



**PHC/KKM2, A BREATH OF RELIEF FOR WORKERS
AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES:**
THE CASE OF THE LOKUTU AREA, TSHOPO PROVINCE,
IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between agro-industrial companies and local communities has always been an asset to the proper functioning of these companies. Agro-industrial companies bring undeniable economic and social development within the community: through their presence, access to villages is made possible by the opening of roads and the construction of bridges. The presence of agro-industrial companies also drives the creation of schools and hospitals, and access to transportation for both people and goods becomes more fluid. Beyond that, it reduces unemployment in rural areas by providing employment to farmers.

It is crucial to note that for companies, the work related to establishing plantations and camps, as well as the massive arrival of personnel entails certain inconveniences; notably, opening control and harvesting routes damages paths, agricultural fields, traps, watercourses, etc. This situation always requires compensation measures in order to give a sigh of relief to local communities.

The acquisition of a territory by a company has negative impacts on the original users of the land and their way of life. In the face of this reality, the dependence of local communities on the company becomes unavoidable.

It is clear that an agro-industrial company called PHC/FERONIA based in Lokutu between 2009 and 2020 was not able to meet the expectations of local communities. Life became unbearable for the farmers, who no longer respected the boundaries of the plantations, barricaded the roads and even threatened the workers.

Currently, the company PHC/KKM2 has taken over since 2020—one year of existence. Under its new management, the symmetrical relationship between the farmers and the company is restored, and the situation is now well under control.

For this reason, the present article wants to draw a balance sheet of one year of PHC/KKM2 management compared to that of PHC/FERONIA which was in operation for at least a decade.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

PHC/KKM2 Lokutu is located in the Tshopo Province, Basoko Territory, ex-Bandu City. As for its operations, PHC/KKM2 is operational in the territories of Basoko, Yahuma and Isangi. It also extends into the Mongala province at YALINGIMBA and into the Equateur province at BOTEKA.

Its geographical coordinates are as follows:

- 370 m of altitude
- 1°37 north latitude
- 23°37 longitude east

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Plantations et Huileries du Congo (PHC) was a subsidiary company of the UNILEVER group, established in the Lokutu area since May 19, 1911 by Mr. William WESKET LEVER.



After the first surveys in 1913, the results obtained showed that the soils of Lokutu and its surroundings were suitable for the Elaeis oil palm culture. Thus, in 1922, the first plantations were created, followed by the installation of the first processing plants in Lokutu and Mosité in 1924. Since the plantations were not producing at the time, the company used palm fruits from the local community to operate its factories.

In 1957, a third factory was installed in Lokumete.

In 1986, the Lokutu factory was rehabilitated with a high capacity, which led to the closure of the Mosité and Lokumete factories in 1996.

The same situation is happening today with the modernization of the Lokumete plant to international standards, which has caused the closure of the Lokutu plant.

At the time, the company was well known, almost all of the native university executives in the Lokutu area were supported by PHC in one way or another.

Between 2015 and 2020, this company went through a dark period in its history with the management of the FERONIA group, the scars of which are still visible.

In 2020, another group, called KKM2 took over PHC with new leaders at its head. They are currently working to redress PHC.

DEMOGRAPHY

As previously noted, PHC spans the territory of Basoko, Yahuma, and Isangi. Our documentary excavations revealed the following:

- Basoko territory: estimated population size: 339,533 (source: <https://www.caid.cd>, consulted on 24/02/2022);
- Yahuma Territory: estimated population size: 242,610 (source: <https://www.caid.cd>, consulted on 24/02/2022).
- Isangi Territory: estimated population size: 816,385 (source: idem).

Thus, on average, the estimated population of the area is 466,176 inhabitants who benefit in one way or another from PHC.

METHODOLOGY

To collect our data, we used the following three techniques:

1. **Desk research:** here we consulted the documents we needed from the PHC administration and the <https://www.caid.cd> websites.
2. **Observation:** we went to the field in order to get a feel for certain realities about the achievements of these two groups, notably FERONIA and KKM2 during our reference period.
3. **Interviews:** we interviewed some workers and some community members.

ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED PARAMETERS OR INDICATORS

In order to better understand the past and present situation of the PHC, we proceeded to the analysis of certain objectively verifiable indicators below:

V.1. INFRASTRUCTURE

In this section, we will speak about schools, hospitals, health centers, roads in agricultural deserts, workers' housing as well as guest houses.

V.1.1. EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To support the vision of the Head of State and that of the local community relating to basic education, PHC/KKM2 has built and rehabilitated some schools throughout its operational area; notably in the Bolesa, Yanongo,... groups as shown in the pictures below.



Fig 1. Medical Technical Institute of Mosite (I.T.M/CADAP)



Fig 2: LIEKE Primary School in Yaoselo

In addition to this construction, PHC/KKM2 has re-launched nursery schools and elementary schools to ensure proper supervision of the children of its agents and executives; in particular in Lokutu, in Yaligimba (C.S. ELAIES) where PHC supports the teachers with, of course, the support of the parents. Along the same lines, logistical support is also provided in terms of river transport by speedboat for students whose parents are employees of the company as well as notables of various communities. All this is to support the young university students who study in Kisangani; in order to prepare the succession of a qualified workforce.

V.1.2. HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE

To guarantee the health of its agents and executives as well as the community in general, PHC/KKM2 has built and rehabilitated several health facilities in all its sites as shown in the images below.



Fig 3. Health Center of the Yanongo group (under construction)



Fig 4. Health Center of the Mwando group (under construction)



Fig 5. Bolombo 1 Health Center (under construction)

For extremely serious cases, PHC/KKM2 transfers its employees to Kisangani, where it has partnered with the REKAPI clinic, or to Kinshasa at the Ngaliema clinic.

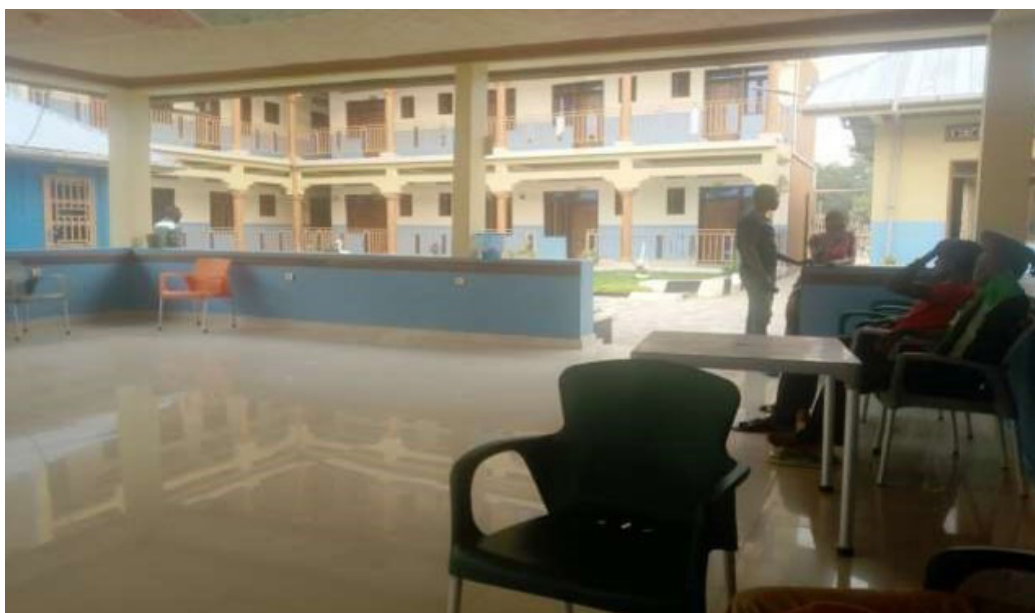


Fig 6. REKAPI clinic in Kisangani (reception area for patients transferred from PHC/ KKM2)

V.1.3. ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

It should be noted that during the FERONIA period, the agricultural feeder roads had become almost non-existent, with the area's bridges in a very advanced state of disrepair on the MWANDO–MOSITE–LOKUTU axis. It is the KKM2 group which came to open several agricultural desert roads through the rehabilitation of several bridges, particularly on the 37 km Isangi (Mwando)–Lokutu (Basoko) axis, the 50 km Yahuma (Ndongo)–Lokutu axis, and the 25 km Lokumete–Lokutu axis, as shown in the images below.



I.3.1. State of roads during the FERONIA period



I.3.2. Road conditions during the KKM2 period



I.3.3. KKM2 construction team



I.3.3. Condition of the Ya Lisubu bridge during the FERONIA period



I.3.4. State of the Ya Lisubu bridge after the intervention of KKM2

V.2. WORKERS' HOUSING AND GUEST HOUSES

WORKERS' HOUSING

To put its personnel at ease in term of housing—as was at the time of William LEVER with the construction of the “garden city” for its personnel in England in the “sunlight” port close to Liverpool—PHC/KKM2 has done similarly and continues to do so with the construction of housing in Lokumete where its factory is installed.

GUEST HOUSES

To better receive its national and international guests, PHC/KKM2 has built V.I.P. houses in all its sites (Lokutu, Yaligimba and Boteka) where it is nice to stay as shown in the photos below.



II.1 Guest house in LOKUTU



II.2 Guest house furniture



II.3 Guest house in LOKUTU



II.4 Guest house in LOKUTU

These different living environments preserve the honor of our different environments and promote the image of our beautiful country both nationally and internationally.

V.3. SOCIAL CLAUSES AND COMPANY–COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP

A. SOCIAL CLAUSES

It must be recognized that in less than two years of its operation, PHC/KKM2 has made considerable efforts in terms of executing the social clauses signed in 2017, formerly between the local communities and the FERONIA group. The latter had not managed to do much during all the years of its existence; whereas PHC/KKM2, has managed to honor a good part of the specifications in less than two years even though it was not the signatory party.

In view of the above, the local communities in PHC's operational areas now have confidence in the company.

To express their support, they organized large-scale actions such as an awareness campaign, and a support march where participants sang songs and held banners on which one could read *"Totosa mpe tobatela plantation mpe biloko ya PHC; po na bolamu ya biso mpe bana mbabiso,"* meaning, "Let's respect and protect the goods of the society for our own wellbeing and that of our children."



III.1 Awareness campaign



III.2 Awareness campaign

B. COMMUNITY–COMPANY RELATIONSHIP

For a short story, the relationship between the company and the community was not in good terms in the past. The two partners, who were supposed to collaborate well, had been looking at each other like cats and mice for some time. All this was due to the company's non-respect of its commitments, resulting in the violation of these commitments by the surrounding communities as well.

It should be noted that currently, with the new approaches of the KKM2 group, which favors dialogue, and especially with the efforts that the company to execute the specifications of the local communities. Relations between PHC/KKM2 and the surrounding communities have become symmetrically good.

As proof, the number of cases of aggression, which used to be commonplace, has significantly decreased or even disappeared in recent years.

This new management in all operational areas (all plantations) of the company resulted in PHC/KKM2 exceeding its 2021 production forecast by 12%.

To sustain this peaceful approach, PHC/KKM2 has even established a system of ongoing dialogue with the elders and leaders of various surrounding communities.

V.4. PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT

It should be noted that when an agribusiness company sets itself up in the area, it is imperative that the company applies participatory management to integrate local communities into the management of the company at all levels. This was not taken into consideration by the previous groups, as it was noted that all the agents and executives of the leadership (Assistants, Head of Division and others) always came from outside the area, despite the skills being local. This marginalization was at the root of frustration of all kinds.

Now, with the arrival of KKM2, the principle of participatory management is taken into consideration because, since 2020, we have noticed that young people from local communities are hired in all possible command positions.

Agricultural workers qualified as "not officially employed" (non engagés officiellement–NEO) are even hired and sign a contract, while elsewhere this is not the case. These workers were previously used as day laborers in rotation, or as permanent day laborers and did not sign an official contract.

It is worth mentioning that the different systems of using labor, including subcontracting or shared farming arrangements, applied in the past by the FERONIA group and which put the agricultural workers in total despair, have been swept away by the KKM2 group and replaced by the signing of open-ended contracts.

V.5. STAFF REMUNERATION

Salaries are a main source of motivation for each employee in an organization or company, without which the employees will not produce quality work according to the expectations of the company. Some data in our possession prove that the salary situation is progressing normally. If we compare the salary of plantation workers during the two reference periods, we will notice a significant difference as shown in the table :

	SHAREHOLDER GROUP		
PLANTATION WORKERS	FERONIA Group 2009-2020	KKM2 Group 2021-2022	Increase Rate
Industrial Guard	67,000 FC	232,000 FC	246%
Weeder	20,000 FC	70,000 FC	250%
Harvester	54,000 FC	120,000 FC	122%

The table shows the following:

- The salary of an industrial guard, which was 67,000 FC at the time of PHC/FERONIA, rose to 232,000 FC at the time of PHC/KKM2, an increase of 246%;
- The same is true for a weeder whose salary was 20,000 CFA francs, which was increased to 70,000 CFA francs during the KKM2 period, an increase of 250%;
- And finally, for a harvester who had an income of 54,000 FC, at present he has an income of 120,000 FC, an increase of 122%.

All other things being equal, we confirm that the incomes of the other employees' categories that we were not able to reach during the data collection would also be revised upwards by any percentage because a company cannot play at salary injustice.

V.6. WORKERS' EQUIPMENT

Work in plantations and factories is a high-risk job. That is why it is important to equip the agricultural workers with uniforms, boots and working tools to protect them effectively against work accidents. This safety aspect plays a crucial role in the production and performance of each worker. But unfortunately, the FERONIA group had ignored this aspect of things; the workers were left at the mercy of any work accident. It was even difficult to identify them because each one of them came to work wearing a uniform of his choice (see images below).



V.6.1 Work clothes during the FERONIA period



V.6.2 Work clothes during the FERONIA period

Nowadays, the KKM2 group solved this situation because all the agricultural workers wear the company's uniforms and work tools such as overalls, boots, helmets, gloves, machetes, etc., as shown in the photos below.



V.6.3 Work clothes during the period of KKM2



V.6.4 Work clothes during the period of KKM2

V.7. HEALTHCARE

Certain health measures have been put forward to prevent or reduce work-related accidents. The provision of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to the employees is a proof of this. Since accidents at work are unavoidable, PHC/KKM2 also takes care of its employees in the various health centers the company has built.

It is necessary to point out that, in order to ensure quality health care to its employees, PHC/KKM2 has signed a partnership with the REKAPI Clinic in Kisangani and the NGALIEMA Clinic in Kinshasa. The most illustrative and recent cases are those of Mr. LINGANDA of the LILEKO division and Mr. MAYANGA of the WENZE division, an industrial guard and a harvester, respectively.

Mr. LIGANDA was seriously injured in the plantation in the middle of his work; he was taken to Lokutu for treatment, transferred to Kisangani to the REKAPI Clinic, and then to Kinshasa to the NGALIEMA Clinic, where the medical team reoperated his injury, thus restoring his health. For the moment, he is in a period of convalescence in Kinshasa. The same is true for MAYANGA who was also transferred to Kinshasa; he is now in good health.

In view of the above, it must be recognized that PHC/KKM2 is indeed taking care of its employees and does not hesitate for a moment to transfer them if necessary.

See below the case of worker LIGANDA of the Lileko Division, who was transferred to Kinshasa via the REKAPI clinic of Kisangani.



Photos taken in Kinshasa during convalescence

CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS

When the KKM2 group arrived at the head of Plantations et Huileries du Congo in 2020, it had found a number of challenges to overcome. As such, its priority was to restore peace and the company-community relationship to a profitable and sustainable level.

Taking into account the data collected from the administration and the workers, as well as our observations and interviews; it is obvious that PHC/KKM2 has just given the workers and the local communities in distress a breath of relief.

In summary, PHC/KKM2 has focused its actions on improving the social welfare of workers and local communities. Indeed, it has built and rehabilitated several health centers and hospitals, opened up agricultural roads with the rehabilitation of bridges, and absorbed a significant number of unemployed youth. Thus, all this becomes part of the assets of the company.

In light of these compelling results, we recommend the following:

- That PHC extends its activities in order to significantly reduce unemployment in rural areas because it is the only entity which withstands winds and tides;
- Let us warn the NGOs who write nonsense about PHC, entities that we do not want to mention by name here by way of courtesy, that the reality on the ground is largely different from what they write and publish on social networks;
- We ask PHC/KKM2 to progress with their actions because, all the communities support them;
- Within the framework of reviving road infrastructure, as well as the national agenda on the transformation of the agricultural sector and other similar initiatives, we ask the government of the DR Congo to support PHC with logistical and financial means as part of the 145 Territoties Project, ultimately to save the communities living in these different corners of the country.