

Exercising the right of reply to the Mongabay press article “Labor abuse and work accidents on plantations of Cameroon’s largest sugar producer”

Ladies,

I, the undersigned Jean-Pierre CHAMPEAUX, acting in my capacity as General Director of Sosucam since December 22, 2022, a subsidiary of the Somdia Group, hereby intend to make use of our right of response following the publication of the Mongabay article “Labor abuse and work accidents on plantations of Cameroon’s largest sugar producer” reporting, in particular, violations of workers' rights within Sosucam.

As a preamble, Sosucam reserves the right to take legal action following the content of certain testimonies that we discovered in this article.

The Somdia Group and its subsidiaries, in particular Sosucam, are particularly committed to respecting the strictest principles in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It is in this sense that we have applied, for more than 10 years, a corporate policy going beyond our obligations in this area, with a view to protecting the environments in which we operate.

The societal approach and sustainable development policy are at the heart of our commitment and are expressed at the level of each of our subsidiaries. However, aware of the risks linked to the agricultural sector, we strive to identify, according to our priority areas of commitment, the most appropriate actions to deploy, to pursue agriculture that respects the environment and the communities that surround it.

At Sosucam, the Sustainable Development Department, as part of the deployment of its policy, has implemented a certain number of measures over several years in order to respond both to our commitments and to the needs of the company's stakeholders.

- **On the subject of the mentioned workplace accidents and workplace safety**

Sosucam is committed to the deployment of an occupational health and safety (OHS) policy aimed at preventing workplace accidents and protecting workers.

Aware, however, that zero risk does not exist, we strive to deploy the most protective remedial measures possible if an accident were to occur.

- On the accidents mentioned

The Mongabay article reports the death of Mr. MBALLA OLOMO as a result of burns during a work accident in our Nkoteng factory. The facts occurred on December 11, 2023, during an intervention on production equipment at the factory. The accident victims were immediately taken care of, according to the following medical course, supervised by the Sosucam Medical Team:

- For first aid at the Sosucam CMS (specialized medical centre) in Nkoteng
- The same day, for further treatment at the Yaounde General Hospital;
- Following medical advice from doctors for special treatment, a transfer in the afternoon to the Burn Center of the Douala General Hospital.

Unfortunately, Mr. MBALLA OMOMO Germain, seriously burned, died after five days of intensive care, while his colleague is now able to return to duty.

The article also reports a traffic accident involving a bus from the contractor company "Global Service" which occurred in April 2023, causing several injuries among workers in the plantation section.

Sosucam was affected by this unfortunate event and immediately took appropriate measures:

- The victims were all directly taken care of, first within the Sosucam medico-social centre in Nkotend where all medical files are available;
- The most serious cases were then evacuated to the Yaounde referral hospitals where some are still treated to this day.

Beyond legal obligations, Sosucam was keen to ensure for the victims of the accidents mentioned, free care, medicines, meals and others, not to mention the financial and moral support, on a personal basis from several executives of the company.

It is important for us to emphasize here that Sosucam declares all of its workers and pays the required social security contributions to the National Social Security Fund. The latter ensures the caring for and payment of compensation to workplace victims in Cameroon.

- On safety at work

Concerning the protection of our workers and as part of the implementation of our OHS standards, a study of the dangers was carried out by an approved firm on each of our sites, followed by a risk analysis by workstation.

These analyses made it possible to identify the appropriate prevention and protection measures for each risk. Thus, all Sosucam workers receive personal protective equipment (PPE) adapted to their workstation.

The Occupational Health and Safety Committee monitors the systematic and correct wearing of this PPE. It should be noted that risks are constantly reassessed and updates made to prevention and worker protection measures.

At Sosucam, staff transport is provided by service providers approved to carry out this activity, who provide approved transport vehicles. The Procedure for the Evaluation and Control of Outsourced Transport Activities for the Safety of All (PECATEST), allows, beyond regulatory technical controls, to verify the technical conformity of vehicles for the transport of workers. The transport fleet is renewed periodically.

- **On the subject of "the importation of labor and transgenerational work"**

Sosucam actively contributes to the local economy and encourages sustainable agricultural value chains. As a committed territorial actor, we value local skills and we commit ourselves beyond legal obligations.

The Mongabay article reports workers benefiting from "working conditions considered precarious and unworthy, and complain of a lack of medical coverage, very low wages, insufficient, or even absent in some cases, of personal protection equipment."

- On the remuneration of our workers

In Cameroon, the new minimum wage for workers in the agricultural sector was increased in March 2023 to 45,000 FCFA monthly.

The article mentions salaries of 52,000 FCFA to 65,000 FCFA monthly for Sosucam workers.

Since November 1, 2023, the basic salary of agricultural laborers has been increased to 56,000 CFA Francs monthly in our salary scale.

Beyond the Basic Salary, there are a certain number of legal bonuses added, plus bonuses for good performance of activities, accompanied by attendance bonuses as well as performance bonuses. This entire bonus system allows an overall increase in remuneration of at least 60% or even beyond 120% for the best.

For agricultural labourers, after 06 contracts (of a duration of 05 months or a campaign duration), they benefit from an automatic step advancement.

At the end of the 12th contract for cutters, if not the 15th contract for all seasonal workers, the staff benefits from categorical advancement; these progression provisions are unique in the national agricultural sector.

Overall, SOSUCAM positions itself as one of the leaders in the salary treatment of agricultural workers in Cameroon.

= On access to education

Sosucam is committed to access to education and the promotion of local skills through dedicated training programs and an anchored societal development policy. The article reports a "generational repetition" of workers, "preventing the parent from earning a significant income which could allow them to sufficiently pay for their children's studies."

Sosucam invests in the education of its workers' children:

- Through the support of APEs (Student Parents' Association) for the support of temporary teachers;
- By building school infrastructure. To this end, Sosucam has built, rehabilitated and equipped blocks of classrooms and laboratories, including in disadvantaged neighborhoods of Mbandjock and Nkotend. Thus, 15 classrooms were built, 8 rehabilitated and 1 laboratory built and equipped which were handed over to the various Ministries in charge of education;
- By strengthening the employability of young people from villages in the sugar perimeter through apprenticeship based on the principle of "learning by doing". More than 200 young people have evolved in this framework and have been trained.

- **On the subject of underlying environmental harms**

The article reports "destruction of village plantations" linked to the environmental consequences of Sosucam's activity.

As part of its sustainable development policy, legal requirements and its CSR commitments, Sosucam has implemented, until the end of 2022, 4 Environmental and Social Management Plans "ESMPs" and carried out in 2023 a complete environmental and social audit of its activities and facilities.

The report accompanied by its ESMP is currently being analyzed and validated by the indicated ministerial authorities.

The ESMP will allow the implementation of a robust action plan adapted to the environmental and social impacts of the company. This also includes an evolution linked to the treatment of effluents which has always been a central concern at Sosucam, being the subject of effective actions with the technical support of an internationally renowned firm. In its development plan, Sosucam has included and validated by the Board of Directors the upgrading of its factories to environmental standards.

Concerning the "drifts linked to aerial spraying", all persons recognized as victims were subject to compensation in accordance with the regulations in force.

As part of the continuous improvement of our operating practices, we are migrating our aerial spraying activities by plane to the use of drones.

The latter have the advantage of being more precise and eliminate any risk of drift on plots adjoining those treated. In the 23/24 campaign, 40% of the areas are thus treated.

Regarding the alleged "grabbing" of land mentioned in the article, all the land exploited by Sosucam is the subject of a concession under emphyteutic leases for which the company pays annual land royalties, of which a part is returned to the villages and communities concerned.

Sosucam renews its determination with regard to its environmental, social and societal commitments, and is committed to respecting the highest standards in terms of human rights, fundamental rights, health and safety at work, and the environment.

The Director General,

Jean-Pierre CHAMPEAUX