



MISSION

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.

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Heightening Awareness of Agro-Colonialism and Promoting Responsible Investment in Ghana

A Project of AFJN for Systemic Change, Prevention & Advocacy for the Poor
and Powerless

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A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States (U.S.) 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 U.S. on the truth about Africa.



Accra, March 2, 2016: Launch of Ghana Integrated Platform for Convergence on Land, Seed and Water Struggles (GIP-LAWS) photo by AFJN

Ghana, which has been one of West Africa's most politically stable countries since its independence from British rule, is facing another form of colonization, agro-colonization. "Ghana has seen a significant surge in large-scale land acquisitions ([LSLAs](#)) in recent years, and has in fact become one of Africa's LSLA hotspots," according to Land Matrix, a public database on land deals. Land Matrix also asserts that as of November 2020, of the 30,960,837.35 Ha acquired by foreign multinationals across Africa, 404,000 Ha are in Ghana, representing 8.6% of Ghana's 4.7 million Ha of arable land.

AFJN proposes the adoption of agroecology. The Songhai Center in Benin with its integrated system of Zero Emission Research Initiative (ZERI) has proven the merit of agroecology and it informs AFJN's preference for this agricultural model in Ghana and Africa in general. This model incorporates responsible and sustainable investment strategies that include the promotion of small farm holders.

Project in the Global Context



Continental Conference on Land Grab And Just Governance In Africa



2015 Photo by AFJN

Held at Jumuia Conference & Country Home Limuru - Kenya, 22nd - 26th Nov. 2015

The ongoing acquisition of large tracts of farmland in developing nations, primarily in Africa, by multinationals and sovereign countries has led to the displacement of many people from their ancestral lands without adequate compensation. The phenomenon known as land grabbing or agro-colonialism threatens the livelihoods of Africa's majority small farm holders and its countless food-related business owners, many of whom are women.

The takeover of Africa's agriculture sector, a multibillion-dollar system, has devastating consequences that are economic, political, and geopolitical. The new scramble for Africa has nothing to do with ensuring food security for Africans. Instead, we are witnessing in real time the creation of a new world power center called agri-geopolitics, recognized simply by its *vision of food production to bolster the advantages of geographical position; in other words, to create a world order where food production is a strategic tool for exerting geopolitical influence. With the disruption of the wheat market, the war in Ukraine has spotlighted what agri-geopolitics is already and what it can become. Among the most aggressive geopolitical players are wealthy multinationals mainly from outside the African continent.*

Awareness and prevention programs are needed to ensure food independence and promote responsible investment in Africa's agriculture. The same demands that some responsible African countries have been making of mining companies, namely that they transform raw materials locally, must be similarly made of all who want to invest in Africa's agriculture. Such requirements must include the sale of part of the produce to local markets and the building of food-packaging factories locally.

Stated Goal of Project

1. To shine light on land grabbing, the related dislocation of families, and environmental pollution through reckless use of poisonous artificial fertilizers, herbicides, and other chemicals.
2. To raise awareness among the public and leaders about the need to protect the communal ownership of seeds and ensure biodiversity.
3. To promote responsible investment and protect Ghana's food sovereignty and security.

Field Activities

Date	Location Visited & Issues discussed or encountered
August 30, 2022	Accra: Networking for greater impact with the executive leadership of the national platform of Ghana's traditional chiefs called "Chosen King's and Queens Virtue Ghana"
August 31, 2022	Nyatikpo: This community leased land in 2018. The community has repossessed the property because the investors abandoned the project. Realizing the relevance of heightened awareness, those who were present requested that a follow-up meeting be held to ensure specifically that the elders themselves hear the information we offered. We estimate that this community is at risk of land grab and needs to be properly informed.
August 31, 2022	Aborkope: Presentation to raise awareness of land grabbing.
August 31, 2022	Gbagbavuinu: Since the Chinese company Huawei Agriculture Development Center set up a fish farm and abandoned it, people have been dealing with flooding that destroys farmland and threatens their homes as well. They are helpless.
August 31, 2022	Kelorkpo: Briefed the community about land grabbing and we learned about the pollution of their two water streams, Kelor and Kolor. KOP Farms is alleged to be the polluter of the water streams.
September 1, 2022	Radio Adamu FM: Live show for public education about land grabbing and responsible investment. This radio station's listening area includes big cities (Adaklu Waya, Ho, Mafi Mumase, Ziope, Kpedze, Kpetoe, Akatsi, Abuati, Tadzewu) and small cities (Klave, Tanyigbey, Sorkorgborga).
September 1, 2022	District Chief Executive: Courtesy meeting with Hon. Madame Juliana Kpedekpo. Personal briefing on the issue of land leasing and girls' education. She offered partnership when possible.
September 1, 2022	Adaklu Waya Traditional Leaders: Closed-door briefing to chiefs followed by a full presentation carried live on radio for the benefit of the public.

Of all the encounters, the stories from the people of Gbagbavuinu and Kelorkpo are most worthy of attention because of the harm they have suffered as a result of agribusiness investments.

Key Concepts

1. Agro-Colonialism



2013 Photo by AFJN

Once land is acquired through long-term leasing (50-75 years, renewable one or twice for the most part), the control of people's livelihoods is established. Example:

Herakles Farms leased 73,086 hectares (Ha) of land in the Ndian and Kupe-Manenguba Divisions in Southwest Cameroon from the Government of Cameroon to develop a large-scale palm oil plantation for \$1 per Ha per year, for 99 years, renewable once. Prior to this, on 11 January 2009, Herakles

Farms signed a land lease located at Asukokoo Zongo, Frankeneko and Brewaniase /Ghana (deed N° RV 252548 Serial N° 357/2010) for \$5 per Ha per year for 50 years, renewable for 25 years. In 2011, Nana Kyere Mrosa of Atebubu Stool, in Brong Ahafo Region leased 22,887.486 Acres (AC) (9,269.432 Ha) of arable land to African Plantation for Sustainable Development, paying Ghana Cedis 2.5 per Ha, per year, for 50 years, with the right to renew twice. (The value to the dollar on 31 December 2011 was 1.63 GHC). Africa Faith and Justice Network has seen these documents and met the affected people. Predatory land leases such as these are found across Africa and are evidence of the agro-colonialism and land grabbing that are already taking root. Ghana is not alone. Action to stop this trend is urgent before it is too late. Often presented as investment for development and job creation, it is in fact a wealth transfer to the already rich.

Agro-colonialism is a plan to tie Africans with an unbreakable economic chain much stronger than political, cultural, and mental colonization. Governments are not removed from playing a role in making agro-colonialism a reality. In "Backroom Bullying: The Role of the US Government in the Herakles Farms' Land Grab in Cameroon," Elizabeth Fraser and Frédéric Mousseau of the Oakland Institute show how the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of African Affairs Cynthia Akuetteh was pressuring the Cameroonian government to move quickly on the lease granted to Herakles Farms. At this time, national and international civil society organizations including Africa Faith and Justice Network were mobilizing to get the lease canceled. Thanks to the Freedom of Information Act (Title 5, USC Section 552), they were able to obtain a cable sent on 31 May 2013 from the US Embassy in Cameroon to the US Department of State showing the government's involvement:

Akuetteh urged the Prime Minister to make a decision and take action to resolve the dispute. She told Yang that the United States does not want to tell Cameroon what decision to make, but Cameroon should act quickly and avoid arbitration or protracted legal proceedings. She warned that a failure to act could cause uncertainty in the local business climate and have a chilling effect on future foreign investment.

Note: Following a series of meetings the week of May 27, Herakles and the GRC [Government of the Republic of Cameroon] are reportedly reviewing the land allocations redrawing boundaries.

2. Maintaining the people's sovereignty over seeds



2014 Photo by AFJN

Since 2014, Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) has been educating Ghanaians about the dangers of agro-colonialism, a new form of colonization by foreign multinationals and agents of non-African countries who are taking over Africa's agriculture sector. For Ghana, this simply means a sinister takeover of Ghana's food production system in order to ensure that Ghanaians remain food dependent.

Ghana's authorities recognized the country's urgent need for food self-sufficiency and passed [the National Biosafety Act in 2011](#) to enable the introduction of Genetically Modified Crops in Ghana's agriculture food system.

This law seeks to regulate the safe transfer, handling and use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) with the exception of those that are for pharmaceutical use. Obviously, the introduction of GMO crops is intertwined with foreign land grabbing (Agro-colonialism) and unfortunately it is believed by [Ghanaian authorities to be an answer to food insecurity](#).

The quiet spread across Africa of genetically modified crops such as corn is worrisome, requiring serious consideration and a strategic response. Kenya, for example, banned the importation and cultivation of genetically modified crops in 2012 to protect small farm holders and for safety reasons. The lifting of the ban this October 2022 by the newly elected President William Ruto is facing legal challenge in the high court filed by [Mr. Paul Mwangi](#). The ongoing plan to genetically modify most of the local staple food crops threatens Africa's future. The plan aims at replacing organic, indigenous, and publicly owned seeds and plants with genetically modified, privately owned crop seeds. Each planting season, every farmer will have to purchase seeds. This plan facilitates the transfer of wealth from poor small farm holders to rich foreign agribusiness giants.

In its 2017 report [Down on the Seed: The World Bank Enables Corporate Takeover of Seeds](#), the Oakland Institute contrasts "farmer-managed seed systems" with the adoption of "chemical inputs and industrial seeds" that is favored by the World Bank. The report asserts that up to 90% of seeds for agriculture in developing countries still come from farmer-managed systems, and these crops are crucial to worldwide agricultural production. The traditional systems help preserve "agrobiodiversity, food security, and resilience against climate and economic shocks." The diverse seeds provided by the farmer-based systems include varieties appropriate to certain environments.

The World Bank and many of its donors underestimate such advantages. They see chemical inputs and genetically modified seeds ("improved seeds") as essential to feed the world. The agricultural inputs market, however, is controlled by an exclusive cartel of Western companies that will benefit most from the use of chemical fertilizers and GMO seeds. More than two-thirds of all commercial seed sales currently involve just six multinational companies. Farmers using GMO seeds are not free to use seed from their own crops, but must continue to buy the GMO seeds.

3. Land Grabbing and Toxic Waste



September 2022 , AFJN Meeting with traditional leaders in Adaklu

Toxic waste that finds no home in developed countries is smuggled into developing countries. Vigilance is needed to ensure that leased farmland does not become a dumping ground for toxic waste. Every land lease agreement must include a clause stating that nothing can be buried under the ground without the knowledge of the original landowner. The movement of toxic waste is hard to control when it is dumped on leased land that is considered private property. Such a clause can have legal weight to hold lessors accountable.

4. Agroecology: The Alternative



Food security is an essential indicator of development. Thus, every government must first and foremost ensure that citizens have enough food. Africa can successfully guarantee the nutritional needs of its people by practicing agroecology. The existing industrial model of monocropping poses environmental problems and requires more water, and much remains to be learned about the safety of genetically modified foods. It is imperative that Africans free themselves from agro-colonialism and have a strong position in the shifting agri-geopolitics. Landowners should lease to investors who exclusively practice agro-ecology. They should discuss options that include making the value of their land become shares in the investment venture. In this way, the landowners' profit is guaranteed for the lifetime of the investment. Governments should pass laws mandating agroecology. In addition, foreign investors should establish transformation industries locally to increase job opportunities. These can include food packaging factories, cosmetics industries, and biofuel transformation plants. This is a way to avoid what has happened in the mining sector, where raw materials produced in Africa are transformed elsewhere. Such a bad economic model should not be repeated in Africa's agriculture sector.

5. Education for Development



AFJN Town Hall 2022 Trubo Senior High School in Brewaniase/ Ghana

Why must Africa rely on foreign countries to produce what Africans eat when Africa has enormous human resources? Africans have to deploy means of reducing dependency on Asian and Western powers. The need for education must be underscored, especially the education of girls, who are often neglected and denied the same opportunities as their brothers. No one should be left behind in the development of African communities. Yet poverty is driving many people away, some to big cities, while others, especially girls, fall into the criminal networks of human traffickers.

Town Hall Meeting in Gbagbavuinu



2022 AFJN Town Hall in Gbagbavuinu/ North Tong/Vota Region Ghana

A fish farm project has turned into a nightmare for the people of Gbagbavuinu and Torgodo. Huawei Agriculture Development Center (HADC), a Chinese agriculture company registered in Asutuare in Eastern Region/Ghana, used heavy-duty equipment to build a T-shaped water wall to bank the water of a lagoon, which includes a small lake called Aklakpa. This created a fish farming pond that soon after flooded nearby farmland, destroying crops. When the community demanded compensation for what had been lost, HADC packed up and abandoned the project. Naturally, water from the lagoon drained into a stream that is an affluent of the Volta River.

The more it rains, the more it floods, threatening livelihoods and homes. On 23 July 2019, the community addressed a letter to the project manager, a Ghanaian, deploring the loss of their livelihoods and demanding compensation and immediate removal of the retention water wall with the hope that the land will go back to how it used to be. Besides the farmland's being under water,

the community complained that they have lost their sources of firewood, of traditional medicine, of fish, of construction material specific for roofing, and much more. The community also deplored that though HADC had promised them jobs, when HADC started the project it employed people from other towns.

How did Huawei Agriculture Development Center know about the Community?

The community blames its misfortune on the former District Executive Commissioner (DEC) Mr. Collins Richard Arku, who brought in the investor. Initially, when the project was explained to landowners - members of Kornorkuxor Clan) - some did not think it was a good project. In fact, people alleged during the town hall meeting that the DEC had coerced community members into signing, a strategy they described as “divide and conquer,” which undermined unanimous consensus as a group.

Violation of the Terms of the Lease



2022 AFJN Team at Gbagbaviunu Fish Farm Crisis Site

What is happening to the people of Gbagbaviunu is contrary to the provisions in the draft lease which in its 6th sections requires:

- To use the land in such generally accepted manner so that the environment shall not be degraded to such an extent as to render it impracticable for future agricultural activities.
- To pay compensation on all crops and farms destroyed as a result lessee's operations in its catchment area.
- To repair and keep all buildings, developments and features on the land throughout the term of this lease.
- To fill all drenches *[sic] dams, excavations and other voids created on the [sic] solely for their purpose before handing over the land to the lessors upon the determination of the lease.*

Note: The correct sentence should have been: “To fill all *trenches dams, excavations and other voids created on the land solely for their purpose before handing over the land to the lessors upon the determination of the lease.*” It is worth noting that Huawei Agriculture Development Center leased 1000 acres (416.66 Ha) for 30 years with the option to renew, paying 150.00 GHC

per acre, a rate to be revised every five years. Mr. Collins Richard Arku, who brought the investors, is no longer in office. The defenseless people of Gbagbavuinu have been ignored by local authorities after the company left a serious mess, in violation of the lease agreement. Those affected by the flooding deserve compensation. Most importantly, the water retention wall needs to be opened to let water flow naturally in hopes that people can recover their farmland.

Town Hall Meeting in Kelorkpo



2022 AFJN Town Hall Meeting in Kelorkpo

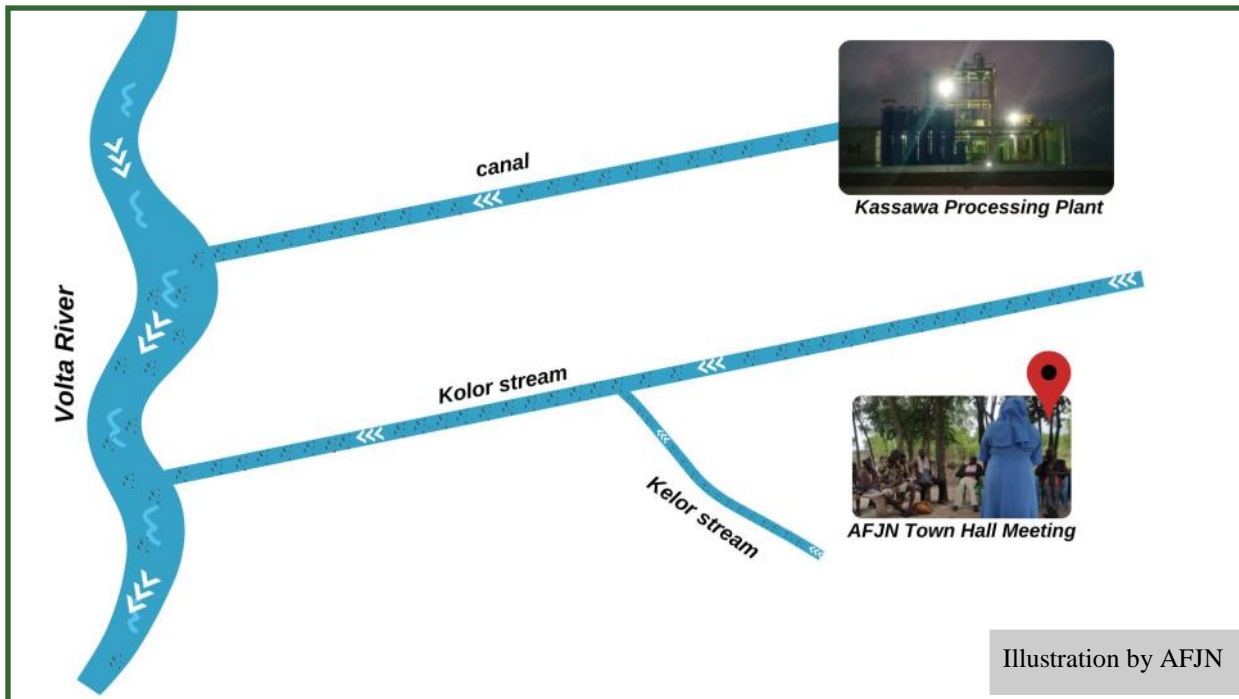
Two weeks prior to our visit to Kelorkpo village on 31 August 2022, in the traditional area of Battor in Ghana's Volta Region, members of the community saw heavy machines plowing their farms, destroying crops without prior notification. They alleged that Mr. Kwesi Aziza Akwetteh had leased the land without informing even the chief, Togbe Gbavu II. Kwesi Aziza Akwetteh is the grandson of the family patriarch, Akwetteh, the actual owner of the land that all of them live on and farm. One after another, participants stated that the land is very much contested. Because Kwesi did not attend the town hall meeting, his side of the story could not be known. A company always needs to ensure that the land it is leasing is not claimed by multiple owners.

Mr. Akwetteh George, a cousin who attended the town hall meeting, said that since they have taken his land, he plans to relocate to the Eastern Region to find farmland. Ms. Sonexor Agbafa, a maternal granddaughter of the patriarch, said that they had uprooted her cassava. Koffi Akwata also known as King George, a paternal grandson of the patriarch, lost a plot where there was a house. Another man said that he had lost six acres. As these people are all related to the elder Akwetteh, the division within the family over this land is a barrier to defending their common interests.

Who Polluted Kelor and Kolor Water Streams?

The people of Kelorkpo (in North Tongu in Battor) are facing an even more devastating challenge: pollution of their water streams: Kelor and Kolor. The two streams important to their livelihoods are allegedly contaminated by runoff water from a corn farm belonging to a company called Kop Farms. Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) learned this information on August 31, 2022 during the town hall meeting in Kelorkpo to promote awareness on land grabbing and responsible investments. No relationship exists between Kop Farms and the people of Kelorkpo other than Kop's having polluted their water streams. Kop had leased no land from the community.

When we went to inquire at the company's local office, we learned from its representatives that three communities are affected. As of September 2022, Kop Farms was temporarily pumping water from the Volta River to two of the communities. The third does not have access to water pumped from the Volta. We were told, however, that efforts are being made to make this possible. The representatives claim they have no obligation to provide water to these communities. Instead, it is out of kindness that they are using their fuel for a good portion of the year to provide water to these communities.



We were also informed that the company has conducted a lab analysis to determine whether the pollutants found in the streams match the chemical compounds found in the product they use in the company's corn farm. Test results were sent to a specialist for accurate interpretation and the company is waiting for the conclusion. If it is determined that the chemicals in the polluted streams are not found in the products they use on the farm, the company will certainly discontinue the provision of water to the community.

However, the people in Kelorkpo are demanding a permanent solution. In fact, they argue that while the water of the two streams has been contaminated by Kop Farms, even the Volta water is not safe for drinking. They allege that a nearby cassava processing plant is dumping pollutants into the river. We witnessed the plant's canal containing liquid from cassava processing, but we have not independently verified whether this is toxic. We photographed the plant only at night and our local partners were terrified doing so. The question is how many more contaminated streams are affluents of the Volta River? What are the health implications for the people who use the water and the biodiverse species that call the river home?

Conclusion

Africa has the opportunity to be a leader in agro-ecology. Governments must make agroecology mandatory for any investor in its agriculture. The Songhai Center in the Republic of Benin, a model now replicated in more than dozen countries, offers an answer to skeptics and those who think less of Africa: a closed loop-farming model calling for waste from one part of the operation to be used to enhance another part of production. Loop-farming is sustainable and is therefore far superior to industrial farming.

Ghanaians have already lost much of their fresh water to pollution by mining activities. Ignorance of the sprawling nature of agro-colonialism now threatening agriculture likely prevails in much of the country, even as too many leaders remain silent or indifferent. The mobilization of citizens is needed to induce action by authorities.

For views of how synthetic fertilizers and chemical pesticides are doing harm and even penetrating the underground water table elsewhere in the world, see Teresa Cotsirilos, in Report: agriculture runoff is leading cause of water pollution in the U.S. published on 21 March 2022. She says that “After evaluating over 700,000 miles of rivers and streams across the country [the U.S.], they concluded that half of those waters are too polluted to fish or swim in — and agriculture is often to blame.” She further adds, “...agricultural industry ... has polluted water and evaded accountability for the better part of half a century.” Which African government is ready to hold agri-businesses accountable? Money talks in most Africa capitals. The PBS Frontline documentary “Poisoned Water,” aired on 12 April 2009, also makes the case that whatever makes a frog have six legs and a male frog have ovaries threatens human life.

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