

The Impact of Agricultural Concessions on the Work of Farmers and on the Surrounding Villages in the Urban Rural Commune of Maluku in Kinshasa (DRC)

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ABSTRACT

Maluku, being the largest of Kinshasa's peripheral communes, is unable to produce enough food crops to meet the needs of the city's population. One of the key causes of this insufficient production is the poor use of many agricultural concessions, which limits farmers' access to large, arable land areas. This limited production restricts farmers' ability to sell in sufficient quantity to generate income that could improve their diets and support the development of their villages. As a result, famine and poverty remain persistent in this urban-rural zone of Maluku. We therefore propose the following measures to the Provincial Government of Kinshasa: reclaim all unused agricultural concessions; redistribute the recovered land to active local farmers; provide technical support to farmers in Maluku; offer financial assistance to support agricultural activity; build and repair rural access roads for agriculture; regulate and inspect private vehicles transporting food products, to ensure farmer safety; prohibit and intervene against the uncontrolled conversion of agricultural land into poorly planned residential areas.

Keywords: Agriculture, Concession, Peasant, Agricultural production, Transportation

INTRODUCTION

The urban rural township of Maluku is the largest of the townships of the city-province of Kinshasa. It has an area of approximately 7,489 km² of which the total area of currently cultivated fields would represent more or less 10% of this area (according to the Maluku agricultural inspection in 2023).

In this article, we examine the impact of concession on the work of peasants and on the surrounding villages. We remind you that the agricultural concession is defined as a geographical area reserved for food crops, livestock farming, fish farming and market gardening.

This concession can become a farm from the moment it exploits certain rural activities which produce agricultural goods for the benefit of the population for consumption or for sale (declaration of the general states of agriculture in Kinshasa, 2021). But despite its remarkable size, Maluku is unable to sufficiently feed its local populations and those of the city of Kinshasa. It has a deficit in self-consumed food crops and in food security.

Statistical data published in the yearbook of the national agricultural statistics service have been denouncing this deficiency since March 2013 which continues to this day. It seems that this situation would be a consequence of the absence for several years of an agricultural policy followed and supported by legislation capable of boosting agricultural production in the countryside (Nyoka, 2001).

Pinned among the causes which would be responsible for agricultural underproduction, we wanted to know the impact of agricultural concessions on the work of the farmers from whom the owners demand \$63 of land rental per hectare for two years of renewable occupation. We also wanted to see this impact on the surrounding villages from a socio-economic point of

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METHODS AND TECHNIQS USED FOR THIS RESEARCH

However, we conducted the investigation at the Maluku agricultural inspection office to assess as an indication, the importance of the spaces occupied by agricultural concessions in the ten localities chosen study areas. The field surveys were based on the questionnaire and interviews reserved for concessionaires, traditional chiefs and to the populations of the villages located in the vicinity of the concessions. To do this, the methods and techniques that we actually used are:

- The historical method for spatially situating the movement of populations in villages, the secondary non-agricultural activities carried out by the peasants;
- The comparative method to locate and compare the different concessions in the villages, their dimensions, their exploitation and their constraints;
- The descriptive method for explaining the relationships between landlords and peasants, activities, their marketing channels to assess their degree of rurality;
- The statistical method for developing the tables contained in this article.

b) The techniques used:

We used the data collection and processing techniques listed below:

- The documentary research in the basic scientific works for the acquisition of general knowledge in relation to our article;
- Free observation of the terrain which allowed us to observe natural and humanized landscapes, cultivated fields, productions, rural housing of peasants;
- The interview which allowed us to obtain useful information from the targeted people;
- The GIS which allowed us to exploit the data and to produce the tables and comments;
- The survey questionnaire addressed to the key players: customary chiefs, concessionaires, municipal authorities and selected peasants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The responses received allowed the table below to be drawn up.

Table 1: Number of concession holders and their owners by location and gender

N°	Localities	Numbers of Concessions	Female Owners	Male Owners
1	Menkao-Inkien	158	23	135
2	Mbakana	62	13	49
3	Kingakati	56	17	39
4	Mongala	60	11	49
5	Dumi	41	10	31
6	Bu	88	11	77
7	Kikimi	45	15	30
8	Yuo	50	20	30
9	Kibonoka	55	11	44
	Total	615	131 (21,30%)	484 (78,7%)

Source: Kayembe Kabasele (Field survey 2023)

The comparing data in the table allows us to say that the locality of Menkao has more concessions than all the others, namely 158 out of 615 and of which 135 belong to men. On the other hand, the locality of Dumi has 41 agricultural concessions, 31 of which belong to men.

The ease of movement seems to be the mobilizing factor of the distribution of concessions in this urban-rural space. In fact, transport poses many problems due to the absence of agricultural service roads.

a) Regarding the viability of concessions and workers:

- There are more men, 484 out of 615, while there are only 131 women;
- Many owners are not professionals in the agricultural sector. They are amateurs. Among them are deputies, senators, ministers, presidents of private and public companies, officers of the army and the Congolese national police, public administration agents and executives and traders.
- It is important to point out that many of these concessions are not farms. Because the activities generally developed on a farm (agriculture, livestock, market gardening, fish farming) are not carried out there. As for agricultural production, we wanted to identify the fundamental causes of the failure to develop these vast areas.
- We also wanted to know the cost of operating a hectare of cassava. The results obtained in this regard made it possible to establish the table below.

Table 2: Cultivation operations and their cost per hectare of cassava

N°	Cultural Operations	Unit Cost \$	Total Cost \$
1	Stump removal	63,15	63,15
2	Plowing	63,15	63,15
3	Harrowing	63,15	63,15
4	Ridging	63,15	63,15
5	Buying cuttings	3, 9 x 30 bags	117
6	Planting	35	35
7	Weeding	35 x 2	70
8	Care	70	70
9	Harvesting	35	35
10	Packaging (rusting, drying, bagging, transport)	35 x 3 operations 1,75 x 15 bags	105 26,3
Total			710,9

Source: Kayembe Kabasele (Field survey 2023)

The apparently high exploitation cost per hectare of cassava (2,325,000 CFA) would be one of the reasons why these vast expanses of land are not being developed the concessions.

The field survey carried out in 2023 indicates that several politicians and senior administrative officials have large concessions whose dimensions vary between 100 and 1000 hectares. These localities bordering the township towards Yuo, Kikimi, Bu, Mongala, and so on. It was found that several of these concessions are not being exploited even though they contain land that would be used by active Farmers looking for agricultural land that could guarantee production in Maluku.

Having noted the absence of activities in these concessions for several years as well as the conflicts that arise from them, the Maluku Agricultural Inspection service has made administrative reports relating to the situation. However, no reaction from the hierarchy has been recorded for unacknowledged seasons.

The number of workers working in these concessions is small compared to the size of the land and the possible activities that could be carried out there. Several of these workers are over 50 years old. Many of them are underqualified in agriculture. Physically and materially, they are marked by apparent poverty.

It often happens that for certain work to be carried out, the owners recover from day laborers or they rent tractors for well-defined jobs. It is important to note that despite all this, there are few concessions in which cultivated fields do not reach more than 4 hectares at least.

This low exploitation does not allow concessionaires to have a good production. In addition, it has been noted that the owners do not want to hire technicians trained in agriculture. This fear is justified by salaries to be paid and other social benefits to be given to them which would be expensive. These include school and academic fees, medical care costs and various social cases.

It should be noted that the current number of concessions in Maluku could partially solve the thorny problem of youth unemployment in these rural areas, it would be enough to require concessionaires to hire a certain number of workers per activity to be carried out on each farm. But alas! The competent authorities in this matter have not yet realized this opportunity.

Furthermore, contrary to their agricultural mission, several of these officials are involved in purely commercial activities such as: the manufacture of charcoal, the rental of arable land as residential plots, and so on. This last case is a phenomenon which is very remarkable in the concessions located along the national road number 1, and in those located around the towns in the process of urbanization towards the provinces of Kwango and Kwilu.

It is also important to note that many women and several independent people have concessions whose dimensions vary between 1 and 5 hectares. But, the cultivated fields rarely reach 1 or 2 hectares due to the rather high operating costs for them. They confirmed during our investigations.

b) Regarding the negative impacts of concessions on the work of farmers

The farmers complain of the following:

- It often happens that several tenant farmers are ordered to leave the occupied lands at the end of the term (after 2 years). If they wish to continue to exploit these lands, they must renew their contract by paying the owners 180,000 CFA or \$63 per hectare for 2 years.
- This practice often creates conflicts between farmers and owners when the contract is not respected by the tenants. This practice discourages insolvent farmers and those who are unable to find better work elsewhere despite their clear desire to farm.

These conflicts lead to the belief that the presence of numerous concessions in the localities would constitute a serious handicap to the work of farmers who are forced to leave the occupied lands. Unable to assert themselves, they remain blocked in their ambitions, while thousands of hectares of lands continue to remain unoccupied in Maluku.

This is why it would be necessary to review the rental conditions of these lands and the harshness of their exploitation. Because the cultivation of several plants such as fruit trees requires more than 2 years to reach maturity. However, given the concessionaires' refusal to engage in dialogue, we believe that government intervention would be necessary to recover all undeveloped land. This land would be redistributed to the working population identified by the municipal authorities in collaboration with traditional chiefs.

This concern is already noted in reports prepared by the Maluku Agricultural Inspection Office. These reports are reportedly misused or expressly rejected by the competent authorities of the relevant provincial and central government ministries involved in this area. This problem persists and has not found a solution desired and expected by the farmers.

c) Regarding the impact of the concession on the surrounding villages:

- Asked about this, villagers stated about the concessions do not exert much visible influence on their direct environment. It happens several times that the concessionaires accuse the populations of the neighboring villages to steal the produce of their fields, but without proof. Following this accusation, the villagers cursed the deader and come into conflict with them several times.

This situation of disagreement and mistrust explains the fact that the owners rent vehicles that transport their products directly to the point of sale. These sales outlets are located in the towns of Maluku, far from the villages or in other townships of Kinshasa. Under these conditions, it is difficult for the Maluku agricultural office to know the nature, quantities of products sold and the revenues generated by leaders. Therefore, it is not possible to produce relevant agricultural statistics.

Following the behavior of the concessionaires, municipal officials and local populations say that the contribution of the concessions to the development of the villages is not visible. It is negative, because the concessionaires do nothing for the villages. They don't create anything, they don't maintain agricultural access roads. They don't build socio-economic infrastructures that are missing in these background areas of Kinshasa. They do nothing for young people or for the various categories of vulnerable people living in the villages where they are based. Generally speaking, although present in all localities, the concessions do not fulfill their normal agricultural mission as they should.

It is believed that the abandonment and non-development of these lands would be the consequence of the disappointment due to the failure of the first project of some

concessionaires. For other concessionaires, the abandonment of the land would be due to their financial inability to face the high cost of operating the fields. Thus, the concessionaires are accused by all villages of hampering and preventing good agricultural production which would facilitate and guarantee the local development of Maluku villages.

The population also denounces some abuses committed by the customary authorities. It is the sale of vast lands and this to the detriment of their populations. Following these sales, populations are forced to leave lands sold to go and cultivate far from their villages. It should be noted that new buyers are obliged to sign the contract with the customary chiefs. They undertake to pay the customary chiefs a tenth of their annual field production.

But it often happens that failure to respect this commitment becomes the cause of open conflicts between customary chiefs and these purchasers. Some chiefs are accused of selling the same land to several people. This behavior is also the basic of the troubles that we are experiencing in some villages. Conflicts are also observed between members of the chief's clan who fight over clients for land for sale.

We believe that to bring order to the land sector, the rigorous application of the Bakajika law is essential. Its application would be one of the possibilities to realize the will expressed by the president of the Republic to ensure the soil's return to the subsoil in the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), a mission in charge of the ministry of Agriculture.

CONCLUSION

It is desirable that the government recovers all unused land that is unnecessarily blocked in several private agricultural concessions. It is necessary to encourage, assist and support farmers and partner NGOS in their activities. This would increase agricultural production in the villages of Maluku.

We believe that public-private partnerships, if properly implemented here in agriculture, would help combat agricultural underproduction; famine and poverty.

On the other hand, the absence of well-maintained agricultural access roads to facilitate the movement of people in the villages and to the sales points constitutes a handicap for the development of this peripheral area of Kinshasa.

Therefore, the intervention of the government, municipal authorities and development partners is essential to improve the working conditions of farmers and their live in Maluku. To reduce famine and poverty that persist in the urban-rural area of Maluku, we propose the following to the urban government of Kinshasa:

- Reclaim all unused land concessions;
- Redistribute the recovered land to identified active farmers;
- Provide technical support to the farmers of Maluku;
- Provide financial assistance to the farmers;
- Build and repair agricultural access roads in the villages;
- Inspect and verify the condition of vehicles transporting food products to ensure consumer safety;
- Prohibit and put an end to the unregulated conversion of agricultural land into poorly planned residential neighborhoods that do not include designated areas for local socio-economic infrastructure.

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