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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.

The New Theft of Africa: America's Involvement in African Land Grabs

by Joe Lyons

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Rain forests being cleared in Madagascar: Photo- Foko Madagascar

The Theft before our Eyes

A tragedy is happening in Africa before our eyes. The ongoing massive lease of Africa's most fertile land as a development approach risks the well-being of millions of people throughout Africa, especially traditional small farmers and pastoralists, who rely on the land as their sole means of survival. This is land grabbing in its worst form. Land grabbing is most often described as the acquisition of large areas of land in developing countries either by domestic or international firms, governments, or individuals. However, there is a wide gradient of legality among these deals.

Recently, land grabs have increased due to the worldwide food crisis of 2007-8, prompting investors to look toward the Global South, particularly Africa, for potential land investment to produce food and biofuel. Large tracts of land are also being acquired for speculative purposes, known as "land banking", where the buyer holds the land and sells it later once the land gains value.¹ Proponents of this kind of agribusiness assert the benefits of their presence in Africa, claim-



Kenyan man with his flooded farmland: "Good Fortune"

ing it increases countries' development, creates jobs, and increases food stability. Many of the companies make lavish promises to the locals, promising to improve their infrastructure, long-term food supply, healthcare, and educational systems. One US company involved in African agribusiness is Dominion Farms, owned by Calvin Burgess of Guthrie, Oklahoma. They assert that their methods work, and benefit the local commu-

nities. Claims like these are fairly typical among foreign companies and investors who move into African regions. The problem comes when these companies fail to carry out their promises, overstep the boundaries given to them, do not obtain free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) from local peoples before acquiring the land, and disrespect the people in general. Large land deals generally have a negative impact on local communities, but land grabs are of particular concern to the people of Africa.

Dominion Farms offers this defense of its African business ventures in Kenya on its website:

"The social and economic progress of the local community is an important consideration in Dominion's business and considerable improvements and activities have been implemented. The company has provided construction materials to a number of schools and clinics. Public water distribution lines have been extended to local neighborhoods and improvements for bathing and for the watering of cattle have been constructed along the new reservoir. Dominion contributes financially to special educational events and sports equipment has been furnished to schools throughout the area. Each year the company donates tons of rice to community governments for distribution to local citizens. Among the most promising activities for economic stimulation is Dominion's out-grower program whereby the company provides seed and technological assistance to local farmers and contracts to purchase their crops. Other improvements benefiting local communities are the construction and maintenance of public roads, the recharging of nearby lakes with fresh water from the Yala River [located in Kenya], improved fishing from new reservoirs and – perhaps most important – the creation of a market economy that relies on hard currency from dependable wages. Direct farm employment currently ranges from 300 to 700 people, dependent on construction and harvesting activities."²

Dominion Farms has operations in Kenya, Nigeria, and Liberia. In Kenya, a water reservoir they built for their rice plantations flooded onto land they did not own, destroying the crops of indigenous farmers and killing the livestock.

The African People Deceived by Foreign Investors and Local Leaders

Land grabs violate human rights while ignoring the principle of obtaining FPIC from the affected land owners. It also neglects the potential social, economic and environmental damage on a given community. Legally, land grabs lack transparent contracts with clear and binding commitments on employment and benefit sharing, and eschew democratic planning, independent oversight, and meaningful participation.³ As of 2010, Dominion Farms did not provide the new schools, water, or development they promised. 10,000 people were evicted from their homes, and



Photo: lifegate.it
Rudy Bressa

even the people who took the farm's money are suffering because their promises were not met. They have denied people access to clean water, have created a breeding place for mosquitoes (leading to malaria outbreaks), and the pesticides they used to spray the crops have allegedly caused health problems in pregnant

women. *When asked what the affected locals should do, Dominion Farms stated that they should change their careers and cultural practices to become a fishing economy.*⁴ Locals who did not sell their land were driven off it by Dominion Farms' flooding, and did not get any part of the profits. Today, Dominion Farms has made an effort to control the flooding, but problems remain.⁵

Firms such as Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, Pentrotech ffn, and individuals like Bruce Rastetter and Howard Eugene Douglas have been accused of participating in land grabbing.⁶ Universities like Harvard University, Spellman College, Vanderbilt University, and Iowa University have also been accused of taking part. These universities use endowment funds to invest in African land, and go through Emergent Asset Management, one of Africa's largest land acquisition funds, run by former Goldman Sachs currency dealers.⁷ Oakland Institute reports Emergent's US clients have invested up to \$500 million in fertile land with the expectation of making 20% returns. Emergent says, "Yes, university endowment funds and pension funds are long-term investors. We are investing in African agriculture and setting up businesses and employing people. We are doing it in a responsible way... The



A jatropha farm owned by Sun Biofuels in Mozambique. Photo: World Press

American Companies Accused of Land Grabbing in Africa Include:

- Dominion Farms (Kenya, Nigeria, and Liberia-54,000ha)
- Nile Trading and Development Inc (South Sudan- 600,000ha)
- Herakles Capital (Ghana and Cameroon- 77,364ha)
- BDFC Ethiopia (Ethiopia- 17,400ha)
- Millennium Challenge Corp (Mali- 22,441ha)
- Southern Global Inc (Mali-30,000ha)
- Aslan Global Management (Mozambique and Tanzania- 52,000ha)
- Jarch Management (South Sudan- 400,000ha)
- Agrisol (Tanzania- 325,000ha)
- Cams Group (Tanzania- 20,000ha)
- TM plantations (Tanzania-50,000ha)

amounts are large. They can be hundreds of millions of dollars. This is not landgrabbing. We want to make the land more valuable. Being big makes an impact, economies of scale can be more productive.”⁸ Agrisol, working with Iowa University, is set to close down two Tanzanian refugee camps where people have been living for 40 years, Katumba and Mishamo, to accommodate its biofuel crops.



Small Holder Farmers in Kenya
Photo: CIAT International

The problem goes far beyond the US and Europe, with large companies from China, Brazil, Russia, the Middle East, Malaysia, and other regions also participating in the seizing of African lands for agricultural purposes.⁹ Investors from other African countries have also been accused of land grabbing, including South Africa, Libya, Mauritius, Djibouti, Egypt, and others.¹⁰ According to Bertram Zagema, a Senior Lobbyist for Oxfam writing in 2011, 227 million hectares of land (an area the size of Western Europe) had been sold or leased since 2001 worldwide. A large portion of cross-checked deals were in Africa (an area almost the size of Germany).¹¹ Zagema and others believe that this problem is only going to increase in the coming decades, as land acquisition will continue to be a good investment.

Water supply for crops is also a problem, as 3 billion people live in areas where water demand outweighs supply, and that number is expected to grow.¹² By 2050 the population is expected to grow by approximately 2 billion, and the world economy is expected to triple.¹³ With African land being sold for incredibly cheap prices (as little as \$.50 per 2.5 acres per year in some areas) there are no signs that the process is slowing.¹⁴

Land Not Used for Food Production

Biofuels are also causing an increased interest in investing in African farmland. In an effort to combat global climate change, the European Union has passed regulations that 10% of all transport fuel must come



Femal Farmers in Kenya. Photo: Hailey Tucker

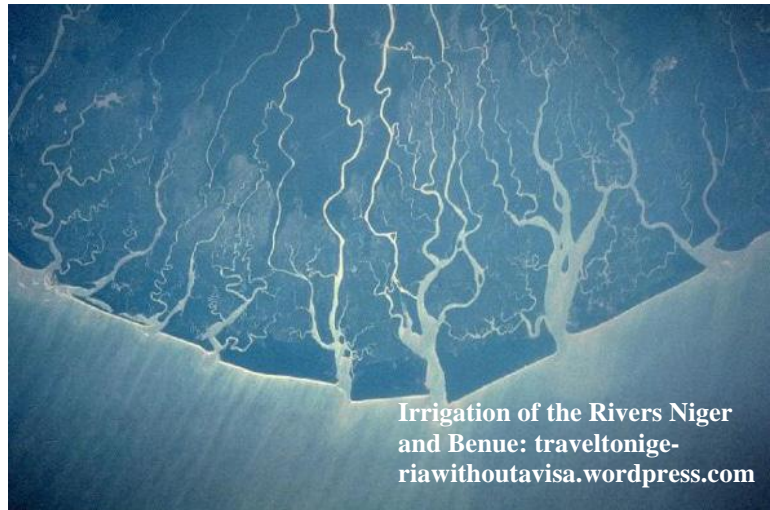
from plant-based biofuels before 2020. In order to meet these needs, the growth of biofuel plants, like jatropha, has increased exponentially in Africa.¹⁵ Jatropha is poisonous to humans, and its impact on farmland is unknown. Airlines are required to incorporate biofuels to solve emissions challenges and economic problems, but it would take 270 million hectares of jatropha (1/3 the size of Australia) to meet the necessary needs, 25 times the amount of jatropha expected to exist in 2015.¹⁶ In order for the goals of the EU to be fulfilled, much more land must be acquired. This

means an increase in food prices as not enough arable farmland is being devoted to food. Non-food crops such as cut flowers and cotton also use up land that could be used for food production, driving prices upward.

Large-Scale Farming vs Small Farmer Holdings

Large-scale, monoculture-type farming does not necessarily lead to better food production.

GRAIN, an international organization that works to support small farmers, believes agricultural systems built on small farming operations are more productive.¹⁷ This is called the “productivity paradox.” GRAIN reports that if all of Kenya had the productivity of the country’s small farms, its productivity would double.¹⁸ This organization found that large farms, despite controlling a majority of the best farmland and excellent financial resources, have lower technical efficiency, and therefore lower productivity. Small farms are better at utilizing biodiversity, maintaining landscapes, contributing to local economies, providing work opportunities, promoting social cohesion, and potentially contributing to reversing the climate crisis. Large farms tend to focus mainly on export crops, such as animal feed, biofuels, textiles, and timber. Small farmers, however, are less intensive in the use of their land, taking much better care of it. Actionaid writes that the reason for the greater yield of small farms is due to their attention to detail and labor investment, while large-scale farms look to continually reduce the number of agricultural jobs, and their large monocultures increase the risk for massive crop failure.¹⁹



Irrigation of the Rivers Niger and Benue: traveltonigeriawithoutavisa.wordpress.com

Who Really Does the Farming?

When foreign companies begin operations in Africa, the local people often do not receive the jobs offered by the firms. Instead, the jobs are given to citizens of the company’s country. This is often to African farmers not having experience with the technology the companies bring in, and the necessity of skilled labor. Jatropha farming is an example of a business endeavor that does not benefit the local Africans. The production of jatropha into biofuels does not create jobs in Africa, as the necessary processing plants are located in Europe and the US.²⁰ Local employment opportunities are often absent from contracts and rarely practiced. Those that are tend to be short-lived, seasonal, and low-paid.²¹ Women in particular suffer under these practices. In most of Africa women do the majority of small agricultural work; in non-industrialized countries 60-80% of food is produced by women.²² In Ghana and Madagascar, women are 15% of the farm holders, but provide 52% of the family labor force and 48% of paid workers, while in the Republic of the Congo, women provide 65% of agricultural labor and are responsible for 70% of food production. All of this is done despite women only being 2% of global landowners. If women lose the ability to farm, it will be incredibly detrimental to the overall well being in Africa. The UN estimates that if women had access to the same level of resources as men, crop yields would increase by 20-30%, with agricultural output increasing by 2.5-4%, and 100-150 million people would no longer be undernourished.²³

Water Security Threatened by Land Grabs

If water resources in Africa are not handled responsibly, history shows that the consequences will be dire. Currently, the Nile and Niger Rivers, as well as all rivers used for crop irrigation, are at risk of having similar fates. In Ethiopia, the source of over 80% of the Nile, the Nile Basin region is vulnerable to land grabbing. In the Gambela region, if all the land is bought out, the country’s use of freshwater resources will increase by a factor of nine.²⁴ Another vulnerable resource is the Niger River, which is estimated to have shrunk by one third in the last 30 years, and may lose another third of its flow due to cli-

mate change.²⁵ In Mali, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimated Mali's irrigation potential from the Niger at over half a million hectares in 1997.²⁶ The water scarcity in the region has halved this number to approximately 250,000 hectares, yet the Malian government has already signed away 470,000 hectares of fertile land.²⁷ If these water sources continue to be depleted, indigenous farmers and pastoralists, and especially women will suffer the most.

Altogether, a chunk of land larger than the state of Connecticut (1,435,630ha) has been grabbed by the US thus far, with that number looking to grow. It is in the best interest of Africa, as well as the world, for the tragedy of land grabbing to be stopped. Development of Africa's agriculture sector has to take into account the needs of the African people first, promoting small farmers, who have been feeding the continent up to now. Any contract must follow FPIC requirements and hold businesses accountable on issues of human rights.

Stop Land Grab Now!

We are aware other countries are involved in land grab, but the US does not need to be part of this evil. Investors know that the African governments are irresponsible and unaccountable. Africa Faith and Justice Network in its advocacy for just US-Africa policies maintains that the US should, through legislation, protect Africa's vulnerable populations who are being taken advantage of by US businesses. The main reason the African people are being taken advantage of is lack of responsible leaders, some of whom are US allies. The US should lead the way in doing ethical business in Africa and elsewhere.



Photo: ifad.org

Some members of Congress have argued in favor of the investors saying that if we don't do it, others will. However, we can set an example by conducting all business operations in Africa honestly and fairly. If we take a stand on this issue, we can promote US leadership abroad, and project a better image of the US. The practice of land grabbing must be stopped, and the US must take the lead in the effort to do so.

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