

Smallholders Participation In Oil Palm Certification And Livelihood Strategy In The Santchou Sub-Division, West Region Cameroon

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ARTICLEINFO

Article History:

Accepted: 05 Feb 2023 Published: 25 Feb 2023

Publication Issue

Volume 10, Issue 1 January-February-2023

Page Number

583-590

ABSTRACT

Palm oil is an edible vegetable oil that comes from the fruit of oil palm trees. The production of oil palm from its Fresh Fruit Punches (FFP) is commonly practice in the Santchou Sub-Divison west region of Cameroon. It is mostly done at a small scale by smallholders with at least 1-5 hectares of oil palm plantation. The productivity of oil palm depends on smallholders' participation in certification and other livelihood strategy. The main objective of this study was to examine smallholders' participation in oil palm certification and livelihood strategy in Santchou. This study was carried out using the case study approach which enable a field survey to be conducted in order to examine smallholders' participation in certification and livelihood strategy. A total of 185 questionnaires were administered using a random sampling technique to three targeted communities within the Santchou subdivision. Ten interviews were conducted to complement the questionnaire in generating qualitative data for the study. Data collected was later analyse with the use of statistical data tool such as excel, software and spsss data tool and presented on maps, charts and tables. from the data collected, it was observed that very limited number of smallholder are fully involved in oil palm certification. A large number of smallholder oil palm production are engage in other sources of livelihood as livelihood strategy for survival. It was recommended that due to the enormous benefits of certification for the purpose of high productivity, authorities should make certification a reality amongst smallholders.

Keywords : Oil Palm, smallholders, Santchou, Certification, Livelihood

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I. INTRODUCTION

Palm oil is an edible vegetable oil that comes from the fruit of oil palm trees. It is scientifically known as Elaesis guineensis which is a native to west and south west Africa (WWF, 2020). It is sometime referred to as red palm oil because of it reddish-orange color (Franziska, 2017). Worldwide production of palm oil has been climbing steadily for five decades. Between 1995 and 2015, annual production quadrupled from 15.2m tonnes to 62.6m tonnes. By 2050, it is expected to quadruple again, reaching 240m tonnes (Paul, 2019). Indonesia in particular, is the largest producer of palm oil in the world, having a supply in approximately 45% of global crude palm oil (World Bank, 2011). Oil palm is a native to West Africa; the West African region especially Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone are the major producers of both palm oil and palm kernel oil (PKO) (Kwabena and Daniel, 2013).

There exist a lot of uncertainty about what sustainability certifications imply for the livelihood of smallholder farmers. Many smallholders viewed certification as a set of technicalities that need to be fulfilled to improve their production and get a better price for Fresh Fruit Bunches and manufactured palm oil (Nia et al, 2015). So many studies have focused on the important of certification but not on the level of certification and the benefits of certification to smallholders and smallholders' livelihood. According to Abazue and Ah Choy (2019), in a studied in Malaysia, revealed that most of the independent smallholders do not have certification, with a reasonable number of them having little or no knowledge of certification bodies which are the Roundtable Sustainable Palm Oil production (RSPO) body and the Malaysia Sustainable Oil Palm MSPO. smallholders' In addition. participation on certification contributes positively on their organizations especially on building business relationships, social and human capital, provides income generation livelihood additional and

improvement, incorporates stronger supply chain cooperation which lowers production costs, raises productivity, better quality, and stabilization of supply (Diana *et al*, 2019). Sustainable palm oil certification is expected to lead to sustainable development and livelihood (Patrice *et al*, 2010).

Santchou Sub-Division is located in the Menoua Division of the West region of Cameroon. It is located between latitude 5°18'0'' North and 9°54'0'' East. It is located on a plain and it is part of the region known as the Plain des Mbo (Figure 1.1). It is boarded to the north by mount Manengouba to the south by the cliff of Dschang and to the east by Kekem. Santchou have a population of 46,249 inhabitants with a surface area of 335km². The population density of Santchou is 137 persons/km² and Santchou is made up of 60 small villages (Santchou rural) and 4 towns of Santchou Urban (Santchou Council, 2015).



Figure 1.1: Location of Santchou Sub-Division Source: Santchou Council (2023)

This study was conducted through a case study research design. In the case study design, the researcher uses the cross-sectional study design. This design brings the researcher in contact with the study area or population only once to get a fair picture of the prevailing situation and the problem in study. The researcher gathered a lot of primary data through the



administering of questionnaires, interviewed and observation of key aspects. The main instrument of data collection was the used of questionnaires. 185 questionnaires were administered to smallholders in 4 towns in the Santchou urban as illustrated in table 1. The questionnaire was made up of four sections. Section A was the respondent identification, section B was made up of questions which were based on determining the level of certification of smallholder oil palm production and the types of oil palm smallholders in the Santchou Sub-Division. Section C was made up of questions that investigate on how oil palm production is value amongst other sustainable sources of livelihood amongst oil palm smallholders in Santchou and section D which is the last section was made up questions that will determine the impacts of the activity and the attempted mismanagement strategies applied by smallholders to cope with the challenges faced by smallholders in this sector.

| Towns | Population | Number of questionnaires | Number | Missing |
|------------|------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| | | issued | Retrieved | |
| Bessouck | 2400 | 50 | 46 | 4 |
| Cassalafam | 1282 | 35 | 32 | 3 |
| Madagascar | 2229 | 45 | 42 | 3 |
| Manzoko | 3517 | 70 | 65 | 5 |
| Total | 9,428 | 200 | 185 | 15 |

Table 1. Questionnaires Administration

Source: Population data from Santchou Council / Fieldwork, November 2022

Primary data collected from the field using questionnaires, interview and observation was analyzed with the aid of frequency table like bar chat, hectograph, and also the use of statements. The frequency table was used to analyses the score gotten from the different answers in the questionnaire. While some of the information from the field based on the respondents viewed was then represented in the form of percentage using tables and graphs. Kruska Wallis H test and the Chi square test was used in testing hypothesis of the researched.

Certification is not a process or practice in the production of oil palm but just an identity and recognition that defined one line of business. Certification is an important aspect for all activities not only oil palm production as it makes the activity legal and open for support in the form of subsidies and grants from the government. Smallholders' palm oil production has been carried out in Santchou for more than a decade now. It started traditionally when the early native inhabitants of Santchou found the soils to be suitable for oil palm production during the early colonial period where the native inhabitant of Santchou own at least 5 hectares of oil palm as smallholders. Santchou which is a Sub-Division in the west region was typically a rural area until when the government became involved in the protection of the Santchou Forest Reserve (Elephant Reserved). Through this, the government realized the activities of smallholders' oil palm production. This explains why the study was aimed to examine the aspect of oil palm certification. Unfortunately, certification seems to be absent or not really practice amongst smallholders' oil palm producers in Santchou.

A greater proportion of the sampled population in the study indicated that smallholders have not undergone certification. Just 2.7 % of smallholders who claimed to be certified pointed out the fact that they are highly known, recognized and approved by state authority and the community though much of the investment and supervision is carried by the owners who invest largely to get transport vehicles and oil



palm grinding machines. The remaining 97.3% of smallholders attested to the fact that, they have not been certified. This means that the government has had little influence over palm oil smallholders' activities in Santchou even though the government knows about the activity looking at the creation of the Santchou council and the ministry of agriculture and development Santchou. rural in Therefore, smallholders have been operating freely without the influence of the government that is why certification is highly absent amongst smallholders. There are several reasons why smallholders were not certified (Table 2).

Table 2. Reasons for no certification

| Reasons | Frequenc | Percentages | |
|------------------|----------|-------------|--|
| | у | | |
| Certification is | 160 | 86.5 | |
| absent | | | |
| Reluctance | 5 | 2.7 | |
| Complicated | 20 | 10.8 | |
| Total | 185 | 100 | |

Source: Fieldwork, Novemeber 2022

Certification is absent

The different variables which judged why some smallholders are not certified were in the aspect of reluctance, certification is absent and complicated. A greater proportion that is 86.5% shows that certification is absent which is the reason of the low level of certification amongst smallholders. This means many smallholders attested to the fact that they have not rejected any certification process introduced and brought to them by the government through the local council and the ministry of agriculture and rural development, but instead the process is absent meaning the government has applied little or no effort to implement certification practices amongst smallholders in Santchou.

Certification is complicated

10% attested to the fact certification is complicated seeing that it takes a lot of effort for it to be done from start to finish, most especially, financially, that means though these ones were not certified, they have knowledge of certification practices, it advantages and disadvantages and but were reluctance to undertake it because of it complication.

In the study, some smallholders that have been certified could only trace it to the fact that they are highly recognized and known by the community and the council. Looking at the fact many smallholders were not certified, it needless to talk about the benefits of certification amongst smallholders as many attested to receive no support from the government (97.3%) as much as they were not certified or has no knowledge about certification. This category of persons were mostly independent oil palm smallholders who carried out their activity without any external support and the others on the aspects of unsatisfactory support (2.7%). Those certified claimed to have unsatisfactory support as much of their investment in oil palm production is carried by their personal effort. Looking as the aspect that many smallholders were not certified as it needless to undergo a process without having knowledge about that phenomenon. Base on having knowledge of what certification is all about, smallholders have different views (Figure 1).





Figure 1 Smallholders knowledge of certification Source: Fieldwork, November, 2022

A greater number of smallholders attested to the fact that they do not have knowledge of certification practices (89%), just 3% indicated they have knowledge of certification practices with 8% of the fact that, they are not sure. This means since many smallholders claimed to the fact they do not have knowledge about what certification, the government through the council and the ministry of forestry and wildlife has to sensitized smallholders in order to make them understand the aspect of certification before it is practice, in order that, it implementation in the future will not be done by force but by wiliness and acceptability as much smallholders understand the benefits of it.

Multiple Smallholders' livelihood and livelihood strategy

Oil palm is a highly productive crop especially when it is grown in an area where the climate is highly favourable, with good soils and the used of fertilizers and insecticides. But the profitability of oil palm production does not depend on the productivity only, but also on the investment and return gotten from the sale of palm oil which depend on the market forces. Inter cropping oil palm during its immature stage with food crops is usually blamed for its negative impact on the growth and future yields of palms. Agro industries unanimously condemn such practice. For smallholders on the contrary, intercropping presents numerous advantages as it not only covers the weeding cost but also provides food and revenue while waiting for the palms to come into production. While such trade-off may be of little interest to an agro-industry, it appears as determining for many smallholders (Yvonne et al., 2015).

The income data of smallholders' oil palm producers in Santchou show that, 30,000-50,000 (37.5%) was the highest income earn by smallholders, which is very low. But these smallholders testified of having earned their income from other farming activities and off-farm activities rather than oil palm production which is productive just in some part of the dry season. Also base on whether smallholders directly market their oil palm or used it for home consumption, smallholders gave different viewed on how the manufactured fresh palm oil is used. Most smallholders market their oil palm product and just few used it for home consumption. Which means most of the FFBs harvested by smallholders are been processed and sole in the market. But the income statistics of many smallholders shows that, the income of many smallholders are very low even though oil palm may contribute just a little part to these incomes (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 Income levels of smallholders' palm oil producers Source: Fieldwork, August, 2020

The income levels of smallholders' oil palm producers are very low in which many fall within the range of 30,000-50,000 (37.8%). From here, it decreases with an increasing rate to the income level of 100,000 and above (16.2%) which is mostly earn by contrast workers, government teachers and business persons who are also smallholders. This shows that oil palm



production is not highly profitable to smallholders in Santchou.

Smallholders in Santchou are not just basically involved in oil palm production only but also in other their activities for livelihood sustenance. Smallholders may value oil palm production to other activities on different levels base on how the activity is profitable to them. There are five different variables of measurement which seems to judge the extent to which oil palm is prefer to other alternative sources of livelihood (Table 5.1). The first variable which claimed that oil palm is profitable recorded the highest percent from the grade "poor" (46.5%) rejecting the fact, the statement is not acceptable. This shows that many smallholders value other activities to oil palm production looking at the fact little income is generated from the activities, the oil palm is only productive in some part of the dry season and producers' benefits from little no external support as shown on figure 4.2 in which oil palm require large investment through harvesting, transportation and processing. The reason why no person was for excellent and very good indicate that many could not accept the fact that oil palm is profitable.

A majority of 39.5% good and 55.5% for very poor in case of oil palm is not profitable and more profitable respectively, indicate that many could still accept the profitability of oil palm production to other livelihood sources. It should be noted that the 3.8% of very good who attested to the fact that oil palm is more profitable were of the reason that, some income is been generated from oil palm farming especially in the dry season and also the great benefit this product is for the household in the preparation of many kind of dishes that are best with oil palm. It is not surprising many attested to the fact that oil palm is too costly and stressful, as it is difficult to examine the effort that is been put in the activity that make it costly and stressful. This effort can be seen the area of purchasing planting materials and the planting process itself. Many smallholders in Santchou in

usually got their oil palm seedlings from areas in the littoral and southwest region where large scale oil palm production is carryout. This is because it is difficult and costly to nurse those seedlings in Santchou looking at the swampy and muddy condition in the rainy season that is hazardous to these seedlings. Young palm has to sprung always until is take some years for it to get mature and start bearing fruits. Harvesting and transporting it is another huge labour force which is incurred by the smallholders alone. Many smallholders do not have grinding machines, and therefore most endeavour to pay at least "1500frs" to grind at least a full container of cooked palm nut or fresh fruit bunches.

The Benefits of certification to smallholders

Certification as a very important requirement is more benefit to smallholders to smallholders as it connect smallholders to more opportunities from the Government, international organizations and NGOs. The study shows that the level of certification amongst smallholders is very low reasons why smallholders have limited support and mostly depend on their personal investment. According to Sakti (2017), Certification becomes a prerequisite for tradable products to get legality and access to global market. Each tradable product can choose certificate according to its market destination. The need of certification to get better access to global market has encouraged companies, millers, processors and traders to make commitment to produce sustainable products. Abazue and Ah Choy (2019), explained that, smallholders when smallholders engage in certification practices, they are likely to partake in the enormous benefits of certification which include; wider market access, quality fresh bunches and technical skill and greater opportunities in the production sectors. This means certification is a great advantage to all smallholders to engage in and not to be despised.

Challenges of smallholders engaging in certification

Certification of oil palm is good because of its numerous benefits and advantages, but in many



situations is seeming complicated, time consuming and a lot of financial spending. Smallholders' palm oil producers find it difficult to take part in this process. Nurliza et al., (2019), based on a study in Indonesia on how smallholders palm oil production is considered important and certified, discovered that though Independent smallholders represent more than 3.1 million hectares of all palm oil plantations in they receive inadequate Indonesia. However, attention from sustainability initiatives, deforestation and palm oil production discussions. Meanwhile, evidences show that by collaborating voluntarily in organizations and building linkages with public and private stakeholders among institutional arrangements, farmers have opportunities to access productive assets for expanding their capacities, to seize economic changes, and policy making. Smallholders find it difficult to engage in certification because they are not follow up, educated and orientated about the importance of the activity, so they see it no need engaging in certification practices. According to Sakti (2017), the application of certification standards are very low in both international amongst smallholders' oil palm producers and farmers. This is because the process to comply with standard and obtain certificate is not simple, particularly for oil palm smallholders since agricultural practices and plantation management practices are often conducted traditionally for many vears.

The benefits of smallholders engaging in other livelihood sources

Alke et al, 2018, in a studied in Indonesia, cited out the need for smallholders' pal oil producers to engage in order alternative livelihood income generating activities. The majority of the working population in some districts are oil palm farmers, but despite efforts to make their plantations highly productive and sustainable, they face climate-related and market price risks, which affects their income. Therefore, finding alternative source of income will help to buffer against these risks. The worked cited some reasons why smallholders require alternative source of livelihood in that; 1) Fresh fruit bunches are typically harvested approximately four years after planting, and do not reach peak productivity until after seven years, therefore smallholders struggle to sustain even basic livelihoods through oil palm alone. 2) Smallholders face several risks that can affect their earnings, including climate change, which can hinder the growth of their harvests. 3) Furthermore, prices are controlled by the mills and intermediaries, meaning that smallholders' earnings highly depend on the price given to them. 4) Smallholders also face a multitude of barriers related to land certificate ownership, access to quality seedlings, a lack of knowledge of good agricultural practices, access to organizational support, and access to finance. Efforts to improve productivity need to be coupled with teaching farmers how to secure alternative sources of income, especially during non-harvest season, when three is a poor harvest, or when there is price volatility.

II. CONCLUSION

It has been clearly seen that smallholders in the study areas do not undertake certification practices, showing very low level of certification amongst smallholders. Smallholders do not also have knowledge about certification practices due to the fact that there is no sign that the government through the ministry of agriculture and rural development and the Santchou council has implemented certification practices in Santchou and also making smallholders to be aware of the importance of certification in the sustainability of oil palm production. Since many smallholders have been aware of the benefit of certification and a joint cooperative to improve on the productivity of oil palm, smallholders should strive in achieving this goal if there are interested that the outputs of oil palm should increase highly in the nearest future. The government should create a department in the ministry of agriculture and rural



development in Santchou in term of financial assistance and technical skill which will help to support the council and other department in the ministry in recording and storing data on smallholders' oil palm output monthly so that future plan can be well made from these records.

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Cite this article as :

Eno Cynthia Osuh, Tayong Hosea, Chick Emil Abam, "Smallholders Participation In Oil Palm Certification And Livelihood Strategy In The Santchou Sub-Division, West Region Cameroon", International Journal of Scientific Research in Science and Technology (IJSRST), Online ISSN : 2395-602X, Print ISSN : 2395-6011, Volume 10 Issue 1, pp. 583-590, January-February 2023. Available at doi : https://doi.org/10.32628/IJSRST2310170

Journal URL : https://ijsrst.com/IJSRST2310170