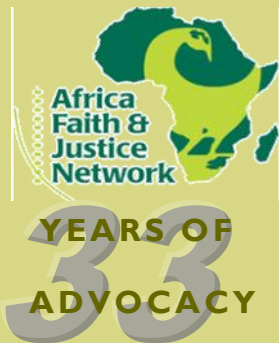


A PUBLICATION OF THE



Conference on Land Grab and Just Governance in Tanzania

St. Gasper Conference Centre Dodoma

September 13-15, 2016

Opening Remarks by Rev. Aniedi Okure, OP, Executive Director AFJN

MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, seeks to educate and advocate for just relations with Africa and to work in partnership with African peoples as they engage in the struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

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.



With all protocol observed, I begin by thanking all who have contributed to this gathering and all participants for being here, and for your determination to contribute to solving a problem that besets Tanzania and the rest of Africa. I thank in a special way the Adorers of the Blood of Christ community, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and Raskob Foundation for funding this gathering. We are grateful to the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference for their partnership with the Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN)

and the Africa Europe Faith & Justice Network (AEFJN) to organize this conference.

There is an epidemic that grips Africa. It is the problem of governance. Governments across Africa, entrusted with the fundamental moral duty of working for the common good, protecting the rights of their citizens and ensuring equitable distribution of resources have failed to do so. Instead, they compromise the common good and future of their citizens for immediate monetary gains.

This problem has been noted by African Catholic Bishops. In 2013 the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), published a joint pastoral letter titled *Governance, the Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa*. I encourage you to read that document if you have not already done so. The document signed by the Archbishop of

Dar es Salaam, His Eminence, Polycarp Cardinal Pengo, at that time the President of SECAM, made an excellent analysis of the ills that beset Africa and identified bad governance and corruption as a “cancer that stands in the way of Africa’s development.” Large scale land acquisition and dislocation of African communities from their lands, water resources and sources of livelihood is a case of bad governance and lack of upholding the common good. Before expanding on this, allow me to briefly indicate some of the common threads of and consequences of large scale land acquisition on the lifestyle of communities, most of which have been documented by Land Matrix International (LMI).

Common thread of land deals in Africa

Africa is the continent targeted most for large-scale land acquisitions. Over 10 million hectares have been acquired, mostly in East and West African countries for investment. These investors come mainly from the Middle East who are looking for food and fodder production and from the UK and Asia (India, China, and Malaysia) searching for biofuel production for clean energy. Others are domestic investors who partner with foreign investors to gain advantage in land acquisition and private companies focused on the production of sugar, rice, rubber, palm oil and jatropha as well as livestock activities.

Patterns and consequences of large land acquisition

Large-scale land acquisitions by investors show a common pattern with negative impact on the lifestyles of communities:

- They target rich fertile lands in areas already settled by communities
- These lands are those along major rivers and natural water sources
- They mostly involve land previously owned by a community for crop production by small-scale farmers
- In effect, there is a direct conflict between communities and investors
- A change of land ownership directly impacts the sources of income, food and other resources for the affected communities
- Land targeted is often fertile and densely populated with good access to markets and cities. Part of the reason for targeting settled areas is that the population around provide cheap labor for investors
- Investors are interested in high value land, not marginal land which is hard to develop
- Part of the land acquired by investors are “banked” for future sale when the land appreciates
- The crops planted most are palm oil, jatropha and sugar cane followed by rubber and a number of cereals
- In general, most of the crops planted in grabbed land are not for consumption by the local communities but for cash crop

A call for foresight

African leaders need to carefully review large-scale land acquisition by corporations and individuals. The reasons given for this large-scale land acquisition for commercial farming are that it brings development and employment and is a solution to food security. However, when examined closely one sees an inherent misinformation that has carefully excluded the unfulfilled promises made by these corporations, the negative impact on small-scale farmers,

the confiscation of water sources from local communities, the harmful impact on the community, and the inherent risks of industrial mono-cropping and the loss of biodiversity. Large-scale land acquisition has already sown communal conflicts in some communities in Africa.

Large-scale land acquisition is part of the Western development and capitalist economic regime that continues to make Africa a continent for cheap raw material extraction and market for high priced finished products. It is the reason that these corporations are appropriately designated as investors. Indeed they are investors. No one goes to invest unless one has already calculated and sees maximal profits from that investment. We have to conclude, from available evidence, that large-scale land dealers are primarily out for profit, and they are doing so at the expense of small-scale farmers who produce about 70% of the food we consume. They also contribute to internally displaced persons (IDPs) by dislodging local communities from their homes.

Large-scale farming assumes to solve the problem of food shortage for Africa. This is also a misinformation, indeed a propaganda. First, what is perceived as “food shortage” is not the lack of food production; rather, it is the failure to empower local farmers to produce food they already know how, and the lack of infrastructure for food distribution already produced. Secondly, most of the crops planted by investors are not for local consumption but export crops for cash. So the question arises: food sovereignty for whom? There is also the long-term damage of appropriating the rights of food production for Tanzanian citizens to trans-national corporations. A country that depends on outside sources to feed its citizens sets itself up for disaster and the control of its population by the corporate world.

The potential short-term gain from large-scale farming is not worth the long-term cultural, ethical and ecological impacts it brings. Besides, it diminishes the positive contributions of small-scale farmers in feeding the country, promoting cultural practices, community well-being, traditional crops and varieties, reducing rural unemployment, raising the quality of life of indigenous peoples and re-affirming food security.

Informed Consent

The Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN) has discovered that when properly consulted, local communities, especially those who have undergone awareness programs of the implications of large-scale land deals, often reject the takeover of their land by investors. The agents of investors know this and avoid community consultations during the negotiations preceding the contract agreement. Those that consult the community often do not give them the full picture, amounting to deceitful negotiations. They promise the community benefits, mainly in the form of educational and health facilities but also in roads and other types of development. But these are mostly empty promises. There is little compensation for the communities whose land and water resources are taken. According to Land Matrix, in only a third of the cases for which compensation was reported have promises **partly** been met.

Sowing the seeds of conflict

Large-scale land acquisitions by corporations seem counterproductive. A look at Tanzania's demographics over the past fifty six years shows that in 1960 Tanzania's entire population stood at 10.1 million. As of January 2016, the population was estimated at 54.3 million, implying an additional 44.2 million over that period. The question arises, what is the wisdom in

appropriating large chunks of Tanzanian lands to foreign corporations, some for 99 years lease? Is it not a lack of foresight? Are we not setting up conflict over land for future generations, especially given that the land size remains the same as it was in 1960? If the leaders of Tanzania keep giving out large chunks of land to corporations, where will future generations of Tanzanians live, farm, and build homes and schools for their children?

Already it is happening in some communities. At a roundtable meeting last month at AFJN in Washington with Fr. Peter Konteh, Executive Director of Caritas and Vice Chairman of Caritas Africa Humanitarian Team, we learned that Sierra Leone is already seeing conflict between communities because of land grabbing. In one community for example, their common land was given out to investors. The communities no longer have a space to bury their dead. An attempt to get a piece of land in the neighboring town for burial plot has resulted in serious conflict. In effect, land grabbing is further dividing and subdividing Africa, keeping them in a perpetual state of conflict while their raw materials are taken away.

Allow me to point out that:

- Business corporations do not come to help you without having already calculated the profit they are going to make from you.
- Let me repeat that. No business corporation comes to help you without having calculated a good profit they are going to make from the deal.
- Business corporations, land developers, those in extractive industries, and those promising you abundant food and a better life do not come to “help” you for your sake. They come because they have already seen ahead. What they see is good for them.
- Some already built into the contract an undue advantage for themselves and a great disadvantage for the local community. A case in point: An agribusiness company, Herakles Farms, that acquired large chunk of land in Ghana’s Volta Region preached development, increased production, employment and improved living standards; coercing the community to sign and give away their land. AFJN obtained the contract document and found a clause that stipulates that if there is any dispute to this contract agreement in the future, the case will have to be settled in a court in Paris. Think for a moment. Local farmers in the Volta Region who do not have a passport, who do not speak French, who have already lost their farm lands and their source of livelihood, will have to find their way to the French embassy in Accra for a visa with all the hassle that comes with it. They will have to hire a team of lawyers, pay for plane tickets for themselves and their lawyers, book a hotel in Paris for however long the litigation lasts, contribute to supporting French economy and cuisine, etc. to seek justice for their heritage taken over by a stranger! Explain that to me.
- There is a case in Tanzania involving a UK company that worked in collaboration with local leaders to take over farmlands for several communities with empty promises of schools, payout for land and development for the community. The land and water source was taken from them and given to the company. They planted jathropha but later found out that jathropha was not all that it was cracked up to be, so they scaled down and abandoned the project. In the meantime, the community is left with nothing, their farms are gone, their sources of livelihood gone and the promises made to them unfulfilled.

Role of Local Insiders

Unfortunately, there are always local insiders who are chief collaborators with these corporations, who serve as the doorway to the exploitation of the community, and who preach that

what they do is best for the community. They readily mortgage the heritage of their people for a bowl of soup.

When these corporations dangle a few dollars or Euros in their faces, something strange happens: their rational, logical reasoning and ability to see beyond the immediate gratification seems completely annulled. What a tragedy!

It is time Tanzanians and Africans develop what the philosopher Frederick Nietzsche called "the art of mistrust," at least as an intellectual disposition in business engagements with others. When it comes to business dealings, do not take what is offered to you at its face value. Read between the lines. When it sounds too good to be true, look and think again because what you think it is, is not what it is.

A Troubling Pattern

On a deeper level, we need to take a look at a recurring pattern in Africa, generation after generation, and it is very troubling. More specifically, it concerns the issue of Africans readily selling their own and their heritage for a bowl of soup. Let me repeat that. Africans readily sell out for very little money or incentive.

When one looks at the history of slavery, the history of colonization, the dynamics that reduce Africa to a land of permanent raw material extraction, and now a new form of colonization that is worse than the first, something striking stands out that can be depressing. Why do Africans readily sell off their own and their heritage for cheap gains? One recalls here that some of the exchange incentives for local dealers during slave trade were mirrors, gun powder, bottle of gin/whiskey, umbrella, etc.

So brothers and sisters, let us wake up and see what is at stake and take action for the good of the future. Let it not be that future generations will look at this generation and curse us for mortgaging their heritage for a bowl of soup. Many children of Africans who were sold into slavery find it difficult to forgive Africa for what happened to their forebears. History might forgive those who did not know better, but history will not be kind to this generation because we should know better.

Remember that a handful of people can and have brought about a great change. History bears testimony to that. If you doubt it, learn from the wisdom of an African proverb that says, "If you think one is too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a room with one mosquito in it." There is a saying that "All that it takes for evil to thrive is that good people do nothing." So I thank you all for your determination to do something to erase this menace from Tanzania, and from the continent.

Peace

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