



Impacts of oil palm on employment, demography and gender issues in Kalangala

The main aim for introducing oil palm in Uganda's Lake Victoria islands has been to improve livelihoods through income generation. However, this has only been seen as positive for a small group while many other impacts on pertinent social issues related to employment, demography and gender negatively affected local livelihoods.

Detailed research undertaken in 2018 summarizes these impacts and makes solid recommendations to the main players, based on the findings and lessons learned.

Recommendations

Oil palm has been produced in Kalangala for over 12 years, with many lessons learned. But to ensure mistakes are not repeated in Buvuma where planting is yet to begin, actions are needed by the government, donors and BIDCO.

1. The government should make clear to communities the unintended consequences of oil palm development, including positive/ negative aspects of in-migration, and try to minimize the impacts. This should be done prior to starting projects, and women, men and youth should be part of such sensitisation programmes.
2. The government and donors must commit to gender issues, and undertake gender impact assessments prior to introducing oil palm. The National Oil Palm Project should engage the Ministry of Gender and the Equal Opportunities Commission to advise on appropriate gender mainstreaming actions and ensure related mitigation actions are developed, implemented and monitored.
3. The government should develop a comprehensive plan including land-use law and resettlement action plans, in advance of the now expected population movements into new oil palm growing districts.
4. The government should put in place a quota system for the employment of local people, to ensure that there is good representation of locals (Islanders) in different work opportunities that are/will be created.
5. The government should fast track the implementation of the recently passed minimum wage, and develop feasible tracking and compliance mechanisms to address issues of worker exploitation and wage inequalities in the palm oil industry.
6. Undertake further studies to assess growing inequalities regarding plantation ownership, and make recommendations on how to limit elite and corporate capture in oil palm landscapes. The government should also recommend minimum areas for smallholder oil palm plantations to be viable.

Main findings

Kalangala – Major activities used to be lumbering, fishing and subsistence agriculture. The introduction of oil palm alongside depletion of the natural stock of forests and fish led to a shift in employment to oil palm, attracting a massive influx of people from within and outside Uganda who make up more than 70% of those working in the oil palm sector. In all formal employment, only 15% are people from the island, occupying low and poorly paying positions, and only 18% are women. In the informal sector, including fishing, more than 85% are men, and amongst boat owners, only 5% are women. The number of businesses has also increased to meet the demands of the growing population.

However, with increasing income, there has been rise in social evils including prostitution, HIV and domestic violence, with no extra efforts in place to address these issues. The attention of government and other key actors has been on creating employment opportunities and improving community livelihoods with no specific programmes targeted at addressing the social problems caused. The National Gender Policy 2007 obliges the government to carry out gender analysis for any programme, but in Kalangala there was no separate gender analysis and impact assessment prior to or during project implementation. Oil palm has created employment but the increase in income has exacerbated gender inequality. Results from this study reveal that only 30% of the oil palm growers are women and they have smaller land holdings compared to men. Also, women hold only 18% of jobs in OPUL and very few at management level. Regarding wages, the study found that OPUL employs over 1000 casual labourers but it was difficult to obtain information on their salaries.

Buvuma – About 70% of the population are not original inhabitants, most engaged in fishing and subsistence agriculture. Recent mass acquisition of land for oil palm has resulted in displacement, and less land for farming,

leading to some growing rice in wetland areas, with at least 100 hectares already converted. With further loss of farmland, it is expected that levels of malnutrition will increase, with pressure on the health sector. Social impacts are seen with many reports of family break-downs and neglect as men sold land and concluded all negotiations without involving their spouses. Some men left to the mainland with the proceeds and never came back, while others came back with nothing left. Oil palm will create employment opportunities, but the extent to which the local population will benefit from this project is questionable. In addition, a population surge is expected once oil palm is introduced and starts to be planted, and mitigating the associated negative impacts need to be planned for. Many local communities are very sceptical about what the anticipated project holds for them, and the government has made no effort to ensure that people are resettled properly and that money paid has been put to good use.

Methodology

This study was undertaken in Kalangala (Bugala) and Buvuma island in July-August 2018, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Statistical data was obtained from published reports. Qualitative data was cross-sectional, using focus group discussions with oil palm outgrowers, coffee and subsistence farmers, fishing communities, and OPUL staff in Bwendero and Beeta, with key informant interviews including district officials, banking institutions, KOPGT (Kalangala Oil Palm Growers Trust), selected hotels and other businesses in Kalangala town. Results should feed into proposed implementation of the new ten-year National Oil Palm Project (NOPP).

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