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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Smallholder Oil Palm Value Chain in Cameroon: A Case Study from the Department of Sanaga-Maritime

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Abstract

Cameroon has been producing palm oil for centuries but industrial scale production started around 1907 under the German colonisation with the development of estates and mills around the Littoral region (Sanaga-Maritime). The country's production of palm oil can be grouped into traditional (artisanal) and industrial milling. The production is stratified in three groups: an agro-industrial sector, smallholders in contract with agro-industries and traditional independent smallholders also called artisanal sector. Smallholders with less than 5 ha of oil palm represent more than 75% of oil palm growers but provide only half of the production due to very low yields. Despite the presence of these three groups, the national production is not sufficient to cover the domestic consumption. The government considers the oil palm sector (both artisanal and industrial) as an important tool to alleviate poverty and to generate national revenues.

This paper analyses the operation of smallholding oil palm value chain in the Department of Sanaga-Maritime. Data were collected through field survey that involved distribution of pre-structured questionnaires to a sample of 60 actors purposively selected. The data collected through these questionnaires were analysed using Olympe software. The study reveals that, oil palm smallholding value chain is made up of three categories of farmers: family farms, rural and urban investors. The average margins of farmers are higher for the plantation of urban investors, followed by those of the rural investor and the family farms. Family farmers are the actors who process all their produce into red palm oil, whereas, the rural investor and urban elites do not process their produce. They rather sell their nuts, either to local artisanal millers or to the local agro industry. Two types of artisanal millers have been identified: manual vertical press users and combined motorized horizontal press users. In general, the motorized horizontal presses have a higher production capacity (tons/day) than the manual presses. The study also reveals that the extraction rate slightly differs according to the type of press used.

Keywords: Artisanal millers, Cameroon, oil palm, olympe, value chain