

Moungo Division:

# Community leaders decry persistent threats of land grabbing by SOCAPALM

By Elizabeth Banyitabi

Community leaders of Mbonjo, a village located about 8km along the National Road No.5, in the Moungo Division of the Littoral Region, have decried constant threats of land grabbing by Société Camerounaise de Palmeraies, SOCAPALM.

The people made their voices heard through an association dubbed National Synergy of Peasants and Villagers of Cameroon, known by its French acronym, SYNAPARCAM.

SYNAPARCAM has been in conflict with SOCAPALM, a subsidiary of the SOCFIN/Bolloré Group, over various issues related to SOCAPALM's oil palm plantations in Cameroon.

SYNAPARCAM, representing communities affected by SOCAPALM's operations, has accused the company of land grabbing, environmental damage, and neglecting the wellbeing of local populations.

The activities of the palm oil company is said to have brought long lasting land conflicts in the area.

During a field trip on the site on June 5, 2025, led by SYNAPARCAM, villagers expressed fear of not being able to feed their families or having a small place to build a house as all remaining lands are being occupied with palm trees.

Prior to the field trip, SOCAPALM, in an eight-point response to accusations, declined to have gone beyond agreed terms and insisted their activities don't affect in anyway the livelihood of the natives.

However, the villagers of Mbongo said the contrary. They said the plantation expansion projects target even the peripheral

area, the only available land exploited by villagers for cultivation

"All the land is occupied by palm groves. No space for the people. Even only road leading to the large village passes under the palm plantation. Here, the oil palm is planted right behind the houses. And the rules are strict. We are forbidden from picking up the nuts that fall or those thrown by birds," Njoh Moise, an indigene of Mbonjo village said.

Connecting historical facts to current happening, Njoh said he was born on January 14, 1971, and grew with his grandmother and by that time SOCAPALM had not planted in the area.

"They came in 1993 when my grandmother left the village for a visit in Kribi. They planted up to three to four metres from the house...and we couldn't do anything at the time because I was young," he spoke in despair.

Today Njoh is a grown man and has decided to continue living in his native land.

"This is where I was born, I have made a decision to stay here," he stated.

Surmounting threats of demolition from SOCAPALM, Njoh went ahead to uproot palm trees planted by SOCAPALM around his compound to build a house for himself. He has been threatened several, but is adamant to leave the place.

Njoh said they don't even have a place to plant crops in their own village, but still, "SOCAPALM wants to take everything" from them. He claimed even their traditional rules "have been bought by the company".

He said since 2020 that the state privatised the plantation, it was noticed that the occupying contract was not well signed, amendments were made and a

portion of land was to be restituted to the villagers.

"This has not been implemented. In 2025, what we the villagers want is for the state to see into the matter before the upcoming generation inherits such land conflicts," he added.

## SYNAPARCAM's agroecology project threatened

Similarly, a project launched by SYNAPARCAM is allegedly being disrupted by officials from SOCAPALM. Although lacking arable land, the association has been working since 2020 to raise awareness among farmers about the importance of agroecology/family farming.

In 2021, it launched a Field School project where farmers are trained. And all young people wanting to get into the agricultural profession are trained. This was followed three years later by the initiative to involve small-scale livestock farming and fish farming in its operation,

President of SYNAPARCAM, Emmanuel Elong, said: "The group began construction of two hangars in December 2024 which resumed in January 2025. But the building project met a deadlock when we were asked to stop work".

"While we were in the field on February 1, 2025, we received security agents stormed the area. And the soldiers brought in by SOCAPALM asked us to stop all work, claiming the site is within SOCAPALM's concession. On February 7, 2025, SOCAPALM security arrived again on the site accompanied by a bailiff. A summons to stop work was served on the project developer," revealed a local worker.

According to sources, a delegation went to meet the Senior Assistant of the SOCAPALM Dibombari plantation to better



Site of SYNAPARCAM's land project under construction



Partial view of SOCAPALM peripheral occupancy

understand the problem. They also met with the Director of the Dibombari Plantation.

The villagers explained that SOCAPALM Directors refused giving them a listening ear. Instead, "they displayed their determination to seize our land".

The villagers said on March 9, 2025, security agents and soldiers landed again on the site and arrested the workers on grounds that SYNAPARCAM is operating illegally.

## SOCAPALM debunks

But SOCAPALM affirms that it was in no way involved in the intervention of the gendarmerie, administrative authorities. SOCAPALM claims to have been informed by its security personnel about the construction of a School Field on land known as peripheral land or low-lying land, which had previously been farmed by a local family without any problems, and which the latter had transferred to SYNAPARCAM. The company acknowledged that it has taken steps to stop the work and has lodged a complaint with those

concerned.

Dipanda Manfred the head of the family that sold the piece of land to Emmanuel Elong, told reporters that he doesn't know why SOCAPALM is bringing up issues at this time.

"It has been our family land for ages, and I sold it to my brother. If they want to seize it, they should show us proofs that it's theirs," he spoke angrily.

Sone Martin, a man in his 60s who seemed to worn out by the constant struggle for survival said: "They should just kills us at ones so they can take the whole village...we can't even plant cassava that we will eat, they want us to die of hunger?? This is our land where we were born, my father cultivated there, but what do they want from us today".

As the villagers continue to hope for solution to their problems, the oil palm company's expansion remains an imminent threat. The villagers do not believe the long promised dialogue will bear fruits if government doesn't come to their aid.