

## Community briefing: Transparency of land-based investments in Cameroon

In 2019 the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment met with six communities in the département de l'Océan to learn about their experiences of nearby agribusiness projects. We wanted to understand community members' ability to access and understand information about the projects, and their ability to use information to influence decisions about the investments and to resolve their grievances.

Communities told us:	We therefore call for a new law that:
<p> <b>Access:</b> Community members found it hard to get information and documents about nearby investments. This made it hard to know what the companies' responsibilities were and what rights the community had.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enables community members, including women, youth, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities, to access relevant information about nearby investments in an understandable form, before important decisions are made, on a regular basis, and in local languages</li> </ul>
<p> <b>Exclusion:</b> Many decisions are first made in Yaoundé without involving the community. This stops the community from deciding how to manage its land and resources. It can also lead to serious problems and conflict.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mandates that communities must get information and opportunities to influence decisions before any project is authorized or expanded</li> </ul>
<p> <b>Comprehension:</b> Community members were not able to understand and act on the information they were given. Older documents were often lost when a chief passed away.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowers community members to know their rights and influence decision-making</li> <li>Requires companies to pay for communities to get independent advice and support</li> </ul>
<p> <b>Information use:</b> Community members could not always effectively participate in decision-making processes. Government actors controlled dialogues, and some community members did not speak up because they felt intimidated. Administrative and judicial authorities were also seen as not being supportive of community concerns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes fair dialogue processes that include Indigenous people, women and other community groups, not just chiefs</li> <li>Includes more effective grievance and judicial processes for communities</li> </ul>
<p> <b>Community information:</b> Community members want information about their own circumstances to feed into decisions about land use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes and incorporates community-generated information into formal decision-making</li> </ul>
<p> <b>Reactions, not rights:</b> Community members said governments and companies often wait until there is a complaint, rather than to respect community rights in the first place. Some communities barred roads just to get a chance to speak with company representatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes and protects all legitimate tenure rights, including undocumented communally-held customary land rights</li> </ul>
<p> <b>Community groups:</b> Indigenous communities felt excluded from dialogues and benefit sharing. There was also a risk of excluding women and girls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Takes gender and Indigenous communities' rights and circumstances into account when designing dialogues and other processes</li> </ul>
<p> <b>Benefits:</b> Community members found it hard to access information needed to hold companies to their promises to improve schools or help local farmers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Includes communities in the design of benefit sharing arrangements</li> <li>Allocates communities legal rights to enforce company promises</li> <li>Requires companies to regularly share information about benefits</li> </ul>