
Cameroon: Opposition to Herakles Farms' oil palm project on native lands

Photo: credito: Greenpeace/Alex Yallop

On 25 November 2013, the President of Cameroon issued three decrees granting 19,843 ha of native land to SGSustainable Oils Cameroon/Herakles Farms in southwest Cameroonfor the establishment of a large-scale oil palm plantation.

Local people and organizations denounce that the Presidential decrees, full of irregularities, arereminiscent of colonialism and slavery and violate provisions of the Cameroonian 1976 land tenure act as well as international laws on climate change that demand not to increase emissions through theconversion of tropical forests into monoculture systems, such as industrial oil palm plantations, which is the case.

The President's decree granting a land concession to Herakles in a verysensitive area has ignored local opposition to the project as well as warnings from eminent scientists andenvironmentalists that the project will cause widespread irreversible impacts.

The Cameroonian NGO SEFE denounces that the decisionis in violation of the principle that any sustainable development can only be attained when all parties mutuallyagree to undertake a venture with the strict respect of principles and relevant criteria guided byexisting conventional laws.

Since 2010, SEFE has led a campaign against Herakles Farms by organising communityresistance against the establishment of large-scale oil palm plantations in the midst of four veryimportant protected areas including the iconic Korup National Park. The area is also a complexwatershed formation (Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve), which provides freshwater to nearby and far-offcommunities in Cameroon and Nigeria, and it is widely considered to be a hotspot for biodiversity. Therefore the project will not only havenegative impacts to nearby communities but also on far-off communities living on coastal fringes inboth Cameroon and Nigeria (Cross River State), which will be seriously impactedfrom pollution, flooding, changes in hydrology, biodiversity loss. Other underlyingystems like mangroves south of the projectarea will be impacted as well.

Tension is now rife within the concession area since the signing of the decree and could degenerate into conflicts among the villages in the area which havelong co-existed in peace and enjoyed communal life together for many centuries.

The company has on several occasions said that the area is a secondary and degraded forest but mostof the land within the Herakles lease is pristine forest, whether in Fabe, Masaka, Sikam, Talangaye, or other communities.

SEFE demands the decree to be cancelled because of inadequate facts contained in the so-called technical documents that are void of actualinformation and inputs from communities. The NGO

believes also that the granting of a land concession for the establishment of a large-scale palm oil plantation that is socially, economically and environmentally unsustainable in this area, goes against Cameroon's obligations to global instruments like the Millennium Development Goals, Convention on Biological Diversity, RAMSAR, UN Human Rights bills, and others which demand the strong adherence to peace and stability, including the preservation of the environment and the protection of citizenry.

SEFE states that it "will continue with the campaign until justice is achieved because no decree has ever and will ever extirpate justice."

Based on the Press Release by SEFE "SEFE calls President of Cameroon's land deal with US company Herakles Farms a grave injustice and hindrance to conventional values",
<http://farmlandgrab.org/22937#sthash.Kef1aXv0.dpuf>