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MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, educates and advocates for just relations with Africa.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by their personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritains), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the United States on the truth about Africa.

Land Grab Prevention Campaign in Volta Region, Ghana

The Impact is Obvious and the Results are Encouraging

On September 3rd Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN) and Ghana's Volta Region Paramount Queen Mothers Association held a conference on land Grab awareness and prevention at the House of Chiefs in the region's capital Ho. AFJN's Policy Analyst Ntama Bahati delivered the keynote address. Mr. Bahati also spent four days with AFJN volunteers based in Brewaniase reviewing last year's activities, planning future activities and training modules to enhance their skills to efficiently share their knowledge with more at risk and affected villages. The team conducted two town hall meetings in Pusupu and in Bontibo villages.



Female chiefs (Queen Mothers) who attended the Conference on Ho, Ghana

In addition, Mr. Bahati and Mr. Theophilus Amoako, the youth representative on the volunteer team visited Tamale Village to further understand the scope of land grabbing and the negative impact of Herakles Farms, a US based agribusiness company, had on local farmers when it grabbed 3715 hectares (9179.96 acres) of land and later sold it back to a British company, Volta Red. We met with Chief Ben Atomey, and Mr. Dzakpata Ebeneza, a member of the local Assembly District and

AFJN volunteer, Mr. Samuel Agbosu, an elder in the community and two more landowners.

At the end of his successful Volta Region tour, Mr. Bahati, AFJN Policy Analyst was on his way back from Nkwanta to Accra, when he spotted a police officer taking bribes from the driver of the public bus driver he boarded, he decided to take some pictures, so he was arrested and was detained for six hours by the Ghanaian police.

What is a land grab?

The International Land Coalition members who gathered in Tirana, Albania from May 24 -26 2011 defined land grab as the “acquisitions or concessions that are one or more of the following: i) In violation of human rights, particularly the equal rights of women; (ii) not based on Free, Prior and Informed Consent of the affected land-users; (iii) not based on a thorough assessment, or are in disregard of social, economic and environmental impacts, including the way they are gendered; (iv) not based on transparent contracts that specify clear and binding commitments about activities, employment and benefits sharing, and; (v) not based on effective democratic planning, independent over-

The Principles Behind Free Prior and Informed Consent.

The underlying principles of free, prior and informed consent can be summarized as follows: (i) information about and consultation on any proposed initiative and its likely impacts; (ii) meaningful participation of indigenous peoples; and, (iii) representative institutions. (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division for Social Policy and Development Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues) Although Ghana supports the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), we are not aware of any law it passed to implement this important principle

Volta Region Land grab in Context

At the end of August and the beginning of September 2014 Mr. Bahati and Melaura Homan-Smith, former AFJN Program Coordinator spent two weeks in Ghana’s Volta region to investigate Herakles Farms land grab activities. This New York based agribusiness, grabbed land from 86 families in Brewaniase and Tamale villages. In collaboration with local chiefs and St. Theresa Catholic Church in Nkwanta, town hall meetings were held in different villages, the first ever on the topic, warning the farmers about the seriousness of land grab in Ghana, in Africa and all developing nations worldwide.

Before leaving Ghana the team set up a volunteer team referred to in this report as the Africa Faith & Justice Network Ghana Volunteer Task Force on Land Grab Prevention. Led by Tidibo Kowura Odamba II the Paramount Chief, the team has spoken formally and informally about land grab and the results have been positive. The team was instrumental in the successful planning of the September 3rd conference at the House of Chiefs in Ho which brought together nearly one hundred queen mothers to learn about the threat of Land Grab on the livelihoods of their people.

AFJN trains Female Leaders of Local Communities

AFJN's Ghana volunteer Task Force on Land Grab Prevention under the leadership of Paramount Chief Tidibo Kowura Odamba II and AFJN office in Washington DC reached out to the Regional Association of Queen Mothers in Ghana's Volta Region for the purpose of training its members on the issue of land grabs. The interest from queen mothers was huge and the association leadership had to limit the number of attendees for logistical reasons.



AFJN Policy Analyst, Ntama Bahati addressing Queen Mother at the House of Chiefs in Ho, Ghana

The Panel

The training team was composed of Ntama Bahati (AFJN policy Analyst) Tidibo Kowura Odamba II (the Paramount Chief), Mr. Jonas Kofibi,(the secretary of the Landowners Association and Mr. George Sarku-Darke, (former District Assemblyman). They shared their experiences with others regarding Herakles Farms' land grabs in Breawaniase and in Tamale. In addition to presenting the threats of land grab to the people of Ghana's Volta region, Ntama Bahati underscored AFJN's advocacy mission and encouraged them to become advocates for their respective constituencies



Tidibo Kowura Odamba II , Mr. George Sarku-Darke, Mr. Jonas Kofibi,

Highlighting the Amuru Protest Over Land in Uganda

One of the highlights of the presentation was the youtube video of Uganda's NTV coverage of the Amuru people protesting over the forceful seizure of their land by the Ugandan government. The video depicts the resistance of the people who fought to protect their land. Scores of men, women and children cry in front of the ministers who came from Kampala to seal the land deal. But the queen mothers resisted it. Women stripped themselves naked, rolled on the ground, held their breasts which is a symbol of a curse for unwanted guests. As a result the ministerial convoy left the village and couldn't believe what had unfolded before their eyes. This was not the first time women stripped naked to protest against land grab in Uganda. The queen mothers were touched by the struggle of their Ugandan sisters.

Highlighting Herakles Farms Intimidation Strategy

The Paramount Chief Tidibo explained to the queen mothers that Herakles Farms, the agribusiness company from the United States, always threatened to settle landowners' grievances in a court in Paris, France in accordance to the lease they signed. They were shocked and wondered how that could be possible and whether the landowners had become criminals. Landowners overcame it by filing a legal case in the commercial court in Accra. It was during this time that Volta Red, a British company bought the land and asked landowners to withdraw the legal case from the court and amicably negotiated their way forward.

The reasons Behind Herakles Farms Land Concession to Volta Red

One may wonder why Herakles Farms sold that large area of land it previously owned in Ghana to Volta Red. The main reason is that the company was facing serious financial problems. It came as the result of the pressure of the Cameroonian and many international organizations campaign against its land grabs in South West Cameroon. In November 2013 President Biya reduced the 73,000 ha land originally given to Herakles Farms to 19,843 ha with a 3-year probationary lease and increased the royalty to \$3. Furthermore, the decree required the company to fulfill certain conditions such as the development of social programs and the respect of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) clause. To protest against the breach of contract, Herakles Farms filed a court case against some of the activists such as Nasako Besingi and companions.

The Conference's Vision

Reaching out to women is part of AFJN's general campaign strategy against land grabbers in Africa and specifically its effects on women. AFJN strongly believes that prevention is the most effective strategy against the new scramble for land grabbing in Africa and elsewhere. The presence of nearly 100 queen mothers speaks volumes of our determination to empower as many communities as possible in Ghana's Volta region. It is our

wish that those who attended will spread the word. We hope that from now on should there be any indication of a land grab those who attended recognize it and hopefully prevent it from happening.

Who is Leasing Farmland and Why to Stop Them

It is a fact that the majority of people do not know about the land grab problem and some government officials are still blind to the seriousness of entrusting Africans' food source to a few rich investors be it individuals or corporations. In some cases, helped by land tenure laws, government officials intentionally mortgage Africa's farmland for their own parochial interest. Experience has shown that reversing a duly signed land deal has always proven difficult. That is why prevention in many ways is the right option. Our effort to inform and empower traditional community leaders is a long-term approach to curbing the problem and preparing a better future for African communities. AFJN's advocacy efforts to stop land grab do not negate the betterment Africa's agricultural sector. On the contrary it strives to build a win-win business model. Exposing the gross abuses of foreign multinationals and agribusinesses will go all the way to protecting Africa's small scale farmers who are deprived of their land, their most valuable assets.

Women's economic independence threatened

Women's economic independence is threatened by land grabs. Multinational ownership of large scale farmland has serious consequences on the economic independence of the majority of African women whose businesses are agricultural products and through which they feed their families, pay for their children's education and care for themselves. It is irresponsible to take all of this wealth and hand it over to a few.

In Ho like in other places our audience unanimously condemned and vigorously contested the ridiculous \$5 per hectare (2.4 acres) royalty paid to landowners in Tamale and Brewaniase and the \$3 which

Herakles Farms is supposed to pay per Hectare and per year in South-West Cameroon. Every farmer we spoke to said that they earn more than this by doing seasonal leasing of



Queen Mothers , Attendees of the Land Grab Conference in Ho, Volta Region, Ghana

their farms to individual farmers or by cultivating less than a tenth of a an acre.

Very Positive Preliminary Results of the Ho Conference

The comments and observations made by the conference participants confirmed the objectives of the project. Mama Alori II, queen mother from Dorfor spoke out against a land grab going on in her area. **On September 18th and 24th, during follow-up calls Mama Alori II informed AFJN that her clan and two others had written letters to their traditional area council which recently called for a meeting to further discuss a land lease Memorandum of Understanding they signed. These clans of 5000 to 7000 people each vowed not to sign any lease unless it clearly guarantees benefits to current and future generations.** She added that the conference by Africa Faith & Justice Network enlightened and emboldened her to take such a stand.

Days after the conference, Mama Edem Wuttur, a member of the Regional Land Management Committee informed AFJN that she attended Fodome traditional area council meeting. At that meeting Mama Vikpi, queen mother from the area, eloquently spoke about the conference and passed on the information she learned. She specifically asked the chiefs to please include women in decision making about land issues. In fact, during the conference the queen mothers sadly remarked that they feel marginalized by chiefs from decision making processes including land related issues.

Mama Barfule Okulgye, the Paramount chief of Akyode , Mama Aseiku IV, the Paramount chief of Battor and many more invitees to the conference were equipped to champion the land grab awareness and prevention campaign for the benefit of in their respective communities.

Measurable Impact: Town Hall Meetings in Pusupu and Bontibi

A Malaysian company had approached members of these communities regarding their land. Our message enlightened them, they said. According to the 2002 census Pusupu was inhabited by 2183 women and 2364 men. The same census says that Bontibo had 1884 men and 1897 woman. The number of attendees of the town hall meeting in Pusupu was 125 adults and many children and in Bontibo the adults were 75 adults.



Paramount Chief Tidibo at Town Hall Meeting in Pusupu, Volta Region

The low turnout in Bontibo was due to an ongoing chieftaincy crisis. We had made arrangements to meet the two sides on separate days, but the crisis interfered with the plan. However, the Africa Faith & Justice Network's Ghana volunteer Task Force on Land Grab Prevention still plans to reach out because these are communities highly at risk

How are we winning the Fight Against Land Grabs in Ghana's Volta Region

Obviously because landowners are the ones leasing their land in Ghana's Volta region, we have therefore made it a priority to bring the information to the villages. We hope to continue to get the message out before land grabbers come in the villages. This way, if land grabbers come, whatever they say will be heard with informed ears. The most important detail of our strategy is to ensure that landowners and chiefs are part of the process. After one on one meeting with chiefs and other opinion leaders in any given community, they organize town hall meetings for us to publicly deliver our warning against land grab.



Communion with ancestors ceremony before the Town Hall meeting in Bontibo, Volta Region , Ghana

From its office in Washington DC, AFJN is actively training and empowering local communities. Its initiative led to creation of the *Ghana Volunteer Task Force on Land Grab Prevention*. These are committed people doing excellent work for their communities.



Those who hear AFJN's land grab awareness and prevention message say: "You have enlightened us, thank you."

Herakles Farms' Deceitful Investment in Brewaniase and Tamale

The harm caused by Herakles Farms to 86 families is beyond telling. This story is a typical example of how dangerous land grab is to small scale farmers' survival. Through a combination of lies and false promises of better jobs for landowners, their families and the community, schools, scholarships for their children, hospitals, roads, and good returns for their land, Herakles Farms was able to acquire 3015 Hectares of land for 25 years lease with the possibility of 25 years, renewal for \$5 per hectare (2.4 acres) and per year. Payment was to be received once the company starts oil production. Landowners reported that they received the first payment four years after signing the agreement in **2008**.

The Lifetime Mistake Hard to Undo

The consequences of the landowners decision were immediate right after they signed the lease with Herakles Farms. First, they did not leave the Hotel where they signed the lease with a copy of the lease. As of September 3rd, 2015 we were told that the copy of the lease had not been given to those who are entitled to it, but Volta Red, the company which bought the land from Herakles Farm is preparing to distribute copies of the lease with addendum which reflects recent small changes the company made after negotiations with landowners.

There was no delay in imposing restrictions against landowners' access to the land they leased. These restrictions are currently in place: they can no longer gather wood, collect sand to build their home, cut trees, hunt or just walk through the farm without permission. Talking to landowners we heard the sense of loss and pain for over a decade after the signing of the lease. Some try to move on, but they still wish they could take their decision back.

Grave injustice to be corrected no matter what papers were the signed

Some landowners whose farms were surrounded by the farms of others who leased their land to Herakles Farms were talked into resettling elsewhere. We heard the case of one family which received 1000 Ghana **Cedes** (less than \$400) to resettle. Today as it stands,

AFJN Policy Analyst Bahati interviewing land owners and Opinion leaders in Tamale, Volta Region, Ghana



that amount can no longer buy even a small plot sufficient enough to build a small hut. The suffering of every family displaced could have been avoided if they were well informed.

Honorable Dzakpata Ebeneza, the village's District Assembly Representative regrets

what happened to his neighbors and constituency. Given the scope of the injustice, Assemblyman Dzakpata predicted that there will one day be a riot if this injustice is not corrected to the satisfaction of the affected people.

Honorable Dzakpata Ebeneza agreed with us that those families which were paid very little to resettle themselves were victims of grave injustice which must be corrected no matter what type of document they signed. He noted that landowners involved in this case have been affected differently and the depth of their pain will only be known if we were to listen to their stories. Finally, we urged Honorable Dzakpata to use his position in the District Assembly to sound the warning alarm about the ongoing land grab in Ghana's Volta region and the country in general.



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Thank you to *AFJN Ghana Volunteer Task Force on Land*

- Paramount Chief Tidibo Kowura Odamba II,
- Tel:0240044744/ 0507219503
- Chief Dawohonso Mireku I,
- Tel 0246124046/ 0276065332
- Mr. Jonas Kofibi, Land Owners Committee Vice
- Secretary
- Tel: 0246952304/ 0504957736
- Chief Okyeame Ben Atomey, Land owner's
- Representative
- Tel 0542920137
- Mr. Theophilus Amoako, Youth Representative
- Tel:0245730875
- Mr. George Sarku-Darke, Former Assemblyman

Report by Ntama Bahati Jacques, AFJN Policy Analyst
Email: bahati@afjn.org

*For More Information about this and other AFJN reports log on to
www.afjn.org , send an email to afjn@afjn.org, call 202-817-3670 or send
a fax to 202-817-3671,*