



A R O U N D Africa

July-Sept 2013

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In Solidarity with the People Affected by Land Grabs in Cameroon

By Jacques Bahati, AFJN Policy Analyst

On July 18, 2013 I arrived in Mundemba, a village in Southwest Cameroon, with a team from Joining Hands (a project of the Presbyterian Church USA) and a team from the Yaoundé-based Cameroonian organization, Network to Fight Against Hunger (RELUFA). We were on a fact-finding mission on land grabbing by the US-based company Herakles Farms. It was a beautiful sunny morning as we set out, and Nasako Besingi, founder and director of the Struggle to Economize the Future Environment (SEFE) told us "it is not every day that we have a day like this." The afternoon showers quickly reminded us that we rode through a rainforest: home to rare biodiversity and ecological significance. This land is special.

Since 2009, the people of Mundemba and other villages in the area have opposed the acquisition of 73,086 hectares (282 square miles) large-scale palm oil plantation by Herakles. The land lease agreement between Herakles and the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Territorial Development is illegal. Concessions of this size require a presidential decree, which they do not have.

It was wonderful to finally meet the people of Mundemba. They had reached out to Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) more than a year ago to join their advocacy efforts to stop Herakles from illegally grabbing their land. AFJN joined the struggle to oppose Herakles' project in Southwest Cameroon in June 2012. Speaking with the community leaders, we told them that Herakles' project in Cameroon was not unique:



Speaking out against land grabs!

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Many thanks the Oblates of the Mary Immaculate Sharing Fund for their support of this project



AFJN united with the people of Mundemba to fight Herakles Farms

similar land grabs were (and are) happening all over Africa, as well as in developing countries beyond the continent.

Why take the fight against land grabs in Cameroon to the US?

First, since Herakles Farms is an American-owned company, we want to specifically urge Americans who have shares in the company to sell them and invest in more ethically responsible companies. Herakles is implicated in land grabs, serious human rights violations, violence, intimidation and corruption, all of which are illegal in the US and in Cameroon.

Also, during his recent trip to Africa, President Obama publicized the second pillar of the US Sub-Saharan Africa policy: "Spur Economic Growth, Trade, and Investment." This policy

aims to "encourage U.S. companies to trade with and invest in Africa" (*Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*, June 2012). Therefore, we call on the US congress and the administration to question Herakles' practices in Cameroon. Herakles' actions aren't meeting the standards and expectations of the people of Cameroon or the US. The company must be held accountable for violating the US Foreign Corruption Practice Act, Cameroonian laws and other international standards.

Corruption

Herakles and their Cameroonian surrogates know the full truth about how they secured such a large, cheap deal from the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Territorial Development. The only possible explanation is that money exchanged hands, but without a convic-

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tion it remains an allegation. We were told that Herakles' Cameroonian surrogates targeted government's local officials, chiefs and other influential members of the community by distributing money and whiskey to get them to buy into its project. As the tenacious awareness campaign against the project started to spread to the people, they took their bribery tactic to another level: win the support of people by offering them food under the guise of a holiday gift.

January 16, 2013—Herakles Farms issued a press release stating that “Over the Holidays, Herakles Farms...donated food to 1,700 households in 38 villages located in the Nguti subdivision of Kupe - Muane Nguba and in Mundemba and Toko in Ndiang. In total, 11 tons of rice and 10 tons of fish were distributed to more than 8,000 individuals in the Nguti, Mundemba and Toko areas” (Herakles Farms Initiates Programs to Meet Community Health And Social Needs).

In an open letter to Herakles Farms' CEO, Bruce Wrobel, the Cameroon-American, and Environmental and Human Right Activist, Mr. Andrew M. Edimo, asks: “How long will the tens of thousands of people displaced, dehumanized and enslaved by your so-called sustainable development project live off your 11 tons of rice and 10 tons of fish? Are they going to be eating the rice and fish for 99 years as they will have no land to farm after you have seized and destroyed their only treasure and hope for a livelihood? It might have made some sense to a few people if you had instead empowered the people who you are trying to feed with rice and fish by educating and encouraging them to cultivate rice and start fish farming.”

“We are not against development . . . But this type of development does not belong here.”

Mr. Nasako Besingi



Meeting with civil society in Yaounde, Cameroon

“We are not against development and Herakles is welcome to invest, but this type of development does not belong here,” said Mr. Nasako Besingi. Chief Mbara of Koto village, like many who are against Herakles, has dreams of an improved quality of life for the Cameroonian people and his area in particular, but “we have many unanswered key questions,” he told us.

The Resistance

In response to the government's claim that all forest belongs to the state, the people have started to clear the forest to claim ownership. We are discouraging this resistance approach the same way we have discouraged violent resistance to this project. Clearing the forests will negatively impact our environment which we are fighting to preserve, explained Mr. Nasako Besingi, whose organization, the Struggle to Economize the Future Environment (SEFE), has been on the frontlines campaigning for the cancellation of Herakles' palm oil plantation project in Southwest Cameroon.

On December 12, 2012 Mr. Nasako Besingi was awarded the Transparency, Access to Information and Open Governance (TAIGO) prize for his work with the community to protect their land from being grabbed by Herakles. On November 14, 2012, Mr. Nasako and four others were arrested and detained by the police in Mundemba for opposing the project. Also on August 29,

Land grabs, continued from page 3

2012, he was pulled off a moving motorcycle by Herakles workers on his way from a very well-attended awareness meeting against Herakles. At anytime he could be summoned to appear before the judge in the High Court of Ndiar for bad publicity against Herakles. What Herakles calls bad publicity is nothing but the truth about its attempt to grab our land using bribery and intimidation, Mr. Nasako explained to us. He is aware that he is fighting against a giant with enough money to go around, but he courageously told us: "I will not give up, I am ready to go to jail."

AFJN is in this to the finish line and we hope you will join us in support of our brothers and sisters of Mundemba and neighboring villages. Although there are signs that the affected people have the ear of some government officials, more needs to be done to get the project canceled. We hope you will sign our petition to President Paul Biya of Cameroon, asking him to cancel the project; and to Herakles Farms' CEO, Mr. Bruce Wrobel, asking him to look elsewhere for land and also stop the legal case against Mr. Nasako Besingi, which is nothing but an intimidation tactic.

AFJN IN AFRICA

As a follow up to AFJN's November 2012 meeting with the SECAM Forum in Dar es Salaam, on networking to empower local communities address issues of governance that engender AFJN advocacy in Washington, AFJN Executive Director Aniedi Okure is in Accra, Ghana to meet with SECAM staff and the Archbishop of Accra to discuss ways of tackling these challenges at the roots and to better guide AFJN's advocacy.

Advocacy Week for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

From August 17-23 in partnership with the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society we hosted a joint delegation of Civil Society and members of the Ministry of Information and New Citizenry from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). They were asking for US diplomatic support for the following policies to end the war in eastern DRC:



The DRC delegation at the White House

- Demobilization instead of integration of rebels into the army; integration has failed many times.
- Institutional reforms and no creation of a transitional government with a transitional constitution as part of the national dialogue which began this September. Changing the constitution, particularly the respect of presidential term would undermine the gains made in the democratic process.
- The extradition of all wanted criminal from Rwanda to DRC namely, Laurent Nkunda, Jean-Marie Runiga Lugerero, Baudouin Ngaruye, Eric Badege and Innocent Zimurinda.
- Creation of a taskforce to address the movement of members of Al Shaba from Somalia into DRC.
- Respect of the mandate of the Intervention Brigade of the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC which is to neutralize negative forces.
- More diplomatic pressure on Rwanda and Uganda for their support to rebels.

AFJN Welcomes New Staff, a Consultant and Four Board Members

During the Board meeting in August, 2013 AFJN was pleased to welcome a new staff, a new consultant and four new AFJN Board members.

Barthelemy Bazemo, M.Afr.



Missionary of Africa Father Bazemo was raised in Burkina Faso, West Africa and spent many years in Eastern Africa, mostly in Kenya and Tanzania. He studied both in Africa and the United States and has training in peace support operations, conflict studies, international politics, human rights and diplomacy. He was an active member of Christian Professionals of Tanzania (CPT), a forum for advocacy, human rights and ethics in the public square; and *Wabunge Think-Tank* for the rule of law, good governance, and peacebuilding. Fr. Bazemo will serve as an AFJN policy analyst.

both within the congregation and to outside constituencies. Previously, he served as the Steward of the District of East Africa before assuming the directorship of the Holy Cross Mission Center in October 2010.

Mr. Brian Reavey



Mr. Reavey is Assistant for Justice, Peace & the Integrity of Creation for the Marianist Province of the United States. Previously, he served as the Executive Director for FaithJustice, New Jersey, and National Director of the Marianist LIFE at Marianist in Philadelphia, unifying and expanding three regional summer programs into a year-round faith formation program. Mr. Reavey serves as president of the board of directors for the Love & Mercy Coalition USA and a member of the advisory board for the Romero Center, a national social justice education center.

Tom Hannon



Mr. Hannon, who currently lectures on American politics, journalism and new media at Johns Hopkins University's Advanced Academic Programs in Washington, DC, comes to AFJN through the Ignatian Volunteer Corp. He has extensive background in journalism and the media. Most recently, he served as CNN News Group Political Director. Prior to that he was CNN Executive News Producer, Washington, DC and led CNN News Group's reporting on U.S. politics with overall editorial responsibility for CNN's domestic and international television networks. He also planned and directed CNN's coverage of presidential primaries, debates, national conventions, general election campaigns and election nights.

David J. Schwingamer, MM



Fr. Schwingamer, MM is a Program Associate for Africa and Sustainable Peace at the Maryknoll Office for Global Concern. He has served in the rural pastoral apostolate in Tanzania and as Director of the Center for Faith and Justice of the Religious Superiors Association of Tanzania. His background includes studies in African history and in conflict transformation. He worked with the Jesuit Refugee Service in the refugee camps of Ngara Region and has been a member of the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis Global Solidarity Program with the Diocese of Kitui, Kenya.

Therese Wetta, ASC



A member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, Sr. Therese brings many years of experience in leadership roles within higher education, her religious congregation, and human services. She taught biology at Kansas Newman College, served as vice president for academic affairs and academic dean of the college and as Director of Development for University Advancement. She served as executive director of the alumni association for Saint Mary College in Leavenworth, KS; and as director of training at Catholic Charities USA. In 2002, she was named CCUSA's director of mission integration and Catholic identity.

Leonard Olobo, CSC



A member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, Fr. Olobo is the Director of the Holy Cross Mission Center at Notre Dame, with responsibility for the promotion of the international mission of Holy Cross

AFJN also welcomes a new Organizational Member - Marist Province of the United States



AFJN on a staff day: Bahati Jacques, Barthelemy Bazemo, Rachael Wolff (summer intern), Aniedi Okure, Rita Murphy (consultant), Tom Hannon, Melaura Homan-Smith, and Michael Murphy (consultant)

Trade: Simply Growth, or Opportunity?

By Melaura Homan-Smith, AFJN Program Coordinator

There is a general agreement that the people of Africa need trade, not aid. But on whose terms? In 2000, the U.S. enacted the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a one-way trade bill giving preferential treatment to African countries if they met certain standards. Some members of congress will tell you AGOA is a godsend: a bundle of generous trade-easements bursting with new jobs, opportunity and industrial expansion. Activists say that since the overwhelming majority of AGOA trade is in energy and minerals, it has everything to do with feeding the U.S. population's oil-hungry habits and little to do with bettering the economies of lesser developed African countries. As the House of Representatives prepares to renew and expand AGOA after it expires in 2015, advocacy groups seek to ensure it fulfills its mission to encourage the growth of just trade.

Essentially, AGOA allows for lower-cost trade on certain goods for member states exporting to the U.S., and it has been best utilized in the energy and apparel industries. There have been gains and job creation within the apparel industry, with about a 15% increase in productivity. But, those gains have been isolated.

Africans would benefit more from AGOA if the agricultural trade easements were better implemented. Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN), with the Catholic Task Force for Africa (CTFA), spoke with a civil society representative in Kenya who is also a key NGO coordinator for

the East African Region. He outlined a few flaws from his personal experience:

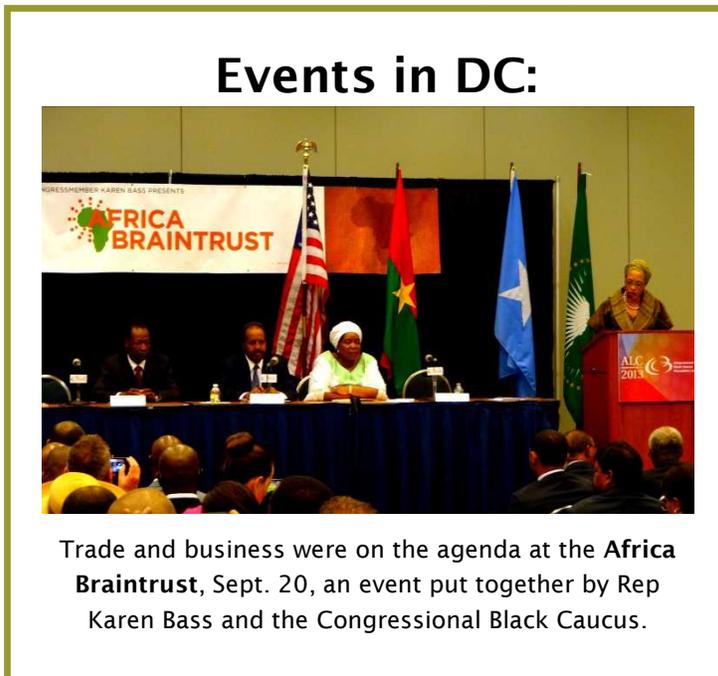
- Civil society isn't included in the policy discussions or briefed on the requirements to meet regulation for agriculture (or, presumably, other aspects of AGOA).
- AGOA is not widely advertised, and so potential beneficiaries, specifically small farmers, aren't aware of its existence. Our source called on the media and the communities to further this outreach.
- Some small holder farmers cannot use AGOA because it doesn't mix well with certain EU monies they receive.

Our Kenyan source said a well-implemented AGOA would help Africa, but there is drastic need for outreach and communications to help people understand how to meet export standards. The really lucrative products like sugar, cocoa, dairy and meat are off-limits. According to a report by the Brookings Institute, allowing

these imports wouldn't threaten U.S. producers' profits. Actively informing participants of the standards and easing trade barriers across the board would truly help, and could be taken up by the Trade Capacity Building (TCB) program of AGOA; market access means nothing if producers cannot meet regulations and move their goods. TCB should emphasize support of agribusiness linkages and physical infrastructure develop-

ment as well. Unfortunately, the funding for TCB has decreased significantly over the last five years and is often double-counted with other USAID and Millennium

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Events in DC:

Trade and business were on the agenda at the Africa Braintrust, Sept. 20, an event put together by Rep Karen Bass and the Congressional Black Caucus.

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Challenge Corporation projects (the main implementers).

The main industry benefiting from AGOA needs little capacity aid, however. Oil, gas, and mining comprise 86-92% of all AGOA trade, and contracts are often carried out by multinational or American companies. Extractive industries are comparatively well-developed in Africa, and duties are already acceptably low under the General System of Preferences, to the tune of about \$.05-.10 per barrel of oil. A few African elite are certainly benefitting from this arrangement instead of providing opportunity to the general population.

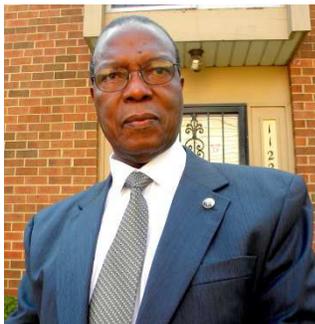
Establishing growth takes time, and for the sake of agriculture and manufacturing, there's no need to completely roll AGOA back. But, it does need to evolve. Here are AFJN's suggestions:

- Evaluate and empower the Trade Capacity Building program and emphasize infrastructure, outreach, and compliance education.
- Continually and independently verify that states are maintaining a high standard of worker rights, rule of law, and poverty reduction as stated in Section 104.
- Establish better relationships with government and civil society organizations and solicit their input at all levels.
- Expand the agricultural goods allowed to include previously excluded products like sugar, cocoa, meat, and dairy.
- Clarify and harmonize AGOA programs with that of the European Union.

Fundamentally, AGOA should be accessible and fair for all Africans that could use it. AGOA was envisioned as more than just a trade bill, it was an extended hand, a vote of confidence. AFJN will be talking with members of the house and senate in the upcoming weeks to advocate for an AGOA that strives to be just, transparent, and prosperous for all.

Reclaiming Africa's Destiny

5th Annual Dyer lecture and discussion



Distinguished speaker and author Remigius Kintu will reveal: who owns Africa? Who formulates the policies that affect African life, and what can we do to refine and reclaim Africa's destiny?

Friday November 1, 2013 5:30pm
Busboys and Poets 5th & K Street NW

Visit www.afjn.org to register for this event!

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

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