

China-Africa forest governance project

Analysis of Chinese investments in non-forest environment affecting the forest land-use in Cameroon

STUDY RAPPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Acronyms	iii
Executive Summary	iv
1. Introduction	7
1.1. General Information on Sino-African Investments	7
1.2. Overview of the Socially Responsible Investing Theory	7
2. Objectives and methods of the study	8
2.1. Objectives and results of the study	9
2.2. Methods and Approaches of the Study	9
2.3. Characteristics of study sites	10
3. Overview of the overall context of China-Cameroon investment	12
4. Technical Operations arising from China-Cameroon Investment	14
4.1. Technical Operations and Ecological Impacts	14
4.2. Technical Operations and Impacts on Natural and Human Habitats	17
5. Assessment of social impacts of Chinese investments	19
5.1. Photography of socio-economic impacts of Chinese investments	19
5.2. Photography of negative socio-economic impacts of investments	22
5.3. Analysis of positive and negative socio-economic impacts of investments	25
6. Analysis of the compliance of practices with existing legal frameworks	27
6.1. Practices of Chinese Investments and Legal and Regulatory Frameworks	27
6.2. Monitoring of Chinese investment practices by Administrations	29
6.3. Chinese Investment Practices and MOFCOM Environmental Guidelines	30
7. Conclusion	32
References	34

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ACRONYMS

CED	: Centre for Environment and Development
CHEC	: China Harbour Engineering Corporation
EIA	: Environmental Impact Assessment
FOCAC	: Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GMG	: Golden Millennium Group
HEVECAM:	Hévéa du Cameroun SA
FDI	: Foreign Direct Investment
INS	: National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon
LAGA	: Last Great Ape Organization
MINFOF	: Ministry of Forests and Wildlife of Cameroon
MINEPAT:	Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development of Cameroon
MOFCOM:	Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China
NGO	: Non-governmental organization
ESMP	: Environmental and Social Management Plan
NTFP	: Non-Timber Forest Product
PM	: Prime Minister

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Chinese presence on the African continent in general and in Central Africa in particular is not something new. However, it has grown phenomenally over the past twenty years. Indeed, trade with China has increased twelve-fold in fifteen years. After becoming Africa's largest trading partner in 2009, China won the title of the biggest donor and pledged, during the 6th China-Africa Summit held from 4 to 6 December 2015 in Johannesburg (South Africa), to raise the amount of loans to the continent to 60 billion US dollars in the 2016-2018 period. As for trade between Africa and China, it reached nearly 200 billion US dollars in 2012.

This dynamics of China-Africa investment occurred just as traditional partners in the North were going through a rather delicate period of their sluggish economies. However, such developments represent both economic opportunities, as well as social and environmental challenges. This last socio-environmental concern is of interest to the Centre for Environment and Development (CED) and its partners in order to better work out the political economy that underpins Chinese investments in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular. This will be done in the light of universally agreed requirements for the protection of the rights of indigenous and local communities and natural ecosystems. In this regard, Chinese fund projects, which are at the heart of this study, are carried out in infrastructure construction, agro-industry, and artisanal mining sectors and incidentally trade in wildlife.

The overall objective of this study is to improve the governance of Chinese investments in areas related to land management through the improvement of rules and practices of economic operators. From this perspective, four different sectors have been the focus of this research: agro-industry, artisanal (semi-mechanized) mining, infrastructure and trade in wildlife.

Specifically, the secondary objectives sought include:

- Providing and producing a comprehensive description of the overall context of Chinese investments in land-related sectors in the Republic of Cameroon (agro-industry, mining and infrastructure);
- Describing the technical operations arising from investments in a mine, agribusiness and infrastructure run by a Chinese company and/or with Chinese capital, with an emphasis laid on their socio-environmental impacts;
- Assessing social aspects of the three main types of investments, including internal capacity to improve practices;
- Analyzing legal compliance of practices with regard to the general framework of cooperation and legislation in force in Cameroon and China.

First of all, the information analyzed in this report was gathered from the review of the literature on Chinese investments in Africa in general, and Cameroon, in particular. Then, some official documents linking both parties (China and Cameroon) were consulted in order to retrieve formal and substantive elements that appeared to be relevant. Secondly, individual interviews were conducted with about twenty (20) local representatives of the Ministries of Territorial

Administration, Forests and Wildlife, Environment, Agriculture and Mines focusing on the genesis of Chinese investments, the macroeconomic, socio-economic and ecological dimensions of the projects and their governance, including regular monitoring and evaluation by the technical administrations in charge of the files. Individual interviews were conducted with resource persons from local, national and international NGOs (the latter were requested for the trade in wildlife), giving a total of eight experts. Thirdly, eight internal experts of projects were added to this group. Finally, the study resorted to the Focus-discussions exercise which involved six to ten people and was performed in the twenty (20) villages visited during the field trips in February and March 2017.

This study highlights the following reality:

The Chinese investments in Cameroon at the heart of this study (namely the development of rubber tree plantation by two subsidiaries of the SINOCHAM Group, the construction of the Kribi Port and Lolabe-Bipaka Highway, the semi-mechanized artisanal mining and trade in wildlife), do not appear socially responsible at this stage, despite the macroeconomic and social effects expected by the Cameroonian authorities. Indeed, sampled investments are causing negative damage to forest ecosystems and wildlife resources. These impacts contribute to deforestation, soil poverty and the accelerated loss of wildlife biodiversity. In social terms, the ratio between socio-economic achievements and induced negative impacts reveals a negative balance to the detriment of local and indigenous communities, and especially their livelihoods and habitats. In this regard, many active and frozen conflicts are emerging between local actors living near the sites and Chinese economic operators, due in part to the non-compliance with commitments made by the latter to the first ones.

However, this adverse path of Chinese investments in Cameroon, far from being inevitable, might be readjusted beyond the public standards in force in Cameroon and CSR requirements. In this respect, concrete areas for improvement could be based on the following recommendations:

- Managing local actors conflict and complaints: Chinese economic operators could be inspired by two management models, which is built around the principles of accessibility, equity, transparency, compatibility with rights and people's participation;
- A mechanism for the joint management of local actors' conflicts and complaints should be institutionalized. It would be structured around setting up multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms, which bring together, on a regular basis (bi-monthly or quarterly), representatives of riverside communities, companies and local and traditional administrative authorities. However, this type of body has some disadvantages, including the fact that it cuts itself off from the social base which suffers from negative impacts and thus becomes a kind of illegitimate elite circle;
- An internal management system of local actors' conflicts and complaints could be put in place in each company within the team responsible for ESMP implementation. In this respect, this unit will be responsible for collecting local actors' oral and written grievances, studying them and providing positive or negative responses adapted to each case. This model could be more operational than the first one. However, it could be an incorrect filter of social realities, thus cutting the managerial hierarchy of the company from the social base;

- Complying with socio-environmental commitments: the mechanism to monitor compliance with social and environmental commitments chosen by investors should be built around two types of models:
 - An external multi-stakeholder model, which brings together representatives from technical administrations, companies' representatives and people designated by local communities. This monitoring team should meet on a semi-annual basis and conduct field visits, instead of relying only on minutes and reports. The findings and decisions delivered by this body must necessarily take effect;
 - A company internal model, associated to the ESMP implementation team, should be systematized among Chinese investors (in particular) and other economic operators (in general);
- Developing and implementing internal policies consistent with CSR principles: Chinese economic operators should develop internal policies that are consistent with CSR universal principles. This could, ultimately, limit destructive practices of socio-ecological achievements in rural areas;
- The Ministries of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), Environment and Nature Protection and Chinese consular authorities accredited to Cameroon (with NGOs support) should organize awareness-raising and education campaigns on the protection of wildlife species in each Chinese investments site in order to minimize the involvement of their nationals in this illegal trade. This action should be combined with the proper application of legal and regulatory provisions on penalties;
- In view of the relatively and endemically weak Rule of Law in Cameroon, both policies and Public Administrations' personnel should be challenged to ensure the proper application of principles, rules and legal standards in order to guarantee security, peace and social justice to Cameroonian citizens and foreign investors.

1. Introduction

1.1. General Information on Sino-African Investments

If the Chinese presence on the African continent in general and in Central Africa in particular is not something new, it has however grown phenomenally over the past twenty years. Indeed, trade with China has increased twelve-fold in fifteen years. After becoming Africa's largest trading partner in 2009 (Ernst & Young, 2012), China won the title of the biggest donor and pledged, during the 6th China-Africa Summit held from 4 to 6 December 2015 in Johannesburg (South Africa), to raise the amount of loans to the continent to 60 billion US dollars in the 2016-2018 period (FOCAC, 2015). As for trade between Africa and China, it reached nearly 200 billion US dollars in 2012 (UNCTAD, 2012).

This dynamics of China-Africa investment occurred just as traditional partners from the North were going through a rather delicate period of their sluggish economies (Maury & Le Belzic, 2013). However, such developments represent both economic opportunities, as well as social and environmental challenges (Leung & Zhao, 2013). This last socio-environmental concern is of interest to the Centre for Environment and Development (CED) and its partners in order to better work out the political economy that underpins Chinese investments in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular. This will be done in the light of universally agreed requirements for the protection of the rights of local and indigenous communities and natural ecosystems. In this regard, Chinese fund projects, which are at the heart of this study, are carried out in infrastructure construction, agro-industry, artisanal mining sectors and incidentally wildlife trade on the boundaries of Chinese investment sites.

It should be underscored that this work is the follow-up of many previous and current studies that question the socio-economic and ecological impacts of Chinese investments in Africa (Brautigam, 2009, 2012, Kaplinsky, 2009, Kaplinsky & Morris, 2009, Cheru & Obi, 2010, Gabas, 2011, Putzel *et al.*, 2011, Moyo, 2012, Tan-Mullins & Mohan, 2012, Wertz-Kanounnikoff *et al.*, 2013). Within certain limits, some observers have already questioned the dynamics of Chinese investments in Cameroon and their current or potential impacts (Jansson, 2009, Cerutti *et al.*, 2011, Tsounkeu & Halleson, 2014, Assembe-Mvondo *et al.*, 2015a; Assembe-Mvondo *et al.*, 2015b). However, despite this intellectual profusion, the main contribution of this work is the fact that it documents the practices governing Chinese investments in Cameroon and their socio-environmental impacts in a crosssectoral manner, but also outlines a mitigation model of negative impacts within local communities and indigenous peoples.

1.2. Overview of the Socially Responsible Investing Theory

From a theoretical point of view, this study draws on the Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) paradigm. It is known that SRI is a selection and management approach of financial investments that takes environmental, social and good governance concerns into account (Porter & van der Linde, 1995; Mercer, 2009). SRI arose in the USA in the 1920s by religious movements which

refused to invest in non-ethical values without considering the financial performance of rejected values (de Brito *et al.*, 2005; Labelle & Koyo, 2012). Since then, SRI moved in a more secular and activist direction by targeting, in the mid-'70s, sociopolitical causes such as Apartheid, the Vietnam War, Human Rights, the Fight against Nuclear Power (Lydenberg *et al.*, 1984).

At the same time, a new approach emerged, since the 1990s, which considered the fact that social, environmental and good governance practices could have an impact on companies' performance and their market value (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). SRI advocates readily acknowledged that applying environmental, social and good governance criteria would certainly reduce investment opportunities, but their integration into investment processes provides benefits which more than offset the loss or reduction in the profitability of the portfolio resulting from the limitation of investment opportunities. In this regard, socially responsible investors believe that integrating environmental, social and governance factors into the investment process will eliminate companies whose expected performance is lower than that of their competitors. Companies which adopt Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) will show better financial results than their competitors (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Logsdon & Wood 2002).

The SRI theory would therefore like to be an answer to an argument put forward by some authors on the disproportionate power of companies and their managers in modern societies (Berle & Beans, 1932). Thus, by virtue of their power, companies have moral obligations towards the global society, thereby leading to their social and environmental responsibility (Frederick, 1994). The transposition of this theory to trade between China and Cameroon raises the question as to whether the investments of Chinese capital groups in rubber industry, port infrastructures and mines are socially responsible.

It is worth noting that previous work on this subject in Cameroon has already highlighted trends in dull investment practices with Chinese capital (Tsounkeu & Halleson, 2014, Assembe-Mvondo *et al.*, 2015a, Assembe-Mvondo *et al.*, 2015b). In this respect, social aspects external to companies (relations with local actors) and environmental concerns appeared to be weak links in the chain of investment achievements in Cameroon. Therefore, this study draws on these preliminary findings. However, its real added value is the fact that it uses an intersectoral comparative method to bring out a global and real picture likely to build opinions.

2. Objectives and methods of the study

2.1. Objectives and results of the study

The overall objective of this study is to improve the governance of Chinese investments in areas related to land management through the improvement of rules and practices of economic operators. From this perspective, four different sectors have been the focus of this research: agro-industry, artisanal (semi-mechanized) mining, infrastructure and trade in wildlife.

Specifically, the secondary objectives sought include:

- Providing and producing a comprehensive description of the overall context of Chinese investments in land-related sectors in the Republic of Cameroon (agro-industry, mining and infrastructure);
- Describing the technical operations arising from investments in a mine, agribusiness and infrastructure run by a Chinese company and/or with Chinese capital, with an emphasis laid on their socio-environmental impacts;
- Assessing social aspects of the three main types of investments, including internal capacity to improve practices;
- Analyzing legal compliance of practices with regard to the general framework of cooperation and legislation in force in Cameroon and China.

The key findings of this study will be compiled and analyzed by way of a research report and published in the form of a Working Paper.

2.2. Methods and approaches of the study

First of all, the information analyzed in this report was gathered from the review of the literature on Chinese investments in Africa in general, and Cameroon, in particular. Then, some official documents linking both parties (China and Cameroon) were consulted in order to retrieve formal and substantive elements that appeared to be relevant.

Secondly, individual interviews were conducted with about twenty (20) local representatives of the Ministries of Territorial Administration, Forests and Wildlife, Environment, Agriculture and Mines focusing on the genesis of Chinese investments, the macroeconomic, socio-economic and ecological dimensions of the projects and their governance, including regular monitoring and evaluation by the technical administrations in charge of the files. Individual interviews were conducted with resource persons from local, national and international NGOs (the latter were requested for the trade in wildlife), giving a total of eight experts. In this respect, recorded statistics on wildlife crime, which directly or indirectly involve Chinese nationals, have been collected from local administrations and notebooks held by civil society leaders and actors on the ground. The information published in the national supplemented this exercise.

Thirdly, eight internal experts of projects were added to this group. Indeed, the interviews with anonymous officials of Chinese-owned companies enabled to highlight internal (relationships with employees who are not the focus of this study) and external (relationships with local riparian communities) socio-environmental practices and, consequently, the collaboration with some local elites in investments in this sample. Moreover, the study resorted to the Focus-discussions exercise which involved six to ten people and was performed in the twenty (20) villages visited during the field trips in February and March 2017. The main parameter of interviews within local communities was to identify actual and/or expected socio-economic impacts from the projects concerned. Besides, this aimed at collecting the perceptions of local actors on the changes brought about in forest canopies (forest cover) and agricultural lands by Chinese capital inflow. Finally, research teams

were able to make participant observation by cross-checking collected information and/or visiting socio-economic achievements in some sites in a bid to verify the accuracy of some statements.



Photo 1: Interview with a neighbouring resident of EBANG village (CED copyright)

2.3. Characteristics of study sites

The data required for this study were collected in the following Chinese investment sites:

The first site is located on the edge of the seaside town of Kribi and its surroundings. In this site, the visited villages (Bissiang, Bidou 1, Elogbatindi, Mbede, Dehane and Donenda) are riparian, in particular, of the extension of rubber plantations owned by a Cameroonian subsidiary (GMG-HEVECAM) of the SINOCHEN Group. Two other villages were investigated by the research team on socio-economic impacts inherent in infrastructure: Lobale (Kribi deep-water port) and Lendi (construction of the highway linking the port). From a human point of view, GMG-HEVECAM rubber extension zone is heterogeneous. Indeed, there are human groups from Fang, Bakoko, Ewondo, Batanga, Ngoumba and Mabi ethnic backgrounds, which are part of the large Bantu Group. The minority of indigenous peoples of the Bagyeli ethnic group is also present. As regards socio-economic aspects, the population of the area mostly relies on subsistence (plantain, cassava, yam, maize) and cash crop (small palm groves and cocoa trees) farming. These agricultural activities are combined with the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs, especially *Irvingia Gabonensis*), artisanal (small-scale) fishing and game hunting. The vegetation of the area is included in the Atlantic *Biafran forest with Caesalpinaceae* (Letouzey, 1985). This ecosystem is rich in *Saccoglottis Gabonensis*. It is a plain that does not rise beyond 100 m, a primary forest with secondary forest galleries. The fauna is mainly made up of small mammals, birds and reptiles.

The second site is located in Meyomessala Subdivision, Dja and Lobo Division. The main concern here is related to impacts induced within the communities by the development and establishment of a new rubber plantation by the second and new subsidiary of the SINOCHEM Group (SUD Cameroun HÉVÉA). In this respect, the following villages were visited: Nlobesse, Djikom, Akom-Ndong, Bytié, Edjom and Ebang-Samarie. Bulu (Bantu) ethnic group is dominant in the site, with ethnic minorities such as Kako (Edjom village) from the East region and Baka indigenous peoples. As regards socio-economic aspects, the populations of the area earn most of their income from cash crop (cocoa) and subsistence (cassava, plantain, cocoyam, pistachio, maize, etc.) farming. The additional income of households comes from the collection of non-timber forest products (especially *Iringia gabonensis*, *Garcinia lucida*, *Ricinodendron heudelotti*) and wildlife hunting products. In terms of flora, the vegetation of the area is an integral part of the dense humid semi-deciduous Guineo-Congolian forest (Sud-Cameroun Hévéa, 2011) with six (06) plant formations: dense moist evergreen forests; dense adult secondary forests with high-density; cultivated secondary forests; young secondary forests; young cultivated secondary forests and swamp forests. Some woody species such as *Lophira elata* and *Pycnanthus angolensis* are predominant. Besides, the site is home to a varied and dense fauna. There are small and large mammals, reptiles and birds, including some protected species (chimpanzee, elephants, gorillas, panthers, buffalo, giant pangolin, etc.).

The third site is situated in the East region of Cameroon and includes Betare Oya (Mbal, Lai 2 Beribedomo villages), Ngoura (Colomine, Bohanto, Tikondi villages) and Batouri towns. The research team's concerns here were related to socio-economic impacts induced by Chinese-owned semi-mechanized artisanal mining on local communities. Wildlife data collection sites are spread over several urban areas or their outskirts in the southern part of Cameroon. These are generally Chinese investments areas where trade in wildlife is an incidental activity. In this context, Lom Pangar, Betaré-Oya and Bertoua localities, in the East region, were visited. Information from Ambam, Ma'an, Nyabizan, Campo, Kribi and Douala corridors was added to this group. From a human point of view, the mining area being considered here is heterogeneous. In fact, the following ethnic groups are dominant: Baya, Kako and Bororo nomadic-breeders. The populations of the area are mainly small farmers (cassava, plantain bananas, yams, groundnuts, pistachios, and on an accessory basis, small coffee farms).

However, additional revenues come from the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and hunting. A small part of local communities are involved in the informal exploitation of gold and other mines. As regards nomadic Bororo, most of their earnings come from cattle breeding, goat rearing and small businesses. The vegetation can be roughly broken down into the rainforest and a forest-savanna mosaic (Tchindjang *et al.*, 2015). Within these two major groups, there are various facies of vegetation: semi-deciduous forests with *Cesalpiniaceae*, secondary forests, gallery forests and swamp forests, grassy, tree-covered and wooded savannahs (Letouzey, 1985). In terms of wildlife, the riparian area of Deng Deng National Park is inhabited by primates (Chimpanzees and gorillas), black colobus, bush pigs, giant forest hog, water chevrotain (aquatic deer), sitatunga, buffalo, etc.

According to INS (2015), the spatial analysis of general poverty in Cameroon reveals the following regional specificities: 34.1% of the populations in the South region (corresponding to rubber cultivation areas and the deep water port of Kribi) lived below the poverty line in 2014, against 30% of the populations in the East Region in the same period. It can be seen that, compared to the 2000-2007 poverty rates, which were 31.5% to 29% and 48% to 56% respectively (INS, 2010), the East region has experienced a slight improvement in the living conditions of its inhabitants, while the South region shows very small changes or even tramples. This difference between the two regions could be partially explained by the diversification of activities, artisanal and semi-mechanized mining operations.

3. Overview of the overall context of China-Cameroon investments

Chinese investments in Cameroon prosaically fall into four distinct and overlapping frameworks. First of all, they are part of the global flows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to African countries. In this respect, it seems that FDI flows in sub-Saharan Africa have declined significantly between 2015 and 2016 (UNCTAD, 2016). However, this downward trend did not prevent China from making available 60 billion USD during the 6th FOCAC Conference for the 2016 to 2018 period. Then, Chinese capital flows to Cameroon are incorporated in the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, also known as "FOCAC". Indeed, the first ministerial conference of FOCAC, held in Pekin from 10 to 12 October 2000, led to the emergence of a new dynamic framework of cooperation between the African countries and China, focusing on four main strands: (i) China's African Policy; (ii) "symmetric" political exchanges between African countries and China; (iii) conquering and ambitious economic and commercial cooperation; and (iv) cultural and social exchanges. To date, six (6) FOCAC Conferences have already taken place. The last FOCAC conference, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 4-5 December 2015, enabled China to make available to the African continent a total of 60 billion USD for the 2016 to 2018 period, to finance new projects (FOCAC, 2015).

Furthermore, Chinese investments in Cameroon are part of the strategic framework of Pekin's "*Go Abroad*", which consists in promoting conquering trade and investment in many countries around the world, in general and Africa in particular. This is probably the strategy that enabled China to foreclose its Western competitors in the African continent. In this regard, it should be emphasized that the Ministry of Commerce of People's Republic of China (MOFCOM) grants prior authorizations for official and formal investments abroad, especially in the mining, agriculture and logging sectors (Wenbin & Wilkes, 2013). This strategy sets China apart and helps the state macro-structure to keep a watchful eye on capital from its territory.

Finally, formalized in 1971, Sino-Cameroon relations economically developed gradually (Tsounkeu & Halleon, 2014). Indeed, previously restricted to infrastructure construction (such as Yaoundé Conference Center and Lagdo Hydroelectric Power Plant) and medical assistance to public hospitals in the early 1980s, China has now become, the main economic partner of Cameroon, with the diversification of spheres of intervention. In this regard, Chinese investments in Cameroon were

estimated at 2.86 billion USD in 2015 and 2.43 billion USD in 2016 by Cameroonian authorities¹. At the strictly domestic level, financial flows from China to Cameroon appear to be a breeding ground to capture some of the funding necessary to achieve the country's macroeconomic vision, also known as the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP).

This macroeconomic vision known as 'Vision 2035' is structured around the following strategic pillars (MINEPAT, 2009): (i) increasing investments in infrastructure and rapidly modernizing the production system through improved business climate and governance; (ii) maintaining high levels of growth in order to achieve Millennium Development Goals and ensure that the population is fully mobilized to tackle climate change impacts; (iii) improving international cooperation through greater openness of Cameroon to the outside world based on its production model and an exports structure mainly based on industries, and facilitating a better financial system that can mobilize internal and external funding in addition to promoting the private sector.

Although the investments, focus of this study, are integrated into the overall global FDI sphere and global conquest strategy of supply sources and external markets mentioned above, they show a prominent feature of accelerating conversion of forest land either into mono-cropping rubber plantation or deforested and/or heavily degraded land for mining and infrastructure, with an almost inevitable disappearance of the rich biodiversity recognized in the humid forests of Cameroon (Karsenty, 2010; Nguiffo & Sonkoué Watio, 2015). Illegal trade in wildlife resources, which results from the Chinese presence at various sites, appears to be an aggravating factor in environmental damage caused.

4. Technical Operations arising from China-Cameroon Investments

4.1. Technical Operations and Ecological Impacts

Technical operations related to the development of rubber tree plantations in the two sites, studied in this work, are built around three components: (i) agricultural component which consists in latex production; (ii) industrial component which consists in constructing plant for the specific case of Sud-Cameroun HEVEA; (iii) and a component related to infrastructure development. In concrete terms, 30,000 ha should be set up and maintain in the case of Sud-Cameroun HEVEA²; and 18,500 ha of planted rubber trees in the case of GMG-HEVECAM extension. This phase requires preparatory groundwork through the following activities (Sud-Cameroun HEVEA, 2011): systematic felling and root cutting of all trees in the sites; pruning and cutting of trees; tightening; elimination of forest discharges; *planting* line opening; establishment of the cover crop. In concrete terms, these impacts are visible in Sud-Cameroun HEVEA site and the forest massif near Nlobesse and Djikom villages, where nearly 10,000 ha of forest and agroforestry land have already been converted into

¹ These statistics were provided by the Director General of Cooperation and Regional Integration in the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development of Cameroon, during the interview granted to the Chinese Agency Xinhua, on 15 January 2017.

² The Minister of Forestry and Wildlife was questioned by the Senate about the activities of this company, which might be prejudicial to the Dja Biosphere Reserve (listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site). In response, he denied Greenpeace's allegations of the threats (see *Mutations* daily newspaper, No. 4410).

mono-cropping rubber plantations, housing and roads, with a virtual disappearance of the natural vegetation cover, and consequently of the wildlife biodiversity. It is the same situation in GMG-HEVECAM subsidiary site, in Bissiang village, not far from the town of Kribi.



The second phase requires using crops for the production of latex and other by-products; constructing and maintaining roads and bridges within sites; building offices, houses for staff and social infrastructure (clinics, schools, playgrounds, churches, etc.); constructing workshops and warehouses to maintain equipment. Rubber cultivation also involves massive use of phosphate, nitrogen and potash fertilizers. This may exacerbate the environmental damage caused by rubber production through the use of toxic chemicals for water, soil and plants.



Photo: Base camp/road network (left) and offices (right) built in place of the dense forest (copyright CED)

As for semi-mechanized mining operations, they use rudimentary mechanized methods to extract minerals (Tchindjang *et al.*, 2015). These mines represent a broader intermediate category than artisanal ones, but they are less important in terms of volume and production than industrial mines. Concretely, semi-mechanized mines are mainly operated by foreign companies (like Chinese, Korean, etc.), which rent a series of artisanal operating permits to groups of Cameroonian artisanal

operators. This practice is illegal, since the mining code gives exclusive rights for artisanal operation to Cameroonians. Concretely, there are deforestation and degradation induced by two factors which constitute lost areas, either through digging or accumulation of wastes or residues resulting from the washing of sludge that contains ore in the villages visited (Tchindjang *et al.*, 2015). This deforestation is attributable to a semi-mechanized mine. This gives rise to a new landscape, made up of gallery forests, clearings, bare soils and abandoned mines.



(copyright CED)

Phase 1 of the construction of the Kribi deep-water port required (Global Water Partnership, 2010) earthworks on the area intended to house port infrastructure itself, but also at the edge for road construction (including the 36 km long Lolabe-Bipaka highway), railway (not yet built), industrial and warehousing facilities, telecommunications and energy. That is a total area of 26,000 ha.



(copyright CED)

Trade in wildlife resources which follows the track of Chinese projects involves illegal collection of fully and/or partially protected species in areas adjacent to investment sites, including protected areas. This trafficking mainly takes the form of arrests of persons and/or vehicles carrying raw and carved pieces of ivory, cargoes of pangolin scales, panther skins and live/dead primates or parts. Table 1 below illustrates the extent and recurrence of the phenomenon in some localities of the sample. Another permanent feature is the removal from the national territory of wildlife species and illegally caught trophies. In this respect, the port of Douala and the international airports of Douala and Yaoundé are the main exit routes taken by operators in the chain of this trafficking.

Table 1: Some seizures made by LAGA and MINFOF with direct involvement of Chinese nationals

Information sources	Number of seized transactions (2006-2017)	Nature of transactions	Nature of seized specimens	Places
LAGA (NGO)	11 seizures	Sale, export, purchase/sale, negotiation, storage	Ivory tusks, pangolin scales, elephant and chimpanzee meat	Douala Port and airport; Yaoundé Airport; Edea; Cameroon-Congo border; Limbe
Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife	5 seizures	-	Ivory tusks, buffalo, sea turtle, pangolin scales	Douala; Lolabe/deep water port; Nyabizan/dam construction

4.2. Technical Operations and Impacts on Natural and Human Habitats

According to Geist & Lambin (2002), the expansion of agriculture, infrastructure and mining is among the direct drivers of deforestation. In this regard, permanent cash crop farming, such as rubber cultivation, has been cited as the largest destroyer of primary forest massifs, first of all, in the Amazon and then in Southeast Asia (Tsayem Demaze, 2008, Rudel *et al.*, 2009). Since the financial and food crisis from 2007 to 2008, acquisitions of large-scale arable land in the South have increased (Cotula *et al.*, 2009, Karsenty, 2010, Karsenty & Ongolo, 2012). Cameroon is no exception, as evidenced by the two land concessions granted to Chinese investors for the extension and development of new rubber plantations to the detriment of the wildlife natural and human habitats of the areas concerned.

These findings confirm observations made in several works. Indeed, the relatively low deforestation rate in the Congo Basin countries, such as Cameroon, seems to be accelerating inevitably under the influence of macroeconomic policies called "policies of emergence" (Megevand *et al.*, 2013, Assembe-Mvondo *et al.*, 2015a, Gilet *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, these macroeconomic visions rely mainly on the promotion of primary sectors which is based on natural resources exploitation: agricultural land, mining and energy development, and construction of large infrastructures³. This political will of Cameroonian authorities is in line with China's strategy of conquering opportunities for its manufactured products and its thirst for natural resources to feed the big production machine around the world (Alden *et al.*, 2008, Moyo, 2012). By increasing its presence in Africa, China has expanded its ecological footprint (Bosshard, 2011). Its appetite for raw materials triggers its interest in various deposits to the detriment of fragile environmental ecosystems in the heart of countries with weak governance, like Cameroon.

In a prosaic manner, the first consequence observed in all the sites of the study is undoubtedly the loss of plant and wildlife biodiversity. Thus, many species used as NTFPs and in the pharmacopoeia of local communities and indigenous peoples are already becoming scarce in the areas concerned. This may partly explain the decreasing demand for traditional medicine in favour of modern medicine, despite limited financial income in rural areas.

The second consequence is the loss of soil fertility. The humid tropical climate is characterized by heavy rainfall. Deforestation in this environment leads to soils leaching. This causes a drop in their fertility and a difficult reconstitution of humus, which remains very thin. Under such conditions, soils become unsuitable to support thick and dense vegetation. This situation does not enable tree regeneration and makes the soils infertile for agricultural activities of local communities. Despite the relatively small percentage of land used for artisanal mining, conflicts may break out at the local level if local communities consider that mining activities are grabbing fertile land traditionally allocated to agriculture and livestock. The current situation in some areas visited within the framework of this study is similar to this hypothesis.

³ As stated above, the Director General of Cooperation and Regional Integration at MINEPAT says that the Government's strategy is to mobilize part of the funding from China to carry out its macroeconomic program called "Emergence by 2035".

Thirdly, a decline in the production of some cash crops and food crops is expected to occur in the medium and long term. Indeed, wet tropical forests are ecosystems conducive to some speculations such as cocoa farming, palm oil, plantain banana, etc. Cocoa tree, for example (cultivated in the rubber farming area), is suitable only for this type of forest ecosystem. Therefore, the inevitable disappearance of primary and secondary forests in these sites will be a real tragedy for all local communities which depend on this type of agricultural speculation and related income.

Finally, deforestation induced by Chinese investments destroys human habitats of Bagyeli and Baka indigenous peoples in rubber development sites and local communities affected by the construction of the Kribi deep-water port. Indeed, places of worship and other cultural activities of Pygmy populations of the two forest massifs where rubber plantations are developed have been destroyed without any regard for specific social safeguards. The same destructive tendency was observed in Lolabe village, where Batanga local communities are displaced from the site hosting the present village to another site without any special precaution for the displacement of tombs.

5. Assessment of social impacts of Chinese investments

5.1. Photography of socio-economic impacts of Chinese investments

Many socio-economic benefits have been promised to local communities and indigenous peoples settled at the edge of Chinese investment sites both by Cameroonian authorities and entrepreneurs. In the case of rubber production, environmental impact assessment reports provided for a range of social measures to mitigate negative effects on local stakeholders. In addition, managers of the two subsidiaries committed verbally or in writing (common agreement) to build socio-collective works necessary for the development of riparian communities. This type of commitment by entrepreneurs to local communities has also been made in the case of the construction of the deep sea port facility in Kribi and, to a lesser extent, by semi-mechanized artisanal mining operators in the East Region.

Case of rubber plantations

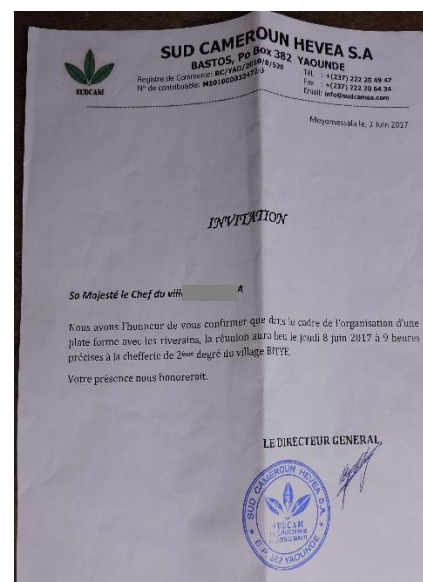
If at the macroeconomic level, the expansion of rubber production will enable Cameroon to triple its current output in the long term from 60,000 t to nearly 180,000 t, expected socio-economic spin-offs include the creation of more than 6,000 (SUD-CAMEROUN HEVEA) and 2,500 (GMG-HEVECAM) direct employments. As outlined above, GMG-HEVECAM subsidiary is extending its plantations in a land concession of more than 18,000 ha spread among six (6) villages. For the time being, only two of the six villages are affected by the current extension works: Bissiang on Kribi-Bipindi road and Mbede on Kribi- Edea road. The company therefore started its socio-economic achievements in these two villages. The other localities are awaiting the beginning of works in their areas. As for the second subsidiary, SUD-Cameroun HEVEA, although it started its work in forest areas of Nlobesse and Djikom villages, it is apparent that the company has made some modest socio-economic achievements in other villages: Akom-Ndong, Bitye, Edjom and Ebang-Samaria.

Table 2: Summary of direct socio-economic achievements in villages bordering rubber plantations

Compagnies	Localities	Types of socio-economic achievements
GMG- HEVECAM	- Bissiang - Mbede	➤ Partial electrification, construction of the Catholic church, drinking water point, Traditional ruler's house (uncompleted), market shed, compensation; ➤ No socio-economic achievement in this village.
SUD- CAMEROUN HEVEA	- Nlobesse - Djikom - Akom Ndong - Bitye - Edjom - Ebang Samarie	➤ Training of 105 youths, 300 rubber shoots offered to the traditional ruler; ➤ 6 employments for young people in the village, drinking water point; ➤ 2 employments for girls in the village; ➤ Training of 10 young people, employments, donation of food and school supplies; ➤ Donation of tables benches to college and school supplies to primary school, 3 employments for nationals; ➤ Compensation of 10 people for their plantations, 1 employment for a youth in the village; No achievement



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Case of the construction of the Kribi deep-water Port and highway

Two villages were involved in this study: first of all, the Lolabe village located on the Kribi-Campo road, where the container port was built. Then, the Londji village located on the Kribi-Akom 2 road, which is crossed by the Lolabe-Bipaka highway road (i.e. 36 km to relieve the congestion of the port). The completion of this major work is carried out without prior impact study, in violation of the current legislation in force. The two works are built by the Chinese-owned company CHEC. Table 3 below summarizes socio-economic achievements for the benefit of local communities.

Table 3: Summary of achievements made in the case of infrastructure

Company	Localities	Types of socio-economic achievements
CHEC	Lolabe	• Compensation for crops and land by the administration; the resettlement site is already equipped with two water points; a school is constructed in the resettlement site;
	Londji	• No compensation yet

Case of semi-mechanized artisanal mining

In Betare-Oya, Ngoura and Batouri councils, which host semi-mechanized artisanal gold mining sites, local communities receive unofficial payments from Chinese operators. This is in breach of legal and regulatory provisions. According to some local stakeholders, Chinese entrepreneurs negotiate "peaceful coexistence" at prices ranging from 1,000,000 – 4,000,000 CFAF/ha. A very small part of the seasonal workforce is locally recruited.

Semi-mechanized mining is about to upset the socio-economic and cultural balance of some local communities. In this regard, it contributes to the scarcity of fertile agricultural land and thus to food insecurity at the local level. This is reflected by changes in rural activities and/or abandonment of agricultural production and livestock by part of the youth segment in the local communities visited. These young people prefer to be hired and work as labourers in mining sites. This finding confirms the analysis of Adam Smith International (2016).

Cases of Wildlife Trade

Surveys conducted indicate that local stakeholders are involved in species trafficking chain, as collectors/hunters or accompanying persons. They earn additional revenue in this activity. Therefore, Chinese sponsors buy Pangolin scales at prices ranging from 350 – 500 CFAF/kg, while giant Pangolin scales range from 15,000 – 30,000 CFAF/kg. This illegal collection and capture of wildlife resources is booming around the adjacent sites which host Chinese investments. In this context, the arrest of Chinese nationals involved in this chain of illegality has become constant and unimportant information in Cameroon print media.

Increasing Asian demand for illegal wildlife products in general and the growing Chinese presence in Africa seem to be driving intensified poaching in Cameroon. This demand meets the needs of various consumers: those who believe in medicinal virtues of some parts of animal carcasses, tourists who carry trophies and those with culinary appetites.

5.2. Photography of Negative Socio-economic Impacts

Sino-Cameroonian investments which are at the center of this analysis are already resulting to or in negative impacts on the social structures of the concerned localities. They include but not limited to, open and/or underground conflicts between local stakeholders and contractors due to unfulfilled commitments. This is the case with the host villages of rubber production development sites where the two companies are delaying in or are not willing to build the socio-collective infrastructures promised to the local communities. A second type of violent conflict also already exists between the different social classes of the same locality. A perfect illustration of such a conflict is the case of Bissiang village where a political elite and member of Parliament (Senator) and native of the village denies access to facilities (only four households close to the parliamentarian have access to electricity in a village of over 750 inhabitants; a similar restriction is imposed on access to water points, etc.) put in place to some other families. This incredible situation between natives of the same village resulted in violent confrontations between the two divided segments of a same village, followed by temporary arrests and loss of liberty for dozens of people in the camp opposed to that of the political elite, especially the village traditional chief and his notables.⁴ The dispute between both parties is hence being examined by the Kribi Court, officially for alleged attempts to physically kill the parliamentarian through witchcraft acts/practices.

In the case of SUD-Cameroun HEVEA, the chiefs of the surrounding villages, having noticed a collusion between the company and their parliamentary representative (member of Parliament living in Yaoundé), decided during a general assembly to replace him with his counterpart from Nlobesse village so that he can better express their grievances to the managers of the company. A report published by the divisional Committee (Republic of Cameroon, 2017) for the follow up the implementation of environmental and social management plans reveals that the company (SUD-Cameroun HEVEA) is reputed for:

“ i) not taking into consideration the fears and grievances of the residents; ii) the non-existence of an action plan prescribing measures to be implemented in relation to the Dja reserve; iii) insufficient poaching alternatives in line with the activities of the resident population; iv) shortage in communication and relation between the company and the residents; v) the non-existence of a specific action plan in favour of minority groups in keeping with the ESMP; vi) approximate organization of support to the resident populations; vii) not involving residents in the implementation of the ESMP”.

⁴The arrests of the chief and his notables took place on the 18 October 2016, early in the morning, following a complaint by the native/Senator at Kribi gendarmerie.

Then, all Chinese investments have attracted and continue to create a major influx of non-natives into the projects host villages. This disrupts the traditional cohesion of families and is likely to bring about diseases, as well as social delinquency within the concerned villages. In the case of the establishment of rubber plantations and the construction of the Kribi deep sea port and its access highway, expropriation decrees for public utility were issued, ordering the occupation of ancestral land belonging to local populations. *De facto* and *de jure*, agricultural areas have been considerably reduced and occupied in these villages. This does not promise better days in terms of agricultural production, related revenue and the wellbeing of the local stakeholders. Finally, cultural and worship heritages of local communities and natives have been violated either through the destruction of large forests blocks or their resettlement on new sites. This is the particular case of Lolabe village where new housing sites are situated more than six km away from their original location. Although divided into plots, the new site does not provide for any space for as burials and ritual ceremonies to honor ancestors and their gods of the sea. This deplorable situation is identical to that of the Bagyeli and Baka people in the concerned area.

Table 4: Summary of Negative Socio-economic Impacts

Types of Sino-Cameroonian Investments	Potential and/or Known Negative Socio-Economic Impacts	Localities
Rubber Cropping	• Open/latent conflicts between communities and contractors; • Open conflicts between social classes; • Influx of populations; • Outbreak of new diseases and delinquency; • Insufficient farming land; • Delay/refusal to pay compensations • Scarcity of NTFPs • Violation of cultural and religious heritages	Bissiang, Mbede, Bidou 1, Dehane, Elogbatindi, Petit Batanga, Nlobesse, Djikom, Akom-Ndong, Bytié, Edjom, Ebang-Samarie
Infrastructure: port and highway	• Open/latent conflicts between communities and contractors; • Influx of foreign populations; • Outbreak of new diseases and delinquency; • Limited farming land; • Scarcity of NTFPs • Violation of cultural and religious heritages	Lolabe and Londji
Semi-mechanized mining	• Open/latent conflicts between communities and contractors; • Influx of foreign populations; • Outbreak of new diseases and delinquency; • Specific diseases due to mining activities and environmental degradation; • Limited farming land; • Scarcity of NTFPs • Violation of cultural and religious heritages	Concerned villages in the Batouri, Betaré - Oya, Ngoura municipalities.

	• Multiplication of unreclaimed and inappropriate areas for farming and fishing. • Recurrent accidents (falls, landslides, etc.) in the pits dug by miners.	
Trafficking of wildlife species	• Scarcity of wildlife species; • Imprisonment for violations	All the villages and mainly those where Chinese companies are operating

5.3. Analysis of Positive and Negative Socio-economic Impacts

On a strict arithmetic plan, and in the short and medium term, a comparison of the socio economic achievements to the benefit of the local communities and natives and their adverse impacts points to the hasty conclusion that Chinese investments in Cameroon are not socially responsible. For, the promised and benefits, expected to mitigate impacts on local residents, have raised so much hope and excitement (See box n° 1 below, showing the promises made to communities alongside rubber farming). Meanwhile, the reality seems to be disappointing for the resident populations. This has been the source of many latent and/or open conflicts nursed by social frustrations at the grassroots. Some of these induced conflicts are inevitably evolving into violent acts and divisions among local communities, the case of Bissiang village being its perfect illustration.

Similar cases of the negative impacts generated by investments related to land management have already been documented by Gerber (2008; 2011) and Richard (2013). These emphasize the frustrations caused by the relationship between agro-industries and local communities and their subsequent transformation into violence. Chinese investments in Cameroon do not seem to escape this conflict and violence-generating trend. In this perspective, an atmosphere of open/latent conflict and violence seems to reside permanently in the semi-mechanized artisanal gold mining where stakeholders (Chinese operators and local communities) never agree on due formal or informal compensations. The absence of regular facilitation and mediation of these conflict processes by local Cameroonian authorities contributes to the degradation of relationships between local stakeholders and contractors. *On the contrary*, we expected local authorities in their threefold role of state representative, defenders of general interest and protector of the populations, to be omnipresent to solve cohabitation conflicts between stakeholders with unequal capacities.

Another common issue with Chinese investments in Cameroon, and which affects the expected socio-economic expectations, is the troublesome interference of the political and administrative elite. In fact, having been regularly appointed and by agreement at the head of representative committees of local stakeholders, political (parliamentarians in both cases of rubber farming) and administrative (as concerns infrastructure and mine exploitation) elite, on the contrary seem to use their respective positions to gain additional resources and impose illegitimate and domineering attitudes on the local communities and the natives. It is such an approach that led to violence in Bissiang village. In fact, the political elite representing the village at the company blatantly began to embezzle the collective socio-economic fallouts for his benefit and that of his family. Such a situation was unacceptable by the majority of the village who, with the support of the traditional chief, resorted to violent actions. In

reality, the socio-economic impacts of Chinese investments in Cameroon seem to fall prey to political and administrative elites with kleptocratic tendencies. (Putzel *et al.*, 2017)

Summary of Mitigation Measures in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report of Sud-Cameroon Hévéa

In order to insure a better integration of the population in the project, to limit conflicts and other socio-cultural disruptions and to optimize advantages linked to the implementation of the project, the project owner set aside some measures grouped by items:

Concerning jobs, staff management and inflow of people into the area, they include:

- Putting in place a recruitment policy that favors the resident population with equal competences and without sex or ethnic discrimination (for the Baka);
- Building houses and basic social infrastructures, schools, health centers);
- Improving security in area through forces of order.

In order to compensate losses or lack of profit due to the reduction in agro-forest land in some villages and potential NTFPs, useful wildlife resources, the following measures were taken:

- The rehabilitation and exploitation of old village plantations in the area;
- Encouraging and supporting the creation of new village rubber plantations;
- Seeking for partnerships with CEREFEN or local NGOs for the domestication of certain NTFP species to be planted in the remaining agro-forest land;
- The putting in place of a small training programme for local CIGs in fish farming and grass cutter, rabbit rearing, beekeeping, etc. and new farming techniques in order to diversify revenue sources and insure the sustainable management of available land;
- The possible funding of micro agricultural projects of the resident population;
- Supporting the realization of social works in neighbouring villages (wells, playgrounds, etc.);

As concerns the destruction of crops and other goods of cultural value, the following actions shall be taken:

- Identifying and locating (GPS) all the farms situated within the concession and their inventory in view of compensating for destroyed crops and goods in keeping with the texts in force (in collaboration with MINADER and MINADT);
- Locating other properties (tombs, relics, sacred places, etc.) for appropriate handling. etc.

Source: SUD-CAMEROUN HEVEA 2011. Environmental Impact Assessment Report

However, these facts should be qualified, as both agro industries could, in long run, fulfill their expected social commitments towards local stakeholders. This is so because their respective presence on these two sites was planned for several decades (50 years in the case of SUD-Cameroun HEVEA for example). In fact, they have signed long leases which grant them long term exploitation. To this effect, the conflicting relationships should give way to peaceful enjoyment within both land concessions. But, such an assumption is plausible only if both stakeholders engage in some form permanent and sincere dialogue. A similar procedure was launched in 2016 by GMG-HEVECAM and the Bulu and Bagyeli communities on its Niète site (HEVECAM 2016; RAINBOW, 2016). In fact, a historic land conflict has always opposed these two communities and the company that replaced the State. This land conflict turned into verbal and physical violence with time (Oyono, 2005; Oyono, 2010). The situation of this site has experienced relative improvement

since Chinese investors became the majority shareholder and began a dialogue with the residents (Assemble-Mvondo *et al.*, 2015b; HEVECAM, 2016; RAINBOW, 2016).

6. Analysis of the compliance of practices with existing legal frameworks

6.1. Practices of Chinese Investments and Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

It should be noted that investments in the rubber plantations, infrastructures, mining, are governed by clear legal rules. In fact, the provisions of Law n° 2002/004 of 19 April 2002 related to Cameroon Investments Charter already provides for this type of project. In this light, the provisions of article 17 already provides for three (3) types of incentives: promotion, facilitation and support. It also institutes three (3) investments regimes: automatic, declaratory and assent. But this investment charter appeared as a very comprehensive framework, having little direct impacts in terms of attractiveness for holders of capital. The Law n° 2013/004 of 18 April 2013 fixing Incentives for Private Investments in Cameroon, thus came to complete and specify the quite general and incomplete provisions of the Investment Charter. In this perspective, the objectives assigned to this law are to encourage, promote and attract productive investments in view of developing activities oriented towards the promotion of sustainable economic growth and jobs creation in Cameroon. Concretely, the provisions of the law grant fiscal, customs, financial, administrative incentives specific to priority activity sectors such as agricultural development, agro industry and manufacturing industries. In this light, both subsidiaries through two conventions received fiscal and custom exemptions of the industrial free zones and the right to export their benefits.

It is this legal framework related to investments in Cameroon which enables both subsidiaries of SINOCHEN to carry out their activities without any major difficulties in Cameroon. However, the said general provisions are completed by establishment agreements between Cameroon and the concerned investors. In this perspective, the State of Cameroon has granted rights and privileges to Chinese investors especially that of developing other crops than rubber on the said land concessions.⁵ Also, they have the right to cut and use wood. This can be interpreted as getting a real forest exploitation right and the right to exploit other natural resources (stones, sand, clay, gravel, etc.) despite the existence of special legislations in force in these sectors. But, the rights to exploit natural resources are subject to compliance with environmental laws frameworks in force and the duty of repairing related damages.

In relation to the attribution of temporary land concessions in Cameroon, it is permitted by the provisions of Article 4 of Decree n° 76/166 of 27 April 1976 fixing the management modalities of the national domain, that every physical or moral entity desiring to use an unoccupied or unexploited land within the national domain should make a specific request to the competent authorities. However, Article 7 specifies that concessions of less than 50 ha are attributed by Ministerial Order, while concessions of more than 50 ha are given by Presidential Decree. At the end of the temporary concession, an Committee Board will assess the development of the land in

⁵The possibility of developing and exporting palm nuts and other speculations is explicitly mentioned.

question. The report on such assessment will be sent to the Senior Divisional Officer who may, as the case may be, extend the duration of the temporary concession, grant it definitely, grant a long lease (for foreigners). Finally, it is stated in the provisions of Article 17 that the concessionaries pay an annual tax distributed as follows (Assemble-Mvondo et al., 2013): 40% to the State; 40% to the host municipality and 20% to the local communities. To this effect, we can notice that the concession Convention signed between SUD-Cameroun HEVEA and the State provides for the payment of an annual rent of only one dollar/ha, i.e. about 550 CFA/ha yearly. This scale seems little compared to the preceding ones in the domain⁶.

As concerns procedures contained in the 1994 Forest Law, it is stated that forests pertaining to the national domain belong to the category of the non-permanent domain; such land may be converted for another use. On the contrary, forests in the permanent domain may be downgraded, provided a forest block of same nature and of equal surface area is upgraded in the same ecological area. Finally, the Framework Law related to environmental management in Cameroon requires all project proponent or owner to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that makes it possible to assess direct and indirect effects on ecological balance and the living environment of the local populations. EIA modalities are described by Decree N°2005/0577 PM of 23 February 2005. Another new Decree of 13 January 2013 hence fixes the Modalities for the performance of any environmental and social audit. This last text allows for periodic assessment of the impact of all or part of the company has and/or is likely to have on the ecosystem.

As concerns semi-mechanized artisanal mining operators and wildlife trade, their practices are all against mining and wildlife rules in force in Cameroon (see Table N° 5 below).

Table 5: Summary of the Compliance of Chinese Investments with Legislation in Cameroon⁷

Types of investment	Compliant with the law on investments in Cameroon	Compliant with environmental law on in Cameroon
Rubber farming	+	+ & -
Infrastructures	+	+ & -
Semi-mechanized artisanal mining	-	-
Wildlife trade	-	-

6.2. Monitoring of Chinese investment practices by Administrations

Analyzing the evolution of the global governance of African countries during the 2006 to 2015 period, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2016) ranks Cameroon 38th out of the 54 States on the Continent. This poor ranking does not appear to be trivial and pathetic. On the contrary, it makes sense especially when we consider the inability of the political and administrative apparatus in

⁶In the case of the convention signed between the State and SOSUCAM, the rent is set at 2500 CFAF/ha. In like manner, rents paid by SGSOC for the development of palm trees in its land concession is above 1 dollar

⁷Caption: The + sign refers to compliance with the laws and regulations; the - sign refers to non-compliance with the laws and regulations; the + & - signs means the sector is legal but its practices are often against the law.

Cameroon to carry out innovative political and legislative reforms, and above all, to apply the laws and rules in force. Thus it is in this context, characterized by systemic poor governance that Chinese investors take advantage of to violate legal rules and regulations in force related to the environmental and social aspects of their projects. This remark is neither new (Assembe-Mvondo, 2009; Ongolo, 2015) nor specific to Chinese business men (Cerutti *et al.*, 2011 Nguiffo & Brendan, 2012).

In this light, it appears that investment projects are not subject to systematic and regular follow up and evaluation. The absence of such routine and regular control and monitoring by relevant administrations allows business men to juggle with legal and regulatory prescriptions and contractual specifications. Other cases are marked by investors' refusal to comply with the norms and to obey public authority. This is the way it is explicitly mentioned in a Monitoring Committee Report on a Chinese project (Republic of Cameroon, 2017):

"Hydro Mekin, which produced its EIA in 2011, has never produced an implementation report of its ESMP. Moreover, between 2014 and 2017, it was subject to many implementation missions initiated by the different follow up actors among which: the South Regional Delegation of the Ministry of Environment, the Governor of the region, etc. All these missions ended with the formulation of recommendations to Hydro Mekin, which decided not to implement them or even to produce a report. (...). Non-compliance with state authority by Hydro Mekin was manifested by its refusal to respond to the invitation of the Committee. From these remarks, we will suggest to the hierarchy that sanctions should be applied on this company in accordance with the regulations in force".

This therefore confirms a weakness in State authority in Cameroon with regards to foreign investors in general and Chinese in particular. There are thus doubts whether such a declining macro structure can be able to face wildlife trade which is a part of transnational crime. In fact, in illicit wildlife and trophies trade, and crossing boundaries entails more possibilities of money laundering and optimizes the valorization of sold illegal goods. Chinese or other *mafia*, at the beginning anchors themselves in a territory which favors their existence, such as Cameroon. In this light, they define their strategies in relation to the territory mapped by local, regional, or national boundaries. As such, to some regards, Cameroon (By extension to other Congo Basin countries) has certain characteristics which make her a favorable place for the development of illegal and illicit wildlife trade practices: weakness of institutions and fragility of the sociopolitical institutions, systemic poor governance and poverty of the rural and urban masses.

6.3. Chinese Investment Practices and MOFCOM Environmental Guidelines

Just as mentioned above, formal Chinese foreign investments first of all require an authorization from the Chinese Ministry of Trade (Wen bin & Wilkes, 2013). It is in a bid to reduce the ecological effect of these business men out of their territory that the same Ministry of Trade enacted investment guidelines and foreign cooperation with several countries and regions in 2009. It advises Chinese entrepreneurs and companies to protect the environment and to comply with the rules and regulations of the host countries. Also, another initiative was taken through the Guidelines on

Sustainable Management and the Use of Forests by Chinese Enterprises operating out of China. We must say that the said Guidelines were enacted by SFA in collaboration with the Chinese Ministry of Trade (MOFCOM) on 2nd March 2009, by the legal form of an administrative circular in conjunction with no real binding effect. The general objective of these Guidelines is to generally orientate the practices of Chinese companies in the rational management, use and protection of forests overseas and with the aim of playing a positive role in the management of forest resources at a global level. To this effect, the principles prescribed are: i) national sovereignty over natural resources (forests) ii) mutual and profitable cooperation; iii) integration of ecological, economic aspects and social benefits iv) combination of public and business internal policies v) sustainable forest management and use vi) protection of resources.

The scope of these Guidelines applies to all Chinese companies operating in forest exploitation, timber transformation and use and related activities in foreign countries. The provisions of article 3 explicitly require Chinese business men in foreign countries to comply with the rules and regulations of host countries. In this perspective, they are required to understand and be familiar with the forest laws of the country where they are operating in order to align their practices on the legal and regulatory requirements. Article 3 (2) requires that employees develop legal awareness in order to avoid and reduce illegal practices. Fundamental requirements of companies are: The management and use of forest resources must be legal; forest resources management and use must be rational. Finally, exploitation and transformation practices must be in line with the requirements of ecological protection, biodiversity conservation and compliance with the recognized rights of local communities, especially their customs.

These initiatives prove without doubt, the willingness of Chinese public authorities to reduce negative external environmental effects from the operations of their enterprises around the world. But the real influence of these guidelines on the daily attitudes of Chinese companies is yet to be proven (Kaplinsky *et al.*, 2011), just as it can be seen from the situation of those operating in Cameroon. In other words, the guidelines given by the Chinese administration have no perceptible positive effect on the practices of their business men in foreign countries.

The good practices of companies can at last be derived from the theory of corporate social and environmental responsibilities (CSER). This approach which came up in the year 1990, requires that one considers the fact that social, environmental and good governance practices can have an impact on the performance of the company and on its stock market valuation (McWilliams & Siegel; 2001). CSR proponents admit right away that applying environmental, social and good governance criteria would certainly reduce investment opportunities, but that their integration into investment processes offers benefits that more than compensate for the loss or the reduction in the profitability of the portfolio resulting from the limitation of investment opportunities. In this perspective, socially responsible investors believe that integrating environmental, social and governance factors into the investment process will eliminate companies whose expected performance is lower than that of their competitors. Businesses that adopt corporate social responsibility (CSR) would therefore offer better financial results than their competitors (McWilliams & Siegel 2001; Logsdon & Wood 2002). The

theory would therefore require Chinese-owned enterprises to have internal policies and codes of conduct that would translate into practices that are consistent with public and ethical standards in environmental and social aspects.

7. Conclusion

In any case, Chinese investments in Cameroon, the focus of this study (notably the development of rubber production by two subsidiaries of SINOCHEN Group, the construction of the Kribi Deep sea Port and the Lolabe-Bipaka highway, and semi-mechanized artisanal mining and wildlife trade), cannot currently be considered as being socially responsible. This is despite the many macroeconomic and socio-economic effects expected by Cameroonian authorities. In fact, the investments sampled, have negative impacts on forest ecosystems, wildlife and water resources. These impacts contribute to deforestation, soil degradation and the accelerated loss of wildlife biodiversity. At social level, the relationship between socio-economic achievements and the related negative impacts tends to show a negative balance at the detriment of local and indigenous communities, and especially in terms of their livelihood and habitats. In this perspective, there is an emergence of numerous open and latent conflicts between local stakeholders and Chinese economic operators due in part to their failure to fulfill many of their commitments towards the villagers.

However, this gloomy side of Chinese investments in Cameroon, far from being inevitable, is liable to be readjusted beyond public standards in force in Cameroon and CSR requirements. In this light, concrete steps in terms of improving the current situation could be based on the following recommendations:

- Conflict management and complaints from local stakeholders: Chinese businessmen could draw on two management models, which are based on the principles of accessibility, equity, transparency, compatibility and participation. In fact, all these major legal principles are prescribed by the environmental legislation in force in Cameroon;
- A mechanism for joint management of conflicts and complaints by local stakeholders should be institutionalized. It would revolve around the creation of multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms, bringing together, on a regular basis (every two or three months), representatives of local communities, companies, local traditional and administrative authorities to deliberate on certain complaints from local communities affected by a specific problem related to an investment. However, this type of instance has among other disadvantages of cut itself off from the social grassroots and turning into a kind of illegitimate elites deliberation circle;
- An internal management mechanism of conflicts and complaints from local stakeholders could be put in place in each of the companies, within the team responsible for the ESMP implementation. In this sense, such a unit will be responsible for gathering the verbal and written complaints of local victims, to examine them and to provide positive or negative responses adapted to each case. This model could be more operational than the first. However, it could be a

bad filter of social realities, thus cutting the managerial hierarchy of the company from the community grassroots;

- Compliance with socio-environmental commitments: the mechanism for monitoring compliance with the social and environmental commitments taken by investors should be built around two models:
 - An external multi-stakeholder model, bringing together representatives of technical administrations, business representatives and people appointed by local communities. Such a monitoring team should meet on a semi-annual basis and carry out field visits and not limit its work on reports. The findings and decisions rendered by such a body must necessarily be taken into account;
 - A company internal model, associated with the team responsible for the implementation of the ESMP, should be systematized among Chinese investors;
- Designing and implementing internal policies compatible with CSR principles: Chinese businessmen should design internal policies that are compatible with universal CSR principles. This may at the end limit harmful practices against socio-ecological assets in rural areas;
- The Ministries of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), of Environment and Nature Protection and the Chinese Consular Authorities accredited to Cameroon (with the support of NGOs) should establish formal awareness-raising and education campaigns on the protection of wildlife species in each of the sites hosting Chinese investments in order to minimize the involvement of their nationals in this illegal trade. This action should be coupled with that relating to the proper application of the legal and regulatory provisions on sanctions;
- Considering the situation of relative and endemic weakness of the rule of law in Cameroon, there is a need to call into question both the policies and staff in public administrations to ensure the proper application of the principles, rules and norms in force in order to provide guarantees of safety, peace and social justice to Cameroonian citizens as well as to foreign investors.

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