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A Legal Appraisal of the Role of Foreign Direct Investment in Promoting Sustainable Development in Cameroon: A Focus on Food Security

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Abstract

Since the promulgation of the Cameroon Investment Charter of 2002 and subsequent liberalization reforms, FDI has been strategically mobilized as an instrument to modernize agriculture through capital inflows, mechanization, technology transfer, and agro-industrial development. However, the outcomes have been ambivalent: while investment has spurred export growth, employment creation, and infrastructural expansion, it has also exacerbated land tenure disputes, environmental degradation, displacement of smallholder farmers, and the prioritization of cash crops over staple foods. Despite Cameroon's agricultural endowment, food insecurity persists, with nearly one in four citizens experiencing chronic hunger and malnutrition. Against this backdrop, this study examines the nexus between Foreign Direct Investment and food security in Cameroon, situating the discourse within the aspirations of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Findings reveals both opportunities and systemic risks: increased yields, market integration, and nutrition programs on one hand, and monoculture expansion, governance failures, and inequitable distribution on the other. We therefore recommend the need for sound institutional frameworks, transparent land governance, equitable labor practices, and complementary national policies that safeguard domestic food needs while leveraging foreign capital for sustainable transformation. This will go a long way for charting a development trajectory that is economically inclusive, socially just, and environmentally sustainable for Cameroon.

Keywords: legal appraisal, foreign direct investment, promoting, sustainable development, food security, Cameroon

1. Background

In recent years, Cameroon has sought to attract foreign investors into its agricultural sector through the Cameroon Investment Charter of 2002 and subsequent sectoral reforms aimed at liberalizing land access, offering tax incentives, and facilitating public-private partnerships. These policy frameworks have led to the establishment of agro-industrial plantations, agro-processing zones, and large-scale farming projects. While such ventures have introduced capital, mechanization, and employment opportunities, they have also generated tensions over land rights, environmental sustainability, the displacement of local farmers, and the prioritization of export crops over domestic food needs.[1]

Food security remains one of the most pressing challenges in Cameroon's pursuit of sustainable development. Despite its vast agricultural potential, fertile soils, and favourable agro-ecological zones, a significant proportion

[1] Bamou, E., et al. (2009). Trade and investment policy reforms in Cameroon: Impact assessment and perspectives. *African Journal of Economic Policy, 13*(1).

of the population continues to face chronic food insecurity, malnutrition, and limited access to nutritious and affordable food. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), approximately one in four Cameroonians is food insecure, a paradox in a country where agriculture employs more than 70% of the rural population and contributes significantly to GDP.[1] Against this backdrop, Foreign Direct Investment is increasingly being projected as a strategic instrument to augment agricultural productivity and enhance national food security. While agricultural investment can promote food security in the home country by increased availability of food, their efficacy in meeting these objectives remains a subject of intense scrutiny, particularly within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.[2]

This research investigates the relationship between FDI and food security in Cameroon, situating the discourse within the normative ambitions of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), which calls for the eradication of hunger, the achievement of food security, improved nutrition, and the promotion of sustainable agriculture. Beyond SDG 2, the research draws connections to SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) which ensures sustainable consumption and production patterns, promoting resource efficiency and waste reduction. As Cameroon stands at the crossroads of a food crisis and an investment-driven agricultural transformation, the lessons drawn here will be instrumental in developing a development path that truly reconciles foreign capital inflows with the sovereign right of all Cameroonians to food.

2. Conceptual Clarification of Food Security and Its Dimensions

Food security is a concept that has evolved in scope and depth since it first entered global policy discourse in the mid-1970s. Initially, the term was closely tied to the notion of ensuring sufficient global food supplies, reflecting a production- and trade-oriented perspective that emerged during the 1974 World Food Conference in response to acute shortages and price shocks.[3] Over time, however, scholars and international institutions recognized that the mere presence of adequate food at the national or global level did not guarantee that all individuals could access it. This recognition prompted a definitional shift toward more people-centered approaches, which emphasized the distribution, access, and utilization of food at the household and individual level.[4]

The most widely accepted modern definition comes from the 1996 World Food Summit, where the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) articulated food security as existing "when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life".[5] This definition captures the concept's inherent multidimensionality, which is often summarized in four pillars: availability, utilization, and stability.[6] Each pillar relates with the others, and failure in any one dimension can precipitate food insecurity even when the others are met.

Recent academic and policy debates have expanded the scope of food security beyond these four pillars to include notions of *agency*, *cultural acceptability*, and *sustainability*. Agency refers to individuals' and communities' capacity to make informed choices about what they eat and how food is produced and distributed, reflecting a human rights perspective on food systems.[7] Cultural acceptability ensures that food security is not only about caloric sufficiency but also about aligning diets with social norms, religious practices, and culinary traditions. Sustainability emphasizes that long-term food security must be underpinned by agricultural, economic, and ecological systems that do not undermine the ability of future generations to meet their food needs, a concern increasingly urgent in the context of climate change and environmental degradation.[8]

Food security is measured by two indicators to capture two FAO dimensions of food security, namely: (i) the prevalence of undernourishment, to measure access to food; and (ii) dietary energy consumption, to measure the

[1] Fonjong, L. N., & Gyapong, A. Y. (2021). Plantations, women, and food security in Africa: Interrogating the investment pathway towards zero hunger in Cameroon and Ghana. *World Development*, 140, 105356. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105356

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Shaw, D. J. (2007). *World Food Security: A History since 1945*. Palgrave Macmillan.

[4] Maxwell, S., & Smith, M. (1992). Household food security: A conceptual review. *World Development*, *21*(3), pp. 419–431.

[5] FAO. (1996). Rome Declaration on World Food Security. World Food Summit. Available at https://www.fao.org/4/w3613e/w3613e00.htm (visited on the 09/08/2025)

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] HLPE. (2020). *Food security and nutrition: Building a global narrative towards 2030*.

[8] Banerjee, A. (2025). Gender-transformative adaptation for food security, rural livelihoods, and agriculture. In *Climate Change Adaptation*. Springer.

availability of food.[1] Prevalence of undernourishment expresses the share of population that continuously consumes an amount of calories that is insufficient to cover their energy requirement for an active and healthy life. Dietary energy consumption is proxied by dietary energy supply.

Despite broad consensus on these conceptual dimensions, operationalizing and measuring food security remains challenging. The range of methodologies used from national food balance sheets to household-level indicators like the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) reflects differing priorities and contexts, but also complicates cross-country comparability.[2] Food security is not a static or purely technical condition; it is a socio-political construct that embodies questions of equity, justice, and governance. Its definitions mirrors the nature of hunger and malnutrition, where solutions must address not just the quantity of food, but its quality, cultural fit, and the systemic conditions that enable all individuals to enjoy a stable and dignified access to nourishment. Understanding food security in this comprehensive sense allows for more effective interventions that are resilient in the face of environmental, economic, and social change.[3]

2.1 The Dimensions of Food Security

There exists four main dimensions of food security including;

- **Availability**

Food availability refers to the physical presence of food in a given area, whether sourced from domestic production, imports, or food aid. It is fundamentally linked to agricultural productivity, storage capacity, and supply infrastructure and concerned with ensuring that adequate quantities of food are physically present within a given territory at all times. This presence can result from three main channels: domestic agricultural production, commercial imports, and food aid.[4] In the case of Cameroon, the availability of food is affected by its diverse agro-ecological zones, ranging from the humid coastal lowlands suitable for cocoa, banana, and oil palm production, to the Guinea savannahs and Sudano-Sahelian regions where cereals such as maize, millet, and sorghum are predominant.[5] Food availability in Cameroon is heavily dependent on rain-fed agriculture and the performance of the informal farming sector, which accounts for more than 70% of food production.[6] The country is largely self-sufficient in root crops like cassava and plantains, but it remains a net importer of rice, wheat, and certain dairy and meat products.[7] This reliance on imports for key staples exposes Cameroon to global market fluctuations, currency volatility, and supply disruptions, all of which sometimes affects food availability in the domestic market.

Agricultural productivity in Cameroon, characterized by fertile soils and favorable climatic conditions in certain regions, faces challenges that constrain overall food availability. These include low mechanization rates, limited access to quality inputs, weak extension services, and post-harvest losses estimated at between 20–30% for perishable crops.[8] Infrastructural deficits such as poor rural roads, inadequate storage facilities, and limited market connectivity further exacerbate the situation by reducing the efficiency with which food moves from production areas to consumption centers.[9] Seasonal variability and climatic shocks also play a significant role. For example, erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged dry spells in the Far North region have repeatedly reduced yields of staple cereals, leading to localized shortages despite surpluses elsewhere in the country.[10]

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[1] The most widely accepted definition of food security is that "[it] exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO et al., 2022, p. 202). This definition encompasses the four dimensions of food security, namely: (i) availability; (ii) access; (iii) stability; and (iv) utilization.

[2] Coates, J., Swindale, A., & Bilinsky, P. (2007). *Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) for Measurement of Food Access*. USAID.

[3] Liu, B., Chen, M., Kharbeche, M., & Kerbache, L. (2025). A systematic review of food accessibility in food supply chains. *Supply Chain Analytics*, 3, 100049.

[4] FAO. (2008). An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security.

[5] MINADER. (2022). Agricultural Statistics Yearbook: Cameroon. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Yaoundé.

[6] IFPRI. (2021). Cameroon: Agricultural Sector Growth and Investment Opportunities. International Food Policy Research Institute. https://www.ifpri.org/publication/agriculture-sector-growth-and-investment-opportunities-cameroon

[7] World Bank. (2021). Cameroon: Agricultural Sector Risk Assessment. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.

[8] FAO. (2021). Country Programming Framework for Cameroon 2022–2026.

[9] FAO Improving Infrastructure and Trade-related Capacities for Market Access. Available at https://www.fao.org/4/y6831e/y6831e-04.htm (visited on the 09/08/2025)

[10] *Ibid.*

Food availability dimension in Cameroon is also affected by socio-political instability, particularly in the North-West and South-West regions, which are major production zones for crops such as maize, beans, and cocoa. Ongoing conflict in these areas has led to displacement of farming populations, abandonment of arable land, and disruption of agricultural supply chains.[1] This has not only reduced domestic production volumes but also increased pressure on food availability in more stable regions through internal migration and market distortions.

In the wake of these, Foreign Direct Investments has been promoted as a mechanism to increase availability through technology transfer, improved irrigation, and expanded agro-processing capacity. However, the focus of some FDI-backed agribusinesses on export-oriented crops (e.g., palm oil, rubber) rather than staple food production may not always enhance national food availability.[2]

- **Accessibility**

Accessibility addresses whether individuals and households have the economic and physical means to acquire adequate food. It involves both market access (infrastructure, transportation, and distance to food sources) and purchasing power (income levels, food prices, and social safety nets). Even in food-surplus areas, poor households may remain food insecure due to low incomes or high market prices. Accessibility is the hinge of food security, the everyday test of whether food is close enough and cheap enough to be claimed by real households.[3] In authoritative usage, food security exists only when people have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food; the "access" pillar therefore fuses geography with purchasing power: working roads, working markets, and wages that keep pace with prices.[4]

History (and present crises) show that hunger often grows not from empty granaries but from broken entitlements when incomes collapse, prices surge, roads fail, or conflict severs the last mile, people lose command over food even when national supply looks adequate. In plain terms: if markets are too far or food is priced beyond a week's earnings, availability on paper does not translate into dinner on the table.[5]

In Cameroon, access has tightened because prices have outpaced incomes and because the physical cost of moving food remains high in too many corridors. Official statistics recorded inflation running at an average 5.7% over the twelve months to June 2024, with food driving much of the pressure; in this context even modest price shocks push poor households to cut meal frequency, substitute toward cheaper starches, or sell assets.[6] Field outlooks through 2024–2025 echo the same pattern: elevated prices and insecurity constrain access ahead of lean seasons, especially for market-dependent poor households. These are classic access failures households cannot reach or afford adequate food long before the country runs short in aggregate.[7]

Banana and palm-oil estate such as Plantations du Haut Penja (Compagnie Fruitière group) and the Cameroon Development Corporation have historically been among the country's major private employers, with PHP alone representing the dominant share of national banana exports in 2024 and many thousands of direct jobs; those wages ripple through township markets and raise the economic side of access. Yet the caution is equally real: when investments are derailed by conflict (as with CDC operations in the Anglophone regions) or when land governance and community safeguards are weak (as shown in recurrent allegations around SOCAPALM estates), entitlements can be undercut wages interrupted, smallholders displaced, and community market routes strained. The policy lesson is blunt and practical: anchor FDI in enforceable labor standards, transparent concessions, grievance redress, smallholder and out-grower contracts, and co-financed feeder-road maintenance; do that, and investment reliably converts to food within reach and within budget.

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[1] Nebamforsah, P. C., & Wuchu, C. W. (2025). Socio-political crisis and agricultural production in Mezam, North West Region of Cameroon. *Global Scientific Journals, 13*(3). ISSN 2320-9186.

[2] De Schutter, O. (2011). "How Not to Think of Land-Grabbing: Three Critiques of Large-Scale Investments in Farmland". *Journal of Peasant Studies, 38*(2), 249–279.

[3] World Bank. What is Food Security? There are Four Dimensions. Available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-update/what-is-food-security?utm_source (visited on the 09/08/2025)

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] INS Cameroon. Brief on trends of household final consumer prices – June 2024 (inflation 5.7% 12-month average). Available at https://ins-cameroun.cm/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Brief-on-trends-of-household-final-consumer-prices-in-june-2024.pdf?utm (visited on the 09/08/2025)

[7] FEWS NET. Cameroon Food Security Outlook (Oct 2023–May 2024) and Outlook Feb–Sept 2024 (price-driven access constraints). Available at https://fews.net/west-africa/cameroon/food-security-outlook/october-2023?utm (visited on the 09/08/2025)

- **Utilization**

Utilization encompasses the biological and nutritional use of food, including dietary diversity, food safety, and access to clean water and healthcare. It refers not just to the quantity of food consumed but also to its quality and the body's ability to absorb and use nutrients. Utilization as a dimension of food security refers to the way in which the body effectively uses the food consumed to meet its dietary needs for a healthy and active life. It extends beyond the mere presence of food to include its nutritional quality, safety, preparation, and the health conditions necessary for nutrient absorption. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, utilization encompasses inter-alia food handling, preparation, diversity, and access to safe drinking water, as well as adequate sanitation and healthcare, all of which influence the body's capacity to absorb and metabolize nutrients effectively.[1] Poor food utilization can occur even in contexts where availability and access are secure if diets lack essential nutrients, or if diseases and unsafe water compromise the body's ability to use those nutrients.[2]

In the Cameroonian context, utilization is a concern due to the rate of malnutrition, inadequate sanitation, and limited dietary diversity in certain regions. Despite Cameroon being agriculturally endowed, an estimated 29% of children under five are stunted, reflecting chronic malnutrition.[3] This problem is particularly acute in the Far North, East, and conflict-affected Northwest and Southwest regions, where displacement, insecurity, and poor health infrastructure impedes the capacity of households to prepare safe, nutritionally balanced meals.[4] The prevalence of waterborne diseases, such as cholera, in areas with limited access to clean drinking water further affects nutrient absorption and exacerbates food insecurity.[5] Even where staple foods are available, diets often lack sufficient protein, vitamins, and minerals, leading to "hidden hunger".[6]

Efforts to address utilization in Cameroon have included integrated food and nutrition programs that combine food distribution with nutrition education, improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions, and promotion of dietary diversity. The government's Convergence Action Blueprint for food systems transformation also emphasizes the importance of safe food preparation, promotion of locally produced nutritious foods, and the strengthening of public health measures to reduce infection-related nutrient losses.[7]

- **Stability**

Stability refers to the consistency of availability, access, and utilization over time. A population is food secure only if these three dimensions are maintained consistently, without disruptions due to economic volatility, conflict, natural disasters, or climate change. Stability as a dimension of food security refers to the capacity of individuals, households, and nations to consistently maintain adequate access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food over time without being vulnerable to sudden shocks or cyclical fluctuations. Even if availability, access, and utilization are assured at a given point, food security cannot be considered complete unless these conditions remain stable in the face of adverse events such as economic crises, environmental disasters, political instability, or seasonal variations. The Food and Agriculture Organization emphasizes that stability requires the absence of risk of losing access to food due to either transitory factors, short-term and sudden shocks, or cyclical issues such as seasonal shortages that regularly affect agricultural production and prices.[8]

Maxwell and Frankenberger argue that stability integrates both temporal and resilience dimensions, meaning it is not only about present adequacy but also about the ability of the food system to absorb and recover from

[1] FAO. (2008). An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Available at: https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/4feaa4a3-f06e-5e8b-a0b9-3d6e9a7f8e5a (visited on the 01/08/2025)

[2] USAID. (1992). Policy Determination 19: Definition of Food Security. United States Agency for International Development. Available at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/PolicyDetermination19.pdf (visited on the 01/08/2025)

[3] World Food Programme. (2024). Cameroon Country Brief. Available at: https://www.wfp.org/countries/cameroon (visited on the 03/08/2025)

[4] FAO. (2023). Cameroon Nutrition Profile. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Available at: https://www.fao.org/nutrition/education/food-dietary-guidelines/regions/countries/cameroon (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[5] UNICEF. (2023). Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report. United Nations Children's Fund. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/appeals/cameroon (visited on the 09/08/2025)

[6] *Ibid*.

[7] UN Food Systems Coordination Hub. (2023). Cameroon Convergence Action Blueprint. Available at: https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/docs/unfoodsystemslibraries/convergence-initiative/cameroon/convergence-action-blueprint_cameroon.pdf (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[8] FAO. (2008). Opcit.

disruptions.[1] In the Cameroonian context, stability in food security is still a challenge as it is affected by socio-political, economic, and environmental factors. The country's agricultural sector, which employs a significant proportion of the population, is heavily dependent on rain-fed farming, making it highly vulnerable to seasonal changes and climate variability. Periods of drought in the northern regions and flooding in parts of the Far North and coastal areas often cause severe production fluctuations, which in turn destabilize food availability and drive price volatility.[2] These disruptions have reduced both household income and the steady flow of food commodities from rural production zones to urban consumption areas, creating conditions of transitory food insecurity.[3]

Economic instability also affects stability in Cameroon's food security. Inflationary pressures, particularly in the wake of global commodity price surges, have reduced the purchasing power of vulnerable households, making them more susceptible to temporary or prolonged food shortages. Research using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) has shown that a significant share of Cameroonians, about 54% experience either moderate or severe food insecurity, with poorer households disproportionately affected by such instability.[4] Furthermore, infrastructural deficits in storage, processing, and transportation contribute to high post-harvest losses, especially for perishable goods such as fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. These losses does not only reduces the stability of the food supply but also exacerbate seasonal shortages by reducing the availability of food during the lean months.[5]

3. Food Security and the Un Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, positions food security at the heart of global development, most explicitly through Goal 2: "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture".[6] This goal is not simply about alleviating hunger but about ensuring that all individuals have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food all year round. The fact that it encompassing availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability of food means SDG 2 is closely tied to economic, environmental, and social systems. It addresses structural barriers such as poverty, inequality, unsustainable farming practices, and climate change, which threaten food systems globally.[7] By linking hunger eradication with sustainable agriculture, SDG 2 promotes an integrated approach that strengthens rural economies, safeguards ecosystems, and enhances resilience to shocks like pandemics, conflicts, and extreme weather events.[8]

From a food security perspective, SDG 2 advances the idea that agricultural productivity must grow in harmony with environmental stewardship. It advances that, the producing more food without degrading natural resources is central to meeting rising global food demands while limiting greenhouse gas emissions and preserving biodiversity.[9] Moreover, attention to equitable distribution is vital: inequality, particularly along gender lines, remains a major barrier to realizing SDG 2, as women often have less access to land, credit, and decision-making

[1] Maxwell, S. & Frankenberger, T. (1992). Household Food Security: Concepts, Indicators, Measurements. Rome: IFAD and UNICEF., Available at, https://www.sciepub.com/reference/212770 (Visited on the 10/08/2025)

[2] Molua, E. L. (2009). An Empirical Assessment of the Impact of Climate Change on Smallholder Agriculture in Cameroon. *Global and Planetary Change*, *67*(3-4), 205–208.

[3] Nfor, B. M. & Ngwa, M. C. (2021). Armed Conflict and Food Security in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, *16*(2), 220–234.

[4] Nolla, N. P., Nono, N. M., & Awono, B. (2024). Determinants of Household Food Insecurity in Cameroon: Evidence from the Food Insecurity Experience Scale. *BMC Nutrition*, *10*(15), 1–12.

[5] Hodges, R. J., Buzby, J. C., & Bennett, B. (2011). Postharvest Losses and Waste in Developed and Less Developed Countries: Opportunities to Improve Resource Use. *Journal of Agricultural Science*, *149*(S1), 37–45.

[6] United Nations. (2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York: United Nations. Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda (visited on the 07/08/2025)

[7] Rickards, L., & Shortis, E. (2019). SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. RMIT University.

[8] Gil, J. D. B., Reidsma, P., Giller, K., Todman, L., et al. (2019). Sustainable development goal 2: Improved targets and indicators for agriculture and food security. *Ambio*, *48*, 685–698.

[9] Fanzo, J. (2019). Healthy and sustainable diets and food systems: the key to achieving sustainable development goal 2? *Food Ethics*, *4*, 159–174. Available at https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41055-019-00052-6 (visited on the 10/08/2025)

power despite being key contributors to agricultural output.[1]

The nexus between food security and other SDGs mean that progress on this issue is not confined to Goal 2 alone. Goals related to poverty reduction (Goal 1), health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), gender equality (Goal 5), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), climate action (Goal 13), and partnerships (Goal 17) are all essential to building resilient and equitable food systems.[2] The recognition that hunger is both a cause and consequence of underdevelopment underscores the need for an integrated policy framework where food security is addressed holistically rather than in isolation.[3]

In practical terms, the SDGs approach to food security calls for increasing agricultural productivity and incomes, particularly among smallholder farmers, who form the backbone of food production in many developing countries. The FAO stresses that sustainable intensification of production through investment in technology, capacity building, and infrastructure can improve both the availability and stability of food supplies.[4] The SDGs also recognize the role of nutrition in food security. Beyond ensuring that people have enough to eat, the goals emphasize the need for diverse, safe, and nutritious diets that meet the needs of all individuals, especially vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly.[5] This emphasis connects directly to Goal 3 on good health and well-being, as malnutrition in all its forms undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overnutrition remains a major global health challenge.[6] Strengthening social protection systems, as envisioned in Goals 1 and 2, ensures that vulnerable households can withstand economic or environmental shocks without falling into food insecurity.[7]

4. The Role of Foreign Direct Investment in Strengthening Food Security

In recent decades, Foreign Direct Investment has emerged as a driver in addressing food security challenges, particularly in developing economies where capital, technology, and infrastructure gaps hinder agricultural productivity. By channeling financial resources, modern farming techniques, and improved supply chain systems into the agricultural sector, FDI enhances food availability, improve market efficiency, and promote sustainable farming practices. In contexts where local investment capacity is limited, FDI offers a pathway to modernize agricultural production, expand agro-processing, and strengthen food distribution networks, thereby contributing directly to the pillars of food security: availability, access, utilization, and stability.

4.1 The Link Between Foreign Direct Investment and Food Security

Foreign Direct Investment has increasingly been recognized as a double-edged instrument in the quest for global food security. On one hand, inflows of FDI into agriculture and related sectors can provide much-needed capital, technology transfer, and infrastructure improvements that enhance agricultural productivity, post-harvest handling, and market access all of which are central to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2, Zero Hunger.[8] Research in the Asia–Pacific region, for example, shows that agricultural FDI contributes to food security by increasing access to modern farming technologies, increasing crop yields, and enhancing agribusiness development, especially when accompanied by measures that safeguard local food systems and land rights.[9]

For instance, studies on Pakistan under the Belt and Road Initiative show that Chinese FDI in irrigation systems, rural roads, and agro-processing has significantly boosted sustainable food production capacity.[10] Similarly,

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[1] Agarwal, B. (2018). Gender equality, food security and the sustainable development goals. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, *34*, 26–32.

[2] Sachs, J. D. (2015). *The Age of Sustainable Development*. New York: Columbia University Press.

[3] Maxwell, S. & Slater, R. (2003). Food Policy Old and New. *Development Policy Review*, *21*(5-6), 531–553.

[4] FAO. (2017). *The Future of Food and Agriculture: Trends and Challenges*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

[5] Kummu, M., de Moel, H., Porkka, M., Siebert, S., Varis, O., & Ward, P. J. (2012). Lost Food, Wasted Resources: Global Food Supply Chain Losses and Their Impacts on Freshwater, Cropland, and Fertiliser Use. *Science of the Total Environment*, *438*, 477–489.

[6] Black, R. E., Victora, C. G., Walker, S. P., et al. (2013). Maternal and Child Undernutrition and Overweight in Low-Income and Middle-Income Countries. *The Lancet*, *382*(9890), 427–451.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Ali, Z., et al. (2025). The Role of the Belt and Road Initiative in Advancing Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security in Pakistan. *African Journal of Economics, Sustainability and Development*, *8*(2), pp. 82-105.

[9] Bhat, M. N., Beg, A., & Ikram, F. (2024). Navigating the global knowledge economy: Temporal effects of regulatory environment and FDI on sustainable development in Asia–Pacific. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, *16*(2), 1-32.

[10] *Ibid.*

research from Zambia highlights that FDI-driven modernization of the agricultural sector introduced advanced farming techniques, improved seed varieties, and access to international markets, which collectively improved national food availability.[1] These investments supported the adoption of advanced farming technologies such as mechanized planting and harvesting, precision irrigation systems, and soil fertility management.[2]

Foreign direct investment in agriculture has gained increasing scope and scale in the context of reducing hunger and promoting food security for all. In 2014, UNCTAD estimated that the investment in agriculture and food security required between 2015 and 2030 is $480 billion, and that the investment gap is $260 billion.[3] FDI is essential to closing the funding gap to increase food production and agricultural productivity. The developmental benefits of foreign investor involvement in investment in agriculture can be realized through four channels: (i) job creation; (ii) providing access to markets and technology for local producers; (iii) local and national tax revenues; and (iv) supporting social infrastructure, often through community development funds using land compensation. The actual impacts and implications vary across countries, by agricultural produce, and influenced by factors, such as the type of foreign involvement, the institutional environment, and the host country's level of development.[4]

The potential benefits of foreign investment in agriculture are counterweighted by the concerns raised due to the examples of the past decades. Firstly, the scale of investment projects involves large areas of land and affects a large number of people. Secondly, the sectoral breakdown of FDI reveals that investment flows to agriculture do not follow a steady pattern. Third, and more importantly, most land deals lack transparency and are either underreported or not reported at all, which makes monitoring a challenge. Concerns include the phenomenon of "land grabbing," where large tracts of arable land are acquired by foreign investors, sometimes displacing local farmers and prioritizing export-oriented crops over domestic food needs.[5]

In Myanmar, land governance issues have limited the pro-food security benefits of agricultural FDI, as insecure land tenure discourages smallholder participation and exacerbate rural inequality. In many instances, these investments involve foreign companies acquiring vast tracts of agricultural land, often through opaque concession processes that disregard customary tenure systems.[6] According to the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), about 65 per cent of the global land reserves are held by indigenous people and communities under customary tenure regimes, with only one-tenth being formally recognized.[7] In Myanmar, the land governance framework; including the Farmland Law of 2012 and the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law of 2012 has been criticized for enabling such acquisitions by granting state authorities wide powers to reallocate land to investors, often without adequate compensation or consent from local communities.[8] Research shows that insecure land tenure discourages smallholder participation in investment projects, heightens rural inequality, and enhances conflict over resource access.[9]

The sustainability of FDI's impact on food security is affected by macroeconomic stability, governance quality, and the presence of complementary policies. Countries with strong institutions and transparent governance are better able to channel foreign agricultural investments towards projects that contribute to domestic food availability and affordability, rather than purely serving export markets. Studies in the Asia–Pacific region

[1] Mabeta, J., & Smutka, L. (2024). Foreign direct investment and sugar production in Africa: a review. *Ukrainian Food Journal*, *13*(1), 27–4.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] UNCTAD World Investment Report 2014: Investing in the SDGs (New York and Geneva: United Nations).

[4] UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). (2009). *World Investment Report 2009: Transnational Corporations, Agricultural Production and Development* (New York and Geneva: United Nations).

[5] Canfield, M., Duncan, J., Madden, A., Anderson, M., et al. (2025). Why food systems governance must be grounded in human rights. *Nature Food*. https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-025-01217-9 (visited on the 12/08/2025)

[6] Scurrah, N., Hirsch, P., & Woods, K. (2015). *Foreign direct investment and land access*. Mekong Land Research Forum.http://mekonglandforum.org/sites/default/files/Extended%20Synopsis%2003%20FDI%20and%20land%20access%20revised.pdf (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[7] RRI (Rights and Resources Initiative). (2015). Who Owns the World's Land? A Global Baseline of Formally Recognized Indigenous and Community Land Rights (Washington, D.C.: RRI).

[8] Hirsch, P., Woods, K., & Scurrah, N. (2015). The political economy of land governance in Myanmar. Mekong Land Research Forum. Available at https://www.mekonglandforum.org/sites/default/files/Political_Economy_of_Land_Governance_in_Myanmar.PDF (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[9] Antonio, M. E. R. (2015). Patterns of access to land by Chinese agricultural investors and their impacts on rural households in Mandalay Region, Myanmar. (Masters thesis, University of Hohenheim).

demonstrate that their sound regulatory frameworks not only attract higher-quality FDI but also ensure that such investments align with broader sustainable development priorities, including food security.[1]

Governance quality plays an important role because it determines how land rights, water use, and environmental protections are enforced. Without fair and secure land tenure systems, local communities risk being marginalized in favor of large-scale agribusiness operations, a phenomenon that has affected rural food security in several emerging economies.[2] Similarly, effective macroeconomic management including stable currency regimes and anti-inflationary policies helps protect vulnerable populations from global commodity price volatility, which can otherwise affect household food access when countries become heavily reliant on export-oriented agriculture.[3]

Complementary policies are equally invaluable. FDI alone does not guarantee improved food security unless it is integrated with national food security strategies that prioritize staple crop production, promote smallholder inclusion, and enhance domestic supply resilience. Countries lacking these safeguards risk deepening dependencies on volatile global markets. If agricultural FDI is not balanced between export and domestic food production, sudden changes in global prices such as the spikes during the 2007-2008 food crisis can trigger shortages and price surges in local markets.[4] These considerations are more crucial in volatile economies like Cameroon.

4.2 Trends and Patterns of FDI in the Agricultural Sector

Agricultural investments in developing countries have risen dramatically in recent decades with variations across regions, in target commodities, scale and how it has impacted smallholder farming. All these variations affect the socioeconomic outcomes of investments.[5] In general, FDI in agriculture comprises a small share of total FDI, as compared to other economic sectors. However, such investments have grown globally since the mid-1990s and, after 2007, FDI inflows to developing country agriculture rose significantly. This development is explained by several factors.[6]

The pace of global foreign investments in the agricultural slowed before the 2008 global financial crisis and was followed by a sharp decline which lasted until 2011. The pace picked up momentum again until its subsequent decline in 2021.[7] The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) shows a continuing decline in the numbers of international private investment projects in the food and agriculture sector, which have not recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite an overall increase, FDI inflows in agriculture fluctuates remarkably and reacts strongly to global economic shocks.[8]

These sudden changes in FDI inflows make developing countries more vulnerable to global business cycles than their developed-county counterparts. Regional distribution of FDI in agriculture has been highly uneven, even though it has overall increased. The East Asia and the Pacific region has received the most FDI in the agriculture sector since 1995. FDI to the region has increased, led by high economic growth, strong institutional capacities, large potentials in agricultural industries and government incentives. Until recently, China was the main FDI destination in the region, but South-East Asian countries have managed to attract increasingly larger shares of FDI. Indonesia has been a prime target of farmland investments: from 2015 to 2019, it was the world's largest recipient of FDI inflows to agriculture, with average inflows of $3.1 billion per year.[9] China accounted for the largest portion of investment in agriculture since 1995, rising as high as 85 percent of total FDI in the sector in

[1] Bhat, M. N., Beg, A., & Ikram, F. (2024). *Opcit*.

[2] Canfield, M., Duncan, J., Madden, A., Anderson, M., et al. (2025). Why food systems governance must be grounded in human rights. *Nature Food*. https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-025-01217-9 (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[3] FAO, IFAD, UNCTAD, & World Bank Group. (2010). Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment that Respects Rights, Livelihoods and Resources (RAI). https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/unctad_iir2009_en.pdf (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[4] Ceadey, D., & Fan, S. (2010). Reflections on the global food crisis: How did it happen? How has it hurt? And how can we prevent the next one? *IFPRI Research Monograph*. https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896291812RM165 (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[5] Deininger, Klaus, Derek Byerlee, Jonathan Lindsay, Andrew Norton, Harris Selod and Mercedes Stickler. (2011). Rising Global Interest in Farmland. Can It Yield Sustainable and Equitable Benefits? (Washington, D.C.: World Bank)

[6] Berna Dogana. (2022). Does FDI in agriculture promote food security in developing countries? *The role of land governance.* Available at https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diaeia2022d3a3_en.pdf (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[7] UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). (2022). World Investment Report 2022: International Tax Reforms and Sustainable Investment (New York and Geneva: United Nations).

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Indonesia is followed by Norway with $940 million per year on average, and by Oman with $816 million per year on average from 2015 to 2019 (See FAO Report, 2022).

2008, before falling to 20 percent before the COVID-19 pandemic.[1]

Sub-Saharan African countries attract the smallest share of global FDI inflows to agriculture. However, the value of FDI flows to agriculture to these countries more than doubled in the period between 2010 and 2019, compared to between 2005 and 2009. This is due to a change of approach in how African governments deal with development and the rural sector. Political commitment to reduce poverty and hunger and increasing production and productivity in the agricultural industries were contained in the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in 2003, and the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) Compact in 2007. Government incentives to attract investments to the rural sector have encouraged transnational companies to consider investing in the region. According to the Land Matrix database, as of July 2022, 9.5 million hectares of land was acquired in sub-Saharan Africa for agricultural production.[2] Mozambique, Ethiopia and Ghana, in that order, were the top recipient countries of farmland investments in the region.

Historically, Cameroon's agricultural sector has attracted FDI largely in export-oriented crops such as cocoa, coffee, banana, and palm oil. Foreign Direct Investment in Cameroon's agricultural sector has followed fluctuating but discernible patterns over the past four decades, reflecting broader structural and policy shifts in the national economy. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, agricultural FDI was modest, with the oil boom diverting investment away from primary agriculture toward petroleum and extractive industries.[3] Following the economic crisis of the mid-1980s and subsequent structural adjustment programmes, liberalization policies encouraged greater openness to foreign investors, resulting in a gradual rise in agricultural FDI inflows, particularly in export-oriented commodities such as cocoa, coffee, palm oil, and bananas.[4] Between 2000 and 2010, data from UNCTAD indicate an average annual FDI inflow to Cameroon of USD 240 million, with agriculture consistently attracting between 8% and 12% of total inflows, largely driven by multinational agribusinesses and large-scale plantation projects.[5]

Recent statistics suggest a renewed emphasis on agribusiness investment, with the World Bank and FAO noting that between 2015 and 2020, Cameroon recorded an annual agricultural FDI growth rate of approximately 5%, buoyed by public-private partnerships and targeted incentives under the country's Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP).[6] Notable investments have been in palm oil expansion in the Southwest Region and rice production schemes in the Far North, with China, France, and South Africa among the leading investor nations. Nevertheless, inflows remain volatile due to political instability, fluctuating commodity prices, and infrastructural deficits. While agricultural FDI contributed to mechanization, technology transfer, and increased export earnings, evidence from 1978–2014 shows that exchange rate volatility and weak institutional capacity have hindered its full potential to drive sustainable agricultural growth.[7]

4.3 Challenges and Risks Associated with Agricultural FDI

Agricultural Foreign Direct Investment brings with it both opportunities and risks, particularly for host countries with developing economies. A principal and recurring challenge resides in land tenure insecurity, a condition wherein proprietary or usufructuary rights to land are either poorly documented, ambiguously defined, or susceptible to arbitrary interference. In many developing economies, customary tenure systems rooted in ancestral occupation or communal ownership coexist uneasily with statutory land regimes, creating a duality that foreign investors may exploit, intentionally or otherwise, through strategic contractual arrangements or asymmetrical bargaining power.[8]

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[1] See FAO Report 2022.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Zisuh, N. M. (2003). The role of foreign direct investments on export performance in Cameroon. *International Science, Technology and Society Forum*. Available at https://ia-forum.org/Files/OSJDQW.pdf (visited on the 11/08/2025)

[4] Djomo, R. F., Ukpe, U. H., & Nwalem, M. P. (2017). Foreign direct investment and exchange rate movement effects of agricultural growth: Evidence from Cameroon (1978–2014). *International Journal of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development*, *7*(1), 101–113. Available at https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/268447/ (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[5] Husmann, C., & Kubik, Z. (2019). Foreign direct investment in the African food and agriculture sector: Trends, determinants and impacts. *ZEF Discussion Papers on Development Policy*, 274. Available at https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/287431/

[6] Anaciet, C. T. (2019). Modern trends in agricultural development in Cameroon and ways to ensure its sustainability. *Economika APK*, 1, 21–33. Available at https://econommeneg.btsau.edu.ua/sites/default/files/visnyky/economika/econ_apk_1-2019.pdf#page=21 (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[7] Djomo *et al.* (2017), *Opcit.*

[8] Ananti, M.O., Nwokike, C., & Ezeneme, E. (2025). Security Challenges and Foreign Direct Investment in Nigeria: Implications for Economic Growth (2010–2024). Available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5345577 (visited on the 11/08/2025)

When agricultural FDI manifests through long-term leases, concessions, or outright acquisitions, such transactions can, in the absence of due diligence and equitable negotiation, amount to de facto dispossession. This displacement may occur without adequate compensation aligned with the principles of just indemnification or without observing the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) standard recognized in international law, particularly with respect to indigenous populations under instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The result is often a forced migration of smallholder farmers from arable land, eroding their capacity to generate subsistence and marketable produce, and precipitating socio-economic marginalization.[1]

Such displacement not only implicates civil and property rights under domestic laws but also contravene treaty obligations where the host state is a party to international covenants on economic, social, and cultural rights. Furthermore, the removal of communities from land with which they maintain deep cultural and spiritual connections constitutes not merely an economic injury but an infringement upon intangible heritage and identity. These outcomes can engender claims in tort for wrongful deprivation, breach of contract where prior agreements existed, and in extreme cases, allegations of unlawful expropriation which, under investor-state dispute settlement frameworks, could paradoxically enable the investor to sue the state if regulatory measures are later imposed to remediate the harm.[2]

Another significant risk is environmental degradation. Intensive farming practices introduced by foreign investors especially monoculture plantations can result in soil depletion.[3] The risk extends beyond soil to encompass deforestation and associated habitat destruction, often as a preliminary step to the establishment of large-scale plantations. Such acts do precipitate irreversible biodiversity loss, contravening both domestic environmental statutes and international obligations under multilateral agreements such as the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. The clearance of forested land not only extinguishes endemic flora and fauna but also disrupts ecological corridors leading to species migration. Under environmental jurisprudence, these actions may be viewed as breaches of the precautionary principle, which mandates proactive avoidance of harm where scientific uncertainty exists regarding the environmental impact of a project.[4] The risk is amplified when investors prioritize short-term returns over environmental stewardship, which undermines the long-term viability of the agricultural sector.[5]

Compounding these effects is the over-extraction of water resources for irrigation, particularly acute in arid and semi-arid regions. The diversion of substantial water flows for commercial agriculture affects the rights of downstream users and compromise riparian and groundwater integrity, raising issues under both domestic water governance laws and transboundary water-sharing treaties. Excessive withdrawal from aquifers leads to saline intrusion, aquifer depletion, and the collapse of local hydrological systems, an outcome that may be actionable under the public trust doctrine, which positions certain natural resources as held by the state in fiduciary stewardship for the benefit of its people.[6]

An additional and structurally significant concern arises when Agricultural Foreign Direct Investment is disproportionately channelled into the cultivation of export-oriented cash crops such as cocoa, palm oil, sugarcane, or cut flowers at the expense of staple food production intended for domestic consumption.[7] While such investments may augment foreign exchange earnings, they often reconfigure domestic agricultural priorities in a manner that affects national food sovereignty and food security, concepts recognized in both domestic policy frameworks and international instruments such as the November 2004 Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food endorsed by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)[8].

By diverting fertile arable land, and agricultural labour away from subsistence and nutritional crops, this model risks creating structural dependence on food imports, exposing the host state to exogenous shocks in global commodity and food markets. Such outcomes may be construed as contravening the state's positive obligation to

[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Jiao, Y. (2025). *ATDC, A Chinese Model of Agricultural Technology Cooperation with Developing Countries*. IAIS., Available at https://iais.uz/upload/outputdocument/18-07-2025/ATDC,%20A%20Chinese%20Model%20of%20Agricultural%20Technology%20Cooperation%20with%20Developing%20Countries.pdf (visited on the 10/08/2025)

[4] Piot-Lepetit, I. (2025). Strategies of Digitalization and Sustainability in Agrifood Value Chains. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Akinwalere, S., & Chang, K. (2025). Cooperative Economics in Africa: Applicability and Suggestions. *Global Economic Perspectives*.

[8] *Ibid.*

ensure the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of food for its population, as articulated in Article 11 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The macroeconomic architecture of such investments further exacerbates their asymmetrical benefit distribution. In many cases, profit repatriation mechanisms embedded in bilateral investment treaties or national investment codes allow foreign investors to expatriate the bulk of their earnings with minimal reinvestment obligations in the host economy. This phenomenon commonly referred to as capital flight in disguised form reduces local economic multipliers, curtailing the capacity of agricultural FDI to stimulate ancillary sectors such as agro-processing, and rural services. These structural vulnerabilities are compounded by governance and institutional capacity deficits in many host states. Regulatory capture wherein foreign investors exert disproportionate influence over policymaking through lobbying, political patronage, or opaque concession negotiations can further affect administrative impartiality and compromise the public interest.[1]

5. Case Studies of Agricultural Fdi Projects and Food Security Outcomes in Cameroon

Here, the researcher examines a number of FDI related to SDG 2 in Cameroon.

- ***Societe Codilait & Ministere der Finaces et du Budget v. Societe Nestle Cameroun & Others***[2]

The dispute between *Société Codilait*, a Cameroonian dairy processing company founded by entrepreneur Pius Bissek, and *Société Nestlé Cameroun* with its co-defendant *Établissement Cosmos*, arose from allegations of unfair competition, fraudulent import practices, and market distortion in Cameroon's dairy sector. Codilait, a domestic producer of sweetened condensed milk marketed under the "Super Milk" brand, accused Nestlé of importing dairy products most notably under the "Gloria" brand that were represented and labelled as milk-based, while in reality containing significant proportions of vegetable fats such as palm and coconut oil. According to Codilait, these products were not only misleadingly labelled but also wrongfully declared to Cameroonian customs as dairy products, thereby benefiting from lower import duties and avoiding the higher tariffs applicable to non-dairy fat products. Codilait maintained that this misclassification constituted a form of customs fraud and enabled Nestlé to sell its products at prices well below Codilait's, thereby affecting its market share and damaging its competitiveness.

The allegations were supported by several expert investigations conducted at the request of the Cameroonian authorities and during court proceedings. These reports confirmed that the contested Nestlé products contained vegetable fats, contradicting the imported product declarations. The customs revenue loss to the State was estimated at approximately 1,751,858,038 FCFA. Codilait argued that beyond the loss to public revenue, the practice amounted to unfair competition under Cameroonian commercial law because Nestlé could leverage artificially reduced import costs to price its "Gloria" condensed milk far below Codilait's "Super Milk." In the early 1990s, "Super Milk" was sold at 600 FCFA per can before the 1994 CFA franc devaluation, later rising to 1,200 FCFA, while "Gloria" was introduced at a highly competitive price of around 900 FCFA, a difference Codilait claimed was only possible through unlawful cost advantages.[3]

The matter was first adjudicated by the Tribunal de Grande Instance of Douala, which, on 14 July 2010, found in favour of Codilait. The court recognized that Nestlé's practices constituted acts of unfair competition and ordered Nestlé Cameroun and Établissement Cosmos to pay 740 million FCFA in damages to Codilait. The ruling relied on the expert evidence showing that the imported goods did not match their customs declarations and that this misrepresentation distorted market competition to Codilait's detriment.

Nestlé and its co-defendants appealed the decision to the court of Appeal. During the appeal, the State of Cameroon also sought to intervene, claiming over 26 billion FCFA in unpaid duties, fines, and penalties, including approximately 18.2 billion FCFA in direct fines. In 2012, however, the appellate reduced the amount demanded from Nestlé from 740 to 150 million CFA francs. Refusing to abandon the matter, Codilait pursued the case to the Supreme Court of Cameroon. After protracted proceedings, the Supreme Court issued its ruling in June 2017, partially reinstating Codilait's victory. While it did not restore the original 740 million FCFA award, the Court ordered Nestlé Cameroun and its co-defendant to pay 517 million FCFA in damages to Codilait. This final judgment recognized the substance of Codilait's grievances and marked the end of a long legal battle in which a local Cameroonian company ultimately prevailed against a multinational giant, albeit with a reduced award.

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[1] Zheng, Q., Gu, H., & Su, Y. (2025). Agricultural OFDI Empowers the Construction of Agricultural Powerhouse under the Background of RCEP. *Journal of Yunnan Agricultural University*, *19*(4), 50−58.

[2] Judgement No: 597 of 14th July 2010.

[3] Olivier, M. (2017). Cameroon: How Pius Bissek forced the giant Nestlé to bow. *Jeune Afrique*. Retrieved August 12, 2025, from https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/446529/societe/cameroun-pius-bissek-a-plier-geant-nestle/ (visited on the 12/08/2025)

This case aligns with Sustainable SDG 2 which aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. At its core, the dispute portrays how multinational corporate practices, when driven primarily by profit maximization, can affect both domestic food security and the integrity of local agro-industrial sectors. By importing products labeled as dairy but containing significant proportions of cheaper vegetable fats, Nestlé was able to position itself at a competitive price point that a local producer who relied on authentic dairy inputs could not match without compromising quality. This cost advantage, tied to mislabeling and customs misclassification, did not only jeopardized Codilait's market survival but also reduced consumer access to genuine, nutrient-rich dairy products, indirectly affecting nutritional quality in the population. In a country where malnutrition and undernourishment remain public health concerns, the substitution of milk fats with vegetable fats in staple products lowers dietary value and affects SDG 2's nutritional targets.

The case further illustrates a recurring pattern in which multinationals strategically maneuver to reduce operational costs in host countries, often by introducing cheaper raw materials or substitutes that may not align with local health and quality standards. While FDI can introduce capital, technology, and market access, it can also distort local competition when the laws are weak or inconsistently enforced. In this instance, the use of vegetable fats rather than milk not only reduced production costs but also sidestepped higher import tariffs, depriving the state of substantial customs revenue estimated at over 1.75 billion FCFA. Such revenue losses have a secondary effect on food security because they limit government capacity to invest in agricultural development programs, rural infrastructure, and nutritional initiatives which are all levers for achieving SDG 2 in Cameroon.

Moreover, when domestic producers exit the market or scale down production due to unfair competition, the result is increased dependency on imported products, which heightens vulnerability to global price shocks and supply disruptions. This dependency runs counter to SDG 2's emphasis on resilient, locally grounded food systems. The Codilait case also highlights how multinationals exploit weaknesses such as ambiguous product classification or limited customs capacity to pursue market dominance, sometimes at the expense of long-term sustainability, food sovereignty, and public health. Without such stringent measures, the influx of multinational investments risks displacing local producers, lowering product quality, and diverting public revenues. These outcomes invariably hinder the realization of zero hunger and improved nutrition in countries like Cameroon.

- **The Case of Herakles Farms**

Cameroon's development trajectory has been consistently hampered by a pervasive and deeply entrenched history of abusive practices by foreign agro-industrial corporations. These entities have routinely capitalized on their considerable economic leverage to occupy vast tracts of indigenous land, exploit local labor, and employ hazardous chemicals that pose direct and severe threats to both human health and the ecological integrity of the environment. Such actions undermine Cameroon's earnest efforts to achieve sustainable development, particularly when relying on Foreign Direct Investments as a catalyst for growth.

For example, in *SEFE v. SG-SOC, Herakles Farms and Timti Isidore*[1], involved Herakles Farms, a U.S.-based palm oil company operating in Cameroon, and a local non-governmental organization that sought a judicial injunction to halt the defendant's activities. The NGO's plea was rooted in the company's flagrant disrespect for due process and established legal frameworks. Investigations revealed that SG-SOC, acting on behalf of Herakles Farms, had engaged in egregious and unauthorized tree felling within a community area, demonstrably exceeding permissible limits and proceeding without the prerequisite permits mandated by relevant Cameroonian Forestry law. This audacious act constituted a direct and unmistakable violation of Section 36 of the 1994 forestry legislation, which explicitly stipulates that any further felling of timber requires an "Autorisation d'enlèvement de bois abattus" a highly specific permit exclusively issued by the Minister himself and granted solely to accredited logging companies, emphatically not to oil palm producers.

This disregard for national law, environmental safeguards, and community rights by a foreign investor is precisely how such FDIs, intended to foster progress, instead undermine Cameroon's commitment to sustainable development. When a prominent foreign entity operates with such impunity, it erodes trust, deters responsible investment, and sends a chilling message that short-term economic gains may supersede long-term environmental protection and social equity. This creates a perception that the nation's natural capital and its citizens' well-being are expendable in the pursuit of foreign-backed economic growth, directly contradicting the holistic principles of sustainability.

In its considered judgment on the matter, the court not only imposed a temporary suspension on the defendant's contentious activities but also issued significant and forward-looking recommendations. It strongly urged Herakles Farms to enter into a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding with the local communities

[1] *Struggle to Economize Future Environment (SEFE) v.SG-SOC, Herakles Farms and Dr. Timti Isidore,* Suit No. HNC/003/05/2011/4m/2012.

whose ancestral rights, traditional livelihoods, and cultural heritage had been severely infringed. Furthermore, the court mandated that the company provide appropriate compensation to these communities for the extensive destruction of their timber resources and irreplaceable forest ecosystems, directly attributable to the company's unauthorized and reckless operations. This ruling, while a victory for local communities, highlighted the systemic challenges Cameroon faces in ensuring that FDIs genuinely contribute to equitable and sustainable development rather than merely extracting resources at the expense of its people and environment.

- **Forest Exploitation in the East Region of Cameroon and the Impact on Food Security**

The persistent conflict of interest observed between forest-dependent communities in Cameroon's South-East, large-scale logging companies (often propelled by Foreign Direct Investments), and the state itself, stands as yet another illustration of the tensions inherent between FDI and genuine sustainable development. These deep-seated tensions emanate primarily from the state's singular desire to maximize revenue by issuing extensive logging concessions to foreign-backed companies. These corporations, driven by profit motives, then proceed to exploit the local forest resources with conspicuously little, if any, regard for the indigenous communities situated within these areas and whose livelihoods are linked to the forest's continued viability. While the state perceives these concessions as a straightforward pathway to economic growth and increased national coffers, the reality on the ground is a relentless extraction that profoundly impacts the delicate socio-ecological balance.

The exploitation of certain timber species such as the maobi (Baillonella toxisperma), bubinga (Guibourtia tessmannii) and sapelli (Entandro phragma cylindricum) in the South-East Cameroon compete with local interests. These timber species has high cultural, social and economic value to the local people, especially to the Baka in the region.[1] During hunting, the Baka also use the moabi tree as markers to guide them through the forest. The bark of the tree is used to produce a concoction by the Baka, with which they cover their bodies during hunting so that they can go undetected through the forest.[2]

Above all, the moabi is well known and appreciated by the local people for the oil produced from the seeds, which is the most popular cooking oil in the region. The sapelli tree is a good breeding ground for caterpillars that serve the Baka women with protein during low season of hunting. On the other hand, the Pallisco Company is interested in the exploitation of moabi as the quality of its wood is highly regarded in Europe. According to the local people, the moabi tree is very scarce around their villages as they must trek for about 15-30 km to find the closest moabi tree. The felling of trees impair on the availability of nontimber forest products. This is particularly felt by the Baka, as their livelihood depends solely on the forests. In the focus group discussions, we noticed moreover differences between how the Baka men and women saw the conflict, illustrating variations concerning which resources each utilize. The men noted issues around hunting as the main challenge. They complained that the noise made by the logging machinery had repercussions for the availability of large game. Furthermore, pathways and points of orientation were destroyed as well as areas where honey bees were found and localities where wildlife used to hide. Only a few Baka men managed to get a job from the logging company and their employment has usually been short-lived and underpaid as compared to the Nzime employed. The Baka women, on the other hand, emphasized the damage done to valuable NTFPs, especially fruit trees, kernels, caterpillars and medicinal barks and leaves. The logging activity had also greatly affected their opportunities to maintain traditional and cultural values. The life of every Baka is linked to the forest, with their sacred places rich in valuable timber species being intruded upon or even destroyed by the logging companies.

Unsurprisingly, these logging companies routinely encounter vigorous resistance from the local indigenes, who are gravely concerned about the devastating impact of overexploitation on the forest as it serves as habitat for countless species, and an irreplaceable means of subsistence and cultural heritage for generations of these communities. However, armed with the government's official imprimatur, these foreign-backed logging enterprises forge ahead with their extractive activities, leading to an increasingly tense and often volatile atmosphere between the local populations and the state.

These activities by multinationals have direct and far-reaching implications for food security and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals that center on eradicating hunger and ensuring sustainable resource use. The indiscriminate logging of culturally and nutritionally significant tree species such as moabi, sapelli, and bubinga hampers the availability of non-timber forest products that constitute the primary source of food and nutrition for indigenous forest-dependent communities like the Baka. Moabi seeds, for instance, produce the most popular cooking oil in the region, while sapelli trees provide caterpillars rich in protein, especially during hunting

[1] Betti, J. L., (2004). Impact of forest logging in the Dja Biosphere Reserve, Cameroon (Unpublished context study report). Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Cameroon.

[2] Samndong, R. A., & Vatn, A., (2012). Forest related conflicts in South-East Cameroon: Causes and policy options. *International Forestry Review, 14*(2), 213–226.

off-seasons. The destruction of these species disrupts traditional food systems, diminishes dietary diversity, and exacerbates protein and micronutrient deficiencies. Furthermore, logging activities reduce hunting opportunities by disturbing wildlife habitats and displacing game species through noise and habitat destruction. This deprivation affects SDG 2 by limiting access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food sources, and SDG 15 (Life on Land) by accelerating biodiversity loss and forest degradation.

Beyond food availability, these FDIs weaken the socio-economic resilience of indigenous populations. Short-lived and underpaid employment opportunities offered by logging companies do little to offset the loss of forest-based livelihoods, while the destruction of sacred sites and traditional pathways to intergenerational knowledge transfer. Women, who rely heavily on forest fruits, kernels, medicinal plants, and caterpillars for both nutrition and income, face disproportionate hardship, thereby exacerbating gendered inequalities in food security. The cumulative effect is a deterioration of both household and community-level food sovereignty, placing local populations at greater risk of malnutrition and poverty.

- **Olam International**

Olam originated in 1989 when the Kewalram Chanrai Group set up Olam Nigeria Plc to export agricultural products; the business scaled rapidly across Africa and Asia and later established its corporate headquarters in Singapore, where Olam Group is listed. This evolution matters because the firm's governance, disclosure and sustainability targets now reflect Singapore-listed company standards, while its operational DNA is still strongly African.[1]

In Cameroon, the export of cocoa beans and the importation of grains and rice are the foundations of Olam's relationship with Cameroon over the past 25 years which has contributed to ensuring food security in the country by providing two of the most important food staples in the country's diet. Olam supplies in excess of 140,000 metric tonnes of rice per annum to the local market, as one of the top three rice importers in the country. Similarly, its annual supply of over 130,000 metric tonnes of wheat flour make Olam one of the top three sellers of that essential commodity.[2] On the ingredients side, Ofi operates one of Cameroon's largest primary processing sites USICAM where cocoa and coffee beans are dried, graded and exported; the scale of this operation makes Ofi a significant regional employer within the cocoa–coffee belt.[3]

On the staples side, Olam Agri imports and distributes well-known rice brands such as Riz Mémé and Riz Bijou (including Riz Bijou Fortifié, positioned as the country's only fortified rice line), and the company has repeatedly been recognized by local authorities and consumer groups for the quality and scale of these imports. Olam Cameroon's commitment to the country's grains requirement saw a 2012 investment of CFA30 billion in a state-of-the-art modern wheat milling facility with a capacity of 500 metric tonnes per day on the outskirts of Douala. The highly automated plant was commissioned in March 2015 and produces wheat flour products that caters to market requirements ranging from beignet, standard baguette and premium baguette or toast bread. The investment has benefited allied industries and service providers and generated both direct and indirect employment. It has also provided Olam with a platform for further community engagement and social welfare activities.[4]

Olam Cameroon's rice division has become one of the most important contributors to the food security effort of the country. As one of the nation's top importers and distributors of rice, it has established an extensive network that helps meet the nutrition needs of communities across all 10 regions. Olam ensures value and availability of rice to 22 million Cameroonian consumers by sourcing from its own South East African counterparts and by meeting the demands of the local consumer premium, medium, parboiled and mass segments.

These operations aligns with SDG 2 in several concrete ways. SDG 2.1 (end hunger; access to safe, nutritious food) is supported by Olam Agri's bulk importation and nationwide distribution of rice, a staple that supplements domestic production and helps moderate seasonal supply shortfalls. The firm's consumer-recognized status and scale suggest reliability of supply, which is a non-trivial buffer against price spikes in urban centers like Douala and Yaoundé. The fortified rice line also targets SDG 2.2 (end all forms of malnutrition) by addressing micronutrient deficiencies a recognized driver of "hidden hunger" through commercially distributed, nutritionally enhanced staples. While fortification is not a silver bullet, country-level availability of fortified rice

[1] Olam International: The Formative Years: 1989 To 1992. Available at https://www.scribd.com/document/60785460/Olam-International (visited on the 11/08/2025)

[2] Olam celebrates its place in Cameroon history. (2020). Available at https://www.olamgroup.com/news/all-news/blog/olam-celebrates-its-place-in-cameroon-history.html (visited on the 11/08/2025)

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

through mainstream retail channels is a meaningful systems lever for malnutrition reduction.

On the producer side aligned with SDG 2.3 (double the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers) Ofi's cocoa/coffee supply in Cameroon integrate primary processing (USICAM) with farmer procurement, quality grading and traceability programs. Ofi has reported 100% traceability for directly sourced cocoa globally, and in Cameroon specifically it has been part of the national push to geo-reference cocoa farms to meet the EU's deforestation-free product rules. Traceability and geolocation data are not just compliance checkboxes: they enable targeted extension support, help segregate higher-quality or certified beans (potential price premia), and can de-risk financing for cooperatives. As the EU regulation bites, exporters like Ofi (Ofi Cam) collaborating with government platforms can help preserve market access for Cameroonian cocoa.

That said, the SDG 2 trade-offs deserve a sober read. First, Cameroon's dietary dependence on imported rice creates exposure to external price shocks (global freight, export bans). Even when imports stabilize urban food availability, they disincentivize local rice investment if not paired with policies that also lift domestic productivity (irrigation, seed systems, milling quality). Fortified imported rice addresses micronutrient shortcomings but does not, by itself, build sovereign production resilience, a core SDG 2 concern. Second, cocoa/coffee are export-oriented; they improve rural incomes when prices are favorable but do not directly raise availability of local staples. The net SDG 2 impact therefore turns on complementary public policies: using reliable imports to smooth consumption in the short run while crowding-in investment for local cereals; and leveraging traceability/compliance work in cocoa to more value back to smallholders through price premia, credit and climate-smart agronomy. (Inference based on the cited operational facts and the SDG 2 target architecture.)

6. Conclusion & Recommendations

Cameroon's agricultural transformation fueled inter-alia by Foreign Direct Investment, has emerged as both as an opportunity and a challenge in the pursuit of national food security. While FDI has undeniably introduced modern agricultural technologies, enhanced infrastructure, and bolstered the export economy, it has also exacerbated deep-rooted structural issues including land tenure insecurity, environmental degradation, smallholder displacement, and growing dependence on food imports. The paradox of persistent hunger in an agriculturally endowed country underscores the reality that capital inflows alone cannot resolve systemic vulnerabilities in food systems. As demonstrated in multiple case studies from Herakles Farms' deforestation and community dispossession to Codilait's battle for fair competition, the misalignment between FDI objectives and national development goals threatens to widen inequality, destabilize rural livelihoods, and compromise food sovereignty.

A sustainable path forward must be guided by a rights-based, inclusive, and ecologically responsible model of agricultural investment. This requires the urgent institutionalization of transparent land governance systems that recognize and formalize customary land rights, alongside measures to enforce environmental, labor, and health standards. Policymakers must anchor FDI within integrated food security strategies that prioritize domestic staple production, strengthen smallholder participation through inclusive value chains, and ensure gender-responsive outcomes. Public-private partnerships should mandate out-grower schemes, enforce grievance redress mechanisms, and co-finance feeder road and irrigation infrastructure that improve both physical access to food and agricultural resilience. Investments that fail to meet these criteria should be screened out to avoid undermining national food security objectives.

To reconcile foreign capital with the right to food, Cameroon must adopt a dual-track strategy: in the short term, leverage FDI to stabilize market supplies and enhance nutritional access through fortified imports and improved distribution systems; in the long term, prioritize agroecological transition, climate-smart agriculture, and domestic cereal productivity to build sovereign food systems. Strengthening the institutional capacity of agencies tasked with monitoring and regulating FDI in agriculture is indispensable to this process. Only a governance framework rooted in accountability, equity, and sustainability can ensure that foreign investment contributes not merely to economic growth but to a just and hunger-free Cameroon.

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