

## **A MESSAGE FROM CATHOLIC CHURCH SISTERS OF DIOCESES OF SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS REGIONS OF TANZANIA TO LEADERS OF TANZANIA ABOUT THE LARGE SCALE INVESTMENTS ON AGRICULTURE**

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From October 9 – 12, 2018, we sisters from the Dioceses in Southern Highland Regions of Tanzania in partnership with the African Faith & Justice Network (AFJN) met in the Monastery of Kamalidolis, Mafinga to pray and to reflect together about the challenges facing our sisters and brothers living in places with large investors in the agriculture sector in Tanzania.

First of all, we support the investment policy aimed at eliminating poverty in Tanzanian, especially smallholder farmers. It is through the investment that citizens get jobs, new technologies for modern farming and better inputs which timely reach to farmers. But also through such investments smallholder farmers can benefit from markets of their crops.

However, the ongoing conflicts between investors and citizens living in large-scale investment areas ranging from Ruvuma, Njombe, Iringa, Mbarali to Sumbawanga provide a bad picture of investment. Investment looks like a crisis rather than a blessing to the people of Tanzania.

The biggest challenge for citizens is their land taken for investment and they remain without land. Although citizens have been given compensations, the compensations are too small to set up other settlements and therefore citizens resort in providing labor work to investors' farms.

The village of Lipokera in Ruvuma Region is one example of the victims of investments. Citizens have been removed from their areas for the investment. About 5,000 acres of land are owned by one investor. The situation caused citizens to invade mountains and destroy the environment. Also citizens are obliged to engage in labor jobs working for investors rather than producing in their farms.

In the village of Lutukira in Iringa, citizens have to travel long distances to search for land after their 50,000 acres of land was taken by an investor who still does not use it.

In the village of Muwimbi Iringa citizens have a water challenge because the investor uses all the water in River Msugulika. But also the investor has put a fence in the forest leading the people to travel long distances to seek social services. Wood services, natural medicine, dishes and fruit collection are no longer available.

In the Usangu Basin Valley in Mbali Mbeya, citizens living nearby the investor's fields are supposed to leave. Already the extension stones to expand borders have been placed in areas where people live. And for everyone who appears to use the area claimed by the investor he or she is asked to leave or pay for the area for agriculture. That is, he or she should pay for the investor for use of the land.

People now produce what they do not eat, while the low wage they receive from laboring for investors cannot adequately sustain them. This threatens food security because 70 percent of the food we eat in Tanzania is produced by smallholder farmers.

The large investment in agriculture has also brought challenges to seeds, pesticides and other agricultural inputs. There are now big companies doing business with poor farmers by selling them seeds, fertilizers and various agricultural inputs that have been genetically modified. Companies produce seedlings that are planted only one season and at the next season the farmer will have to buy the seeds again from these companies. The interpretation is that, first of all we will lose our natural seeds and second, every season the farmer will need to buy seeds so he can produce. Over time, this will create a total dependence on investors. This is a threat to the Tanzanians.

According to African culture, the seeds are a gift from God, so our ancestors exchanged seeds and did not sell seeds. During the harvest season, they analyzed the good crops and kept them for the next season. This is a danger to the farmer's life because it is not easy for farmers to earn money to buy seeds every year from investors.

The price of a small farmer products declines when it comes to the harvest season but the agriculture inputs price is higher all the time.

The large scale investment in agriculture is also a major catalyst for environmental degradation. We absolutely believe that the natural environment is a gift from God so destroying it is contrary to God's command. When we talk about large investments we talk about logging, water pollution in rivers that leads to the emergence of various diseases. Some investors have been using a plane to spray pesticides in their fields and unfortunately, these pesticides destroy peoples' plants, and others are carried by rain into the drinking water systems.

Together we are asking our government to stop inviting more large scale investors and instead make a thorough assessment of how much land we have. Of course we have lots of bushes, but experience shows that no investor is going to invest in the bushes. Many are going to invest where people are already living in order to get cheap labours.

We also urge the government to address the challenges facing farmers, including land allocation, solving water problems, fences and other social disadvantages people are going through because of large scale investment.

## **Conclusion**

We would like to conclude with a quote from Hoh. Benjamini William Mkapapa, "We can't win the war against poverty with weapons that we don't have. The most reliable weapon every Tanzanian has is Land. By using land as land or as collateral, we can overcome poverty. Investment in other sectors such as mining, industries, tourism, business, infrastructure and others will help some people getting out of poverty. But land is the only one capable of pulling every Tanzanian out of poverty."

Catholic Sisters  
Southern Highland Regions of Tanzania  
October 10, 2018.