the government in the 1980s. By 1987 when the government split the primary school in Molyko into two; Government Practicing School Molyko Group I and II, there were above 600 pupils with close to half of this number being the children of non-plantation workers. Generally, the CDC awarded prizes and scholarship to brilliant pupils irrespective whether they were children of workers or not. The essence was to encourage quality performance among pupils.

It is worth noting that most of the CDC primary schools were constructed with make shift wooden material or planks while others were lodged in revamped colonial buildings which dilapidated over time as was the case of the CDC primary school premises in Molyko (see plate 1A). Following the government take-over, some of the said schools were reconstructed with modern cement block as depicted by the structure in Molyko (see plate 1B).



Plate 1: Former CDC Primary School Now Government Practicing School Molyko

Source: Snapped by Joseph Nkweteyim, teacher, GPS Molyko, 17 June 2021.

In spite of the fact that the CDC handed over most of its schools to the government in the 1980s, it remained committed to the promotion of the welfare of youths in the domain of education. Between 2012 and 2013, for example, the CDC participated in the reconstruction of a greater portion of the Government

High School (Lycée bilingue) Njombe in the Littoral Region and delivered three new classrooms to the school authorities. Generally speaking, the corporation made financial contributions amounting to over FCFA 154,751,000 annually to the education sector in Cameroon. The money was meant to pay the salaries of

teachers who were non-civil servants recruited to teach as part-timers in some government schools situated in areas where the CDC operated. (Elat, N. Assoua and L. Feintrenie, 2013, pp. 27-28).

Likewise, SOCAPALM was very much involved in the running of schools and acting in synergy with the government in the promotion of education in areas where the company functioned. The children of labourers and non-employees of the company were given the opportunity to attend various schools such as the primary school in Mbongo (see Plate 2). In fact, SOCAPALM prioritized accessibility to education through the construction and renovation of schools around its installations. By 2012, the company counted 41 schools built in partnership with the government. Like the CDC, SOCAPALM stood steadfast and engaged the promotion of education at the secondary and high school levels. In 2012 for example, the company assisted the government in the construction of Technical High School Kienke in the Ocean Division. This permitted the children of management staff, labourers, contractors and inhabitants of surrounding villages to receive formal education (SOCAPALM, 2012, p.10).



Plate 2: Some Pupils of a SOCAPALM Constructed School in Mbongo

Source: SOCAPALM, 2019, p.31.

Both the CDC and SOCAPALM invested in numerous literacy programs. The CDC undertook the promotion of adult literacy by opening over 60 adult literacy centres for workers and members of the public the first two decades of its existence. However, these centres no longer exist as the CDC gave up its establishments to the government as earlier mentioned. Conversely, SOCAPALM remained committed to the continuity of this and other related programmes in the areas where it operated. SOCAPALM authorities argued that by the year 2010, 29 percent of Cameroon's youths were illiterates. In order to close this gap, they went on to organize holiday classes to enable several youths improve their level of education and took the engagement to help several villagers improve on both literacy and professional training. For example, SOCAPALM organised computer classes for its employees and sewing classes for women of the surrounding villages in order to help them gain additional means of survival (SOCAPALM, 2012, p.5).

Furthermore, schools in sites like Mbambou and Mbongo witnessed the influx of hundreds of pupils and students since 2018 as a result of the Anglophone crisis in the English part of the country. Many gained admission and were integrated in these communities (SOCAPALM, 2019, p.31).

Health

In labour intensive plantation systems, the provision of health care facilities to labourers is an important factor that impacts on qualitative performance and output. The essence here is not to judge the quality of the health facilities but to see how the non-employees of the agro-industries in question benefitted from health facilities that were originally set up because of its workers.

From its inception, the CDC accompanied the establishment of estates with the installation of health facilities to cater for its workers and their relations as well as the public. By 1975 the CDC counted over 30 clinics and 42 aid posts. The Corporation managed 04 major well equipped hospitals found in Bota, Ekona, Mukonje and Tiko besides 06 auxiliary hospitals. In 1981, the CDC Tiko Cottage Hospital was upgraded to a reference hospital. Apart from CDC workers, hundreds of persons from nearby towns such as Tiko, Victoria (now Limbe), Mutengene, Buea and even from as far as Douala visited these hospitals in order to benefit from the various services provided. Meanwhile, the aid posts and clinics also attended to labourers, their relations and other persons in the areas where they were found (Onya, 1982, p.10).

Like the CDC, the SOCAPALM management also provided health care to workers, their beneficiaries and the general public. Each plantation site had a central health centre with a full time doctor assisted by medical staff who included nurses, midwives and laboratory technicians. The health centres offered medical services to both workers of the company and people from surrounding villages leading to increased consultations. In 2011, for example, SOCAPALM invested in the construction of a new health centre in Mbambou in an attempt to increase accessibility of workers of the company as well as villagers to medical care (SOCAPALM, 2012, p. 12). With about 51 health personnel including 06 medical doctors, for example, over 45, 597 consultations were registered in 2018 among labourers and their relations. Besides, over 1,800 villagers (non-employees) also visited, consulted and were treated at SOCAPALM health facilities that year. By the end of the year, the company had spent over FCFA 609, 211, 466 in the treatment of labourers, their relations and villagers (SOCAPALM, 2018, p.26).

Another health related concern of the two companies was their interest in fighting against the spread of various diseases such as malaria, typhoid, tuberculosis and sexually transmissible diseases (STDs)

such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic both on their estates and environs. The special interest on the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic could be understood from the gravity of its spread and on the fact that no cure had been found for the illness. Mbanya, Sama and Tchounwou (2008, p.379) intimate that though the first AIDS case was diagnosed in Cameroon in 1985, the figure had risen to 2,766 by 1995. In terms of percentages, the prevalence rose progressively from 0.4 percent in 1987 to 1.2 percent in 1990. In 1997 the rate stood at 07 percent and by the year 2000, it had skyrocketed to 11 percent. Worse of it all, poverty in society was greatly associated to the wild-bush fire nature of its spread. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (as cited by Makoge, Vaandrager, Maat and koelen, 2017, p.2) the top three Poverty Related Diseases in the poor countries in the world include malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis which account for over 18 percent of the disease burden of these countries. WHO further avers that their persistence leads to “a reduced quality of life and the wellbeing for a people and hinders economic growth in developing countries.”

Like Makoge, Vaandrager, Maat and koelen (2017, pp.2-3), Kinmengsi, Lambi and Gwan (2016, p.8) contend that the poor living conditions of labourers within plantation camps (congestion, poor sanitary, hygiene conditions, moral decadence, crime and violence) creates a potential opening for the propagation of diseases. They maintain that this is further compounded by the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STDs with fast ravaging effects on these camps terming them a “population in transit.” While this can hardly be disputed, it could however, be reiterated that some plantation authorities made efforts, both in their various estates and neighbourhoods, in the fight against these diseases. In the 1990s, the CDC stepped into the campaign against the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It educated not only its workers but the general public, through sensitization campaigns, on the dangers involved in acts of sexual promiscuity and unprotected sex. Thousands of preservatives (condoms) were distributed to both workers and members of the public during health campaigns in a bid to fight the spread.

Likewise, SOCAPALM engaged in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic through vast periodic sensitization campaigns on its estates and the surrounding villages. Like the CDC, it distributed thousands of preservatives especially to youths. Besides, free counseling and screening were carried out in make-shift tents mounted at strategic points for the purpose, by some medical staff of the company from Edea. The campaigns were also taken to schools where students formed part of the target population (see plate 3). Mbanyu, Sama and Tchounwou (2008, p.379) assert that youths, especially students and commercial sex workers were the most vulnerable in the face of the

pandemic. They argue that those of the ages between 15 and 24 years “are hard hit” with girls infected constituting 10 to 15 percent and boys 04 to 06.5 percent. Therefore, targeting and involving students in the HIV-AIDS Free campaigns was not a happenstance. SOCAPALM medical teams also used the opportunity to sensitize the people on childcare, sanitation, and the importance of general hygiene in their environment. The campaign teams orientated patients to major specialized units in hospitals such as the General Hospitals Laquintinie, Douala, Edea, Kribi and Yaounde (SOCAPALM, 2019, p.29).



Plate 3: SOCAPALM Health Team on Anti-HIV/AIDS Campaign in 2019

Source: SOCAPALM, 2019, p.29.

Recreation

Some plantation regimes have been known for investing into recreation facilities which are intended to give workers comfort and the opportunity to relax especially when not at work. Most of them have been criticized on the basis that they are, at times, reserved for the pleasure of “cadres” while the “common” labourers are ignored due to their low status. In other circumstances, those from the general public who have better means and/or status tend to exploit and enjoy certain recreational facilities that were meant for workers at the time of their conception (Mbome, 2019, p.5).

As the CDC expanded its activities after 1960, it continued to create or revamp a number of recreational facilities for its workers as well as the general public. For example, the Likomba Golf Course and Club were established for lovers of the game of golf. The course was an 18-hole beautiful lawn situated at Likomba, Tiko. The Golf facility was a popular destination for tourists and golf lovers. During the dry season major golf tournaments were organized there. Given that the equipment for the game were said to be very expensive, mostly top management personnel and well to do non-CDC workers and tourists took part in the tournaments. However, the competitions attracted a cross-section of the Tiko and Mutengene populations who went in as spectators to catch some fun (Mbome, 2019, p.7).

The CDC participated in the sponsor of some football clubs; especially those that bore its initials as was the case with the Tiko based CDC United Football

Club during the Elite Championships. Unfortunately, during the 1973/74 tournament, Jonh Niba Ngu, the first indigenous General Manager of the CDC, decided to withdraw the corporation's support from CDC United FC for undisclosed reasons. During that season, Mbida Andrew, the newly appointed Manager of Brasseries du Cameroun Tiko branch, took over the sponsorship of the team on behalf of his company. Consequently, the indigenes insisted that the team changed its initials before going for the competition. The name of the team was changed from CDC United FC to Tiko United FC (<https://cm.linkedin.com/tikounited>). In spite this, subsequent CDC authorities rebounded to the football scenario by rallying support for some teams. In March 2009, for example, at a congress organized in the Tiko Town Green Hall to raise funds for Tiko United FC (fondly called "Samba Boys"), Henry Njella Quan, the General Manager of the CDC, donated the sum of FCFA 2 million on behalf of the corporation in addition to technical advice to the team. At the end of the ceremony, Charles Dikongue Eteki, the President of the Club, and Peter Tieh Ndeh, the Secretary General of the South West Governor's Office, who chaired the congress all left satisfied as the club backed home FCFA 14.5 million as funds raised (Mbunwe, 2009, www.camfoot.com).

The CDC also setup the Senior Service Club (SS Club) at Bota which was opened to the public and drinks, snacks and other items were sold at affordable prices. The corporation also contributed to village and town development by helping in the building of halls for meetings and ceremonies in places like Tiko and Limbe. In 1998 the CDC management spent over FCFA 1,000,000 to give a face-lift to the CRTV building in Buea and promised to improve on the equipment of the station so that they could provide quality services to their listeners and customers. In exchange, CRTV Buea offered to give CDC products a befitting publicity on radio. The CDC financed the construction of a Presbyterian church at Penja amounting to over FCFA 1.5 million. It bought and shared hundreds of road-safety helmets to moto taximen (benskiners) and helped to finance the organisation of their syndicate in the town (Mbome, 2019, pp.7-8).

At the level of public relations, the CDC participated in the successful organization of various national celebrations such as those of 11th February and 20th May. For example, they made available their trucks to transport students from far-off places to the ceremonial grounds for the match pass and other activities. In addition, they contributed an annual sum of over CFA 401,668,278 as contribution to the organization of such public festivities. Part of the money was destined to other important events as well as to the reception of special guests to the present day South West Region (Elat, N. Assoua and L. Feintrenie, 2013, pp. 27-28).

In the same vein, SOCAPALM marked its presence on the roll call for the provision of recreational facilities in its operational neighbourhoods. For over twenty years, the company worked in partnership with the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) to reforest its plantations and to set up some recreational areas in villages and schools within its operational vicinity. Like the CDC, it took interest in the building of meeting or community halls in some of the villages hosting its plantations. Meanwhile, lawns and reading gardens with seats made out of cement blocks or concrete were constructed in some schools. SOCAPALM also provided a number of clubs for relaxation which were opened to the general public. For example, the there was a club at Nkapa which welcomed and hosted "Club Cyclotourism of Cameroon" during cycling competitions (<https://socapalm.com>).

Although SOCAPALM was not as incisive as the CDC in the sponsorship of football clubs, the company made considerable efforts at providing some sports facilities to the people in the areas where it operated. For example, it constructed football fields in schools and some of the villages hosting its plantations. This made room for the possibility to organize inter-quarter competitions especially during the long holidays, between June and August, every year which attracted youths from far and near (<https://socapalm.com>).

Research

Between 1947 and 1975 the CDC had established a number of research centers in areas such as Bota and Ekona. Plantation crops such as banana and palms and fruits such as paw-paw, guavas and mangoes were subject to research and improved species produced. Both the CDC and the indigenous people benefitted from these. The CDC equally accompanied some academic institutions in this domain by assisting them on research and development. For example, in 2014, the corporation went into an agreement with the University of Buea to sponsor some research projects of the institution and some students were given the opportunity to carry out their internship in the CDC. On 14 February 2021, the partnership was renewed in which the University agreed to assist the CDC in its research needs in areas such as crop protection, quality control, soil fertility and social science intervention. In turn, the CDC was to sponsor more research-related projects in the university (www.dcd-cameroon.net).

On its part, SOCAPALM established a plant pathology unit in Dibombari which comprised a microbiology laboratory for pathology studies. There was a plant breeding unit situated at Kienke which had experimental fields and nurseries. Their findings were beneficial to many smallholders as they improved on the quality and quantity of their produce. Villagers around the plantations equally benefitted from the advice from SOCAPALM experts on subsistence

farming and crop management. As a way of encouraging research in schools, SOCAPALM donated computers to a number of schools found around its plantations (socapalm.com/social-responsibility/relations-with-the-bagyeli-pygmies). In its commitment to environmental protection, SOCAPALM was the first agro-industrial complex in Central Africa to be certified under the International Organization for Standardization (IOS) with the code ISO-14001. The ISO is a worldwide federation comprising over 160 countries. This organisation sets a series of laws and guidelines related to environmental protection especially in industrial settings.

Water Supply

The CDC provided pipe borne water to its workers especially in camps and other corporation houses. Though Elat and Feintrenie (2013, p.28) argue that by 2013 not all the workers had access to drinkable water, it is however, important to underscore here that some non-employees enjoyed water supplied by the corporation in some neighbourhoods. For example, the people of “Small Soppo Stranger Quarter” benefitted from a water catchment constructed by the CDC in Small Soppo Wovilla village in Buea which was meant to supply water to the camps of the Tole and Saxenhof Tea Estates since the mid-1960s. They were allowed to tap a line from the catchment which helped them gain access to clean water in their self-reliant project. The catchment provided regular drinkable water to over 1,000 persons who were not workers of the CDC. The CDC and the community took regular turns in carrying out maintenance on the catchment periodically. In addition, the CDC Limbe Camp (behind the Limbe District Hospital) had taps to which the people in the area were allowed free access to fetch water from without reservation. At Middle Farms where the CDC had taps, the situation was basically the same [²].

Likewise, SOCAPALM too did much to make available pipe born water to its workers in the various camps. Just like in the CDC camps, access to drinkable water was difficult in some workers’ settlements. However, a cross section of villagers in the plantation neighbourhoods were lucky to benefit from water supplied by SOCAPALM. The company sponsored the building and maintenance of some water catchment points in the surrounding villages and ensured the availability of water to some of the people. At Mbongo, for example, the SOCAPALM authorities provided a number of water points for the villagers (<https://socapalm.com>).

Lodging

The CDC built a number camps for its workers where both relations and friends who had no

engagement with the corporation benefitted. By 1970, for example, the CDC had close to 100 camps hosting over 30,000 persons. Close to half of the number were said to be non-workers of the corporation. Makoge, Vaandrager, Maat and koelen, (2017, p.4) and Obale (2020, p.13) acknowledge that the corporation invested in lodging facilities for its labourers though they contend that these facilities remained wanting in terms of quality. In spite of this, many non-workers of the corporation stilled gained from related facilities which appeared better in quality.

Real estate belonging to the CDC was used as accommodation for administrative officials and headquarters for the defence forces. Examples include the residence of the Divisional Officers of Tiko, the premises of the Delta Force in Bota and several transit huts for the reception of personalities in Mukonje, the premises of the gendarmerie at Penda-Mboko and the premises of the civil status registry at Mukonje. Besides material support, the CDC donated financial assistance to the forces in charge of public security. On this alone, the corporation spent over FCFA 25 million to support several gendarmerie and police posts in the South West Region annually. The corporation also provided free fuel worth over FCFA 2.2 million every year to the gendarmerie brigades in Idenau, Limbe, Mbonge, Muyuka, Nkap, Tiko and Tombel (Elat, N. Assoua and L. Feintrenie, 2013, p. 27).

Similarly, SOCAPALM was involved the construction and/or rehabilitation of some lodging facilities in their areas of operation. The company helped in the rehabilitation or construction of village halls and other important buildings in the communities. The company spent huge sums of money every year to reconstruct numerous lodging facilities in the villages in which they functioned. In 2018, for example, the SOCAPALM management spent over FCFA 2,330,868 billion for the construction of villages within the plantations as well as to carry out repairs on existing structures (SOCAPALM, Sustainability Report, 2018, p.25).

Road Construction and/or Maintenance

The CDC was involved in the construction or rehabilitation of roads, culverts, bridges and some railway lines. In fact, the CDC assured the rehabilitation of roads in various localities where the corporation conducted its operations. For example, the corporation was involved in the construction of the road linking Mukonje-Fiango in Meme Division and the Kola-Tombel road in the Koupe-Muanemguba Division. The CDC also undertook to upgrade the roads, linking Idenau-Illoani (between Ndiian and Fako Divisions), Limbe-Mabeta (in Fako), Mondoni-Mungo-Meanja (in Fako), Kompina-Matouke (in the Moungo Division) (Elat and Feintrenie, 2013, p. 27). It is important to note that these roads were not only used by the CDC for the transportation of its produce. The general public and

² The information stated here is based on personal observation being born and breath in Small Soppo and haven schooled or lived in other CDC neighbourhoods.

highway transport agencies also benefitted from them in spite of the fact that there were mostly seasonal roads. The corporation established garages especially the main one at Moliwe whose engineers repaired vehicles and equipment belonging to the CDC and the general public.

In the same way, SOCAPALM authorities were involved in the construction or maintenance of roads linking the plantations in the localities where they operated. Besides, the company also rehabilitated roads linking the villages that hosted its plantations in order to facilitate not only the transportation of their produce but circulation of the populations in these areas. In 2019, for example, SOCAPALM spent over FCFA 290,996,515 for the maintenance of national roads and other access roads in the villages which hosted their installations (SOCAPALM, 2019, p.49).

Environmental Protection

Both the CDC and SOCAPALM made attempts to protect the environment in which they functioned. They were expected to act in conformity with several laws related to the environment. For example, law number 96/92 of 5 May 1996 spelt out various social norms related to environmental protection besides the labour code and collective conventions.

The CDC tried to enforce cleanliness in some parts of the area they operated. While they had Camp Committees to ensure the sanitation of the camps, they also provided equipment to facilitate the management and evacuation of waste found in some parts of the towns. For example, the corporation provided three tractors with drivers and assigned them to clean the town of Loum by clearing off refuse heaped along the roadside of the town. (Elat, N. Assoua and L. Feintrenie, 2013, p. 28).

SOCAPALM showed interest in environmental protection as well. The company had a written environmental policy which was communicated to its employees whether permanent or temporal. Suppliers and contractors were as well made to take cognizance of the fact that the company operated within the ambits of some environmental norms which they were expected respect before entering into any business agreement with company (SOCAPALM, 2012, p.5).

SOCAPALM progressively replaced and improved on the equipment of its mills in order to increase their performance and reduce their environmental impact. It constructed silencers to reduce the noise of the sterilizers and to reduce smoke emission in order not to exceed the accepted norm. The company made an effort to collect, dispose and even recycled waste from various plantations and villages. For example, scrap metal was collected and directed

towards scrap metal dealers while wood chips were used for energy recovery. (SOCAPALM, 2012, pp.7-8).

SOCAPALM did not plant on peat or on land containing high conservation values (HCV). They preserved wet spots, microhabitats such as steep terrain and rocky hills as well as ecologically sensitive or protected areas. For example, the company management took the responsibility to protect the natural reserve at Kienke which played host to various species of monkeys. The forest around the plantations were protected and they prevented the cutting down of tall trees which acted as habitats for birds of prey and non-planted areas were kept in each concession for endemic rodents (SOCAPALM, 2012, p.7).

As part of its environmental policy, SOCAPALM paid special attention to the Bagyeli pygmies living in the villages in the middle forest spreading over five villages within the vicinity of the Kienke plantations. The company offered them access to both education and health with the understanding that they would acquire knowledge related to modern ways of forest conservation and how to protect themselves from infectious diseases that could not be treated in the forest without destroying it. To this effect, the SOCAPALM authorities assisted in the creation of the Bagyeli Cultural Development Association (BACUDA) to help in the protection of their natural environment and development (socapalm.com/social-responsibility/relations-with-the-bagyeli-pygmies).

Regular consultation meetings were held with local stakeholders like civil society and village heads. They were regularly brought together to identify and discuss concerns that might exist with respect to SOCAPALM's environmental, social and economic performance (SOCAPALM, 2012, pp.2-4).

Smallholder Schemes

As part of their operational policy, the CDC and SOCAPALM encouraged smallholders' schemes with the aim of assisting private planters in growing and selling their produce. These two companies were among the agro-industries that received government encouragement to engage various forms of contract farming. Several individuals or organized groups engaged in "cash crop" farming in the neighbourhood of agro-industrial undertakings, entered into contracts with them for the purpose of doing business together.

In the early years of its existence, the CDC was committed to partnering with smallholders. In August 1952, for example, Dr E.M.L. Endeley founded and led the Bakweri Cooperative Union of Farms (BCUF) to conclude a market agreement with the CDC for the sales bananas produced by the Bakweri indigenes. The CDC was prohibited from making profits from the BCUF except for handling charges. When the banana boom declined in the mid-1960s, the BCUF was advised to diversify production. (Konings,

1993, pp. 160-161). The CDC was increasingly involved in smallholders' schemes with government encouragement. In 1968, for example, the government charged the CDC with the responsibility of "assisting smallholders or groups of them engaged in the cultivation of crops similar to those cultivated by itself in the collection area of the mills it managed." In 1973, President Ahmadou Ahidjo reminded the CDC authorities on the role they were to play on the encadrement of the peasantry in the neighbourhood of its estates when he instructed that:

The CDC is an important agro-industrial complex. It must stand out as an example to, and stimulate progress within the population in the vicinity of its plantations. The local people, in turn, should aspire to establish satellite smallholdings around these plantations where they could learn and implement modern farming methods and technics (as cited by Konings, 1993, p.158).

There were several planters who had sizeable farms within the vicinity of the CDC operations and who supplied their produce to the CDC. Some of them were Dr E.M.L. Endeley, E.K. Martin, E.A. Mbiwan, Nfon V.E. Mukete and Chief S.O Ebaja. Nfon Mukete became the largest smallholder in the South West Province (South West Region since 2008) with a labour size of over 400 workers by 1982. Though smallholders had a steady supply line opened with the CDC which also gave them some technical assistance, all was not a jolly ride for the farmers. There were times that they faced some difficulties which led to loss of profit. Some of them protested against the CDC accusing the corporation for fanning the flames of their predicaments such as paying low prices for their produce. For example, Chief Ebanja, who was Chairman of Smallholders in the South West Province, complained that his vocal position made him a subject of victimization by the CDC leading to losses on his part. The conflict between the CDC and the smallholders forced the corporation to keep them aside from participating in the framework of the second Commonwealth Development Corporation (COMDEV II) project of 1978-1982 [³] (Konings, 1993, pp.162-166).

³ Through COMDEV, the CDC was able to secure various loans from the IMF and other donor agencies to finance its development. Some of these were organized under various programmes. The programme, COMDEV I, was envisaged for the period 1967-1974. The CDC satisfactorily executed it though it was delayed until 1976. It was aimed at increasing the size of the CDC plantations from 22,120 hectares in 1967 to 32,700 hectares by 1974. The second programme, COMDEV II, estimated at 39.3 million US dollars, was planned for the period 1978-1982. It targeted among other things, the expansion of oil palm and rubber production, the supply of foreign technical assistance and the

Contrary to the position of the CDC, the World Bank after an appraisal of the COMDEV II plan insisted that the corporation should integrate smallholders and work towards their advancement. It was against this backdrop that the bank advocated that the CDC should oversee the setting up about 1,000 hectares each of smallholder rubber and oil palms during the duration of the COMDEV II programme. Both the World Bank and the Cameroon government were to contribute up to the tune of 1.1 million US dollars and 1 million US dollars respectively. Meanwhile, 0.6 million US dollars was to come from COMDEV. The funds were to be channeled to the CDC through the Fonds National du Développement Rural (FONADER). The CDC was to provide the smallholders with the necessary inputs, technical advice, supervision and credit facilities. On their part, the smallholders were obliged to attend meetings summoned by the CDC, participate in training programmes and sell all their produce to the CDC (Konings, 1993, p.167).

The COMDEV II programme prohibited smallholders from developing more than 02 hectares of land at the same time. During the "maturity period" of the crops, they were to receive a non-refundable cash grant of FCFA 56,900 for oil palms and FCFA 108,106 for rubber. The money was intended to serve as a kind of remuneration for labour inputs. To crown it all, a smallholder department was established in Tiko. On 27 November 1978 Samuel Ndum, Technical Adviser to the Ministry of Agriculture, was installed as head of the Smallholder Department. He was charged with the treatment of applications and other important matters arising to the functioning of the scheme (Ibid., pp.168-169).

By the same token, SOCAPALM embraced the idea of assisting independent planters in the production and marketing of their produce after the first decade of its existence. By 1978 therefore, it decided to assist indigenes who had invested in palm cultivation and in the production of palm oil and other related products. Local producers received both financial and technical assistance from SOCAPALM. The company authorities went ahead to institute a credit operation backed by FONADER in which local producers were obliged to supply all their produce to SOCAPALM (Elong, 2003, p.4).

The FONADER backed credit procedure was a long-term loan granted for the supply of items such as plants, fertilizer, barbwire and work tools at an average interest of 09 percent annually payable in 14 years after a deferral 06 years period between the time of planting and that of harvesting. Local planters were also given some money (non-refundable) to subsidise the payment

establishment and development of smallholders' schemes (see also Konings, 1993, pp.43-44).

of workers. At the beginning of a project, for example, indigenous and/or independent planters were given FCFA 41,000 per hectare and FCFA 15,000 for maintenance. The amount to support the payment of workers reduced as the years went by with the understanding that the planters were gradually being stabilised in their functioning. The subsidies geared towards the payment of workers therefore, dropped from FCFA 41,000 per hectare, at the inception phase, to FCFA 6,000 in the first and second years and FCFA 3,000 in the third year per hectare (Ibid.).

Besides the permanent employees and temporary (casual) workers of SOCAPALM, the company also had a significant number of smallholders who benefitted from its largesse. In 2018, for example, the company had 5,387 persons contributing to its economic activities with various financial benefits accruing to them. Out of this number, 2,156 were permanent employees while there were 1,748 temporal workers and 1,483 contractors, most of whom were smallholders (SOCAPALM, 2018, p.26). An analysis of these figures shows that in 2018, the permanent workers constituted 40.02 percent of the actors involved in the production and marketing process in SOCAPALM. Meanwhile, temporal workers comprised 32.45 percent, while contractors consisted 27.53 percent of the entire team. In fact, smallholders earned huge sums of money from their contracts with SOCAPALM. In 2019, for example, the company paid premium amounting to FCFA 9 billion to smallholders alone (<https://socapalm.com>).

CONCLUSION

Both the CDC and SOCAPALM were and are still huge agro-industrial complexes that employ a large number of persons given their labour-intensive nature. Their activities covered very large areas of land with great impact on the lives of both those who worked on their plantations as well as those who were non-employees of the companies. Both companies were obliged to provide a number of social amenities to their workers though they were sometimes criticised by a number of researchers for their poor quality as was the case with camp houses. That notwithstanding, both the CDC and SOCAPALM had it as a mandatory obligation to accompany the state in its development process beyond the plantation settings. This means that they were to engage an all-inclusive policy where the populations (non-employees) who were in the ambit of their installations had to benefit from their presence. It was in this light that they made their impact felt by even those who were not directly employed by the companies through the provision of a number of welfare related services such as education, health, recreation, research, road construction and/or rehabilitation, environmental protection and support to smallholders. In the process of providing these benefits, many non-workers of the companies ended up, in some cases, gaining more than some of their own employees. Their activities at times

created problems such as conflict over land with the indigenes, and complaints about pollution and so on. Given that our work did not elaborate on the hind side of the activities of these companies in the operational vicinities, this aspect could be a subject to subsequent research by those interested in plantation systems in general and agro-industrial settings in particular.

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