

Weekender

NEWS

News

SCANDAL!

Enterprise With FCFA 5m Capital Wants To Grab 60,000 Hectares Of Forested Land

BY JOE DINGA PEFOK

A scandal has emerged in Ocean Division, South Region of Cameroon, with a little known enterprise, Camvert Sarl, with a capital of only FCFA 5 million, lobbying to grab as much as 60,000

was scheduled between Camvert and the Nyété Community, at the DO's Office. The meeting, which was very stormy, was chaired by the DO of Nyété, Mbotiji Hotison Babila.

Speaking at the beginning of meeting, the representative of

they will suffer. He blasted companies in the Ocean Division in the agro-industry sector as exploiters and liars. He frowned that the thousands of Cameroonians that are labourers at HEVECAM and SOCAPALM are treated like slaves. Chief Edande lashed out that agro-industries in Ocean Division do not create wealth for the people.

"Everybody likes development, but the development that HEVECAM and SOCAPALM promised the people is not being felt in our villages. What the people feel is instead misery."

So Much Has Already Been Given Out

The Mayor of Nyété, Jean Jaures Mengue, said he had just returned from Kribi where he and the Mayor of Campo attended a meeting related to the Camvert project. He said both of them share serious concerns about the project. The Nyété Mayor said they do not even know the real shareholders of Camvert, as well as their real intention in lobbying to grab land.

The Mayor also stated that Camvert itself has admitted that it has never before engaged in the oil palm plantation sector. He asked how the enterprise can, in its first project in the sector, be demanding for as much as 60,000 hectares of land.

Talking about the claim by Camvert that the enterprise will invest FCFA 150 billion in the palm oil project, Mayor Mengue questioned the sincerity and credibility of the enterprise. He pulled out a correspondence that was addressed to him on the letter-headed paper of Camvert Sarl, on which it is indicated that the capital of the enterprise is FCFA 5 million. The Mayor asked how an enterprise with a capital of barely FCFA 5 million, can be claiming that it will invest FCFA 150 billion.

Mayor Mengue complained bitterly, that so much land has already been allocated in the Ocean Division to agro-industries as well as for conservation. He asserted that, to give out more land for agro-industries will certainly hurt the population so badly. He said the population also needs land to put up community or private development projects.

The Mayor of Nyété advised the hidden faces behind controversial Camvert project, to come out and talk frankly with the people. He warned Camvert, which he said is making noise that the land they are demanding is State land, that, if anything is signed in Yaounde, and the population of Nyété and Campo Subdivisions say no, that project will not work.

Youths In Campo Say They Need Land

On September 13, the group of journalists travelled to Campo Subdivision. The first stopover was at Ebodje Village. Nestor Kowe, who spoke on be-

half of the youths of the village, stated that over the years, the main occupation of the villagers has been fishing. But he said with the construction of the Kribi Deep Seaport, which has brought along several maritime activities around the area where they fish, fishes have moved away, thus the villagers have been witnessing a steady drop in the quantity of fishes they catch. He said many of the villagers are now thinking of abandoning fishing, to turn to agriculture, and so they need farmlands. He said the youths also need land where they will have to build their own homes, as well as set up other businesses. Kowe was firm that the youths, in particular, are strongly against the Camvert project which will take away almost all of their land.

The Chief of Essmendingang Village, Dieudonné Ngane Nto'o, disclosed to the team of journalists that, during a meeting between the community and the representative of Camvert, they raised a number of worries, one of which was the fear of pollution. The Chief said his village, like the other villages around, does not have pipe-borne water, and that the population depends on streams for drinking water. He said they have the fear that if Camvert sets up the plantations, when the plantations are sprayed with insecticides, the streams will be polluted.

Buea Based NGO Comes With Experience



Tarkang, Founder/Executive Director of EGI

John Tarkang, the Founder and Executive Director of the Buea-based Environmental Governance Institute, EGI, which was one of the 40 civil society organisations that signed the August 14 declaration that was addressed to the Cameroon Government, went with the team of journalists for the field trip to the Ocean Division. In an interview granted The Post, Tarkang stated that EGI is interested in conservation and globally speaking, in sustainable development.

As to what interest the Buea-based NGO has in the Camvert project in the South Region, Tarkang, first of all stated that their NGO has quite

a bit of experience working around oil palm agro-industrial complexes in the Southwest Region, like; PAMOL, CDC and SOCAPALM in the Dibombari production basin in the Littoral Region.

"We think that we can bring that experience onboard to bargain a better deal for the communities in the zone where Camvert is proposing their project," Tarkang explained.

The Executive Director said the major concern of EGI with the Camvert project is, first of all, the scale of the forested land that the enterprise is requesting for the industrial complex, which is 60,000 hectares.

"And from what we have learnt in the course of this field trip, Camvert itself has no prior experience in this kind of activity. So, that raises a lot of questions."

Tarkang said the second reason why EGI is concerned with the Camvert project is that the project has been proposed, "in a really ecologically sensitive zone with the Campo Ma'an National Park which is a protected area under the Cameroon Law, on the side, and there is also a gorilla habitation programme which is right close to the park and the proposed project area."

Suspected Mafia

The EGI Executive Director said their other concern is about the local communities. He explained that they are concerned that in as much as 60,000 hectares of land is taken in the area, there will not be sufficient



Mayor of Nyete (hand raised) making a point at the meeting of September 12

hectares of forested land, owned by the State of Cameroon, to purportedly invest FCFA 150 billion to establish a palm oil production and processing agro industrial complex.

Camvert Sarl says that it will directly use 55,000 hectares, and allocate 5,000 hectares to small holders.

The 60,000 hectares of forested land that Camvert is lobbying to grab, is a concession in the Campo and Nyété Subdivisions in the Ocean Division, with a bulk of it located along the Kribi-Campo road, and bordered to the west by the Campo Ma'an National Park, with which it shares a boundary of approximately 50km.

The scandal emerged following Public Notice No. 0082/AP/MINFOF/DE/SDIAF/SC to degazette part of FMU 09-025 purportedly for agricultural production, that was signed by the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife, Jules Doret Ndong, and published on May 15, 2019. Considering the gravity of the highly controversial public notice, as many as 40 civil society organisations from different parts of the country, on August 14 in Yaounde signed a declaration, and addressed it to the Government, expressing deep concern for the serious consequences of the ministerial decision.

Field Trip

A group of journalists from a number of major media organs in the country, gathered in Kribi on July 11, 2019, for field trips to Nyété and Campo Subdivisions, to get the reactions of the people of the two Subdivisions, to the demand by Camvert Sarl.

On September 12, the group of journalists travelled to Nyété Subdivision where a meeting

Camvert Sarl, Abdou Fata, painted a rosy picture of the project and what he claimed the local population of Nyété and Campo Subdivisions will benefit. He claimed that Camvert is owned by a 42-year-old Cameroonian whose name he would not mention, and alleged that the enterprise will invest FCFA 150 billion in the project.

In a presentation that followed, a Consultant of the Camvert project, Georgis Chekoe, who was hired to study the environmental impact of the project, stated, among other things, that the felling of trees to replace the 60,000 hectares of forested land with oil palm plantations, will lead to the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and, thus, pollution of the atmosphere. He also talked of the risk of erosion that the area could suffer following the cutting of trees.

Violation Of international Conventions

The Chief of Adjap, Charles Edande, a retired International Consultant, attracted much attention at the meeting. The Chief made reference to the several international conventions on the protection of the environment to which Cameroon is a signatory, like the Paris Accord on Climate Change. He asserted that the Camvert project, which will destroy as much as 60,000 hectares of forest, will be a violation of the international conventions.

Also quoting the Consultant of the project, who admitted that there are negative environmental impacts that can last as long as 200 years, Chief Edande asked whether what the communities in Ocean Division will gain with the coming of the Camvert project, will be more than the negative effects that