



AFRICA LAND-GRAB

I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. Ps.140:12

PRIVATE
PROPERTY
BEYOND
THIS
FENCE



Land Grabbing

Is the purchase or lease of large tracts of land by wealthier nations and private investors from mostly poor developing countries in order to produce crops for export.

Initially land-lease was welcomed as a development opportunity. There is now incontrovertible evidence that, in most instances, it has a negative impact on the human rights of the poorest. Land-lease increases poverty by separating people from the land which is their primary asset. This fact together with the scale, secrecy and corruption associated with lease-deals has led to them being referred to as "Land-Grabbing."

Supporters of land-lease try to promote it as a "win-win scenario" that benefits both local populations and investors. The reality is different. In most cases only investors and the local elite benefit. Local communities are often excluded from decision making and they lose the land they have occupied for generations. In most cases the compensation paid to displaced people has been inadequate and sometimes non-existent.

Promised benefits such as employment, training, infrastructure development and improved local economies have not materialised to any great extent. The produce of these land-lease farms is mainly for export adding nothing to local economies or local food supplies. There are also real concerns about the long-term environmental effects of these industrial scale projects.

Rush to close land deals.

It is estimated that globally an area of land roughly the size of Western Europe has been sold or leased in developing countries. Most of this leasing took place in the last few years. In particular, Africa has become a major land-grab target as land is plentiful, fertile and cheap - an investors dream.

Since 2010 land-lease has accelerated dramatically. There has been a rush to complete deals in the face of mounting criticism of unjust land-lease practices. Dispossessed communities, NGO's and Church groups are speaking out, with some calling for a moratorium on the practice. They also call for the legal recognition of customary land rights and transparent consultation with local communities on all projects that affect their livelihoods. They seek laws and policies that protect local people and the environment rather than the short-term interests of investors and corrupt officials.

Voluntary good practice guidelines aimed at promoting transparency, consultation and human rights have been developed. However, as they are not backed up by the force of law they



Swiss owned, Sugarcane biofuel plantation in Sierra Leone



are unlikely to succeed. The rush by investors to complete leasing deals was fuelled by fear that laws enforcing good practice would be introduced. Unfortunately this has not yet happened and so the present flawed and unjust status quo continues.

“They can’t sell our ancestral land”

The above statement made by an Ethiopian farmer proved untrue. The land was sold, in this case to investors from China and Saudi Arabia. In Ethiopia alone land deals covering almost 2.5 million hectares have been made. Land-lease deals have been completed in at least twenty countries across Africa.

Figures estimating the actual amount of African land under lease vary widely. Research published in 2012, which is at the more conservative end of land-lease estimates, identified **754 land deals covering 56.2 million hectares.** (See www.landmatrix.org) Undoubtedly other deals have taken place since. We can however, say with certainty that at the very least, an area more than 6.5 times the size of Ireland, or 2.3 times the size of the UK has been leased to foreign investors in Africa.

Investment companies and African governments often promote land-lease as making use of idle’ or ‘unused’ land. This

is not the case. Even where local people are not evicted from land they actually farm, they still lose access to traditional or ancestral areas that provided water, grazing, raw materials for building, wild fruit, hunting grounds and traditional medicines.

While land given over to land-lease may, in law, be technically owned by the state the *de facto* situation is that customary rights of use and occupancy have been recognised for generations. In foreign investment deals these rights are ignored. Villagers are evicted or duped into accepting compensation that will not, in the long-term, replace the loss of their land and its resources.

Land Grab - Who and Why

Oil rich, but land poor Gulf States and emerging economies such as China, India and South Korea have leased huge tracts of African land, mainly for food production. Biofuel companies from the UK, Germany, Sweden and other European countries have also invested on a lesser scale.

Land is leased for periods up to 99 years to grow rice, maize, sugar-cane, fruit, vegetables and biofuel crops such as palm-oil and jatropha.

Following the 2008 crisis, when the price of staple foods doubled, countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar poured millions of dollars into long-term leases in order to ensure future food security. Growing economies in China, South Korea and India also led to greater demand for food and hence for farmland. EU countries seeking to reduce dependence on oil introduced lucrative subsidies that gave biofuel producers the incentive to lease land in Africa in order to cash-in on the opportunity.

Recently land-lease has come to be viewed as a safer and more stable investment by financial institutions, such as banks and pension funds who are now shying away from the more volatile traditional investments.

Together the above factors have led to an increased demand for farmland in Africa, and contributed to the land-rush of the last few years.

There are many unknowns around land-lease deals. For example: nobody knows exactly how much has been leased, the terms of these deals or how much rent is paid. These details are usually negotiated outside of public scrutiny and often with no reference to those who occupy the land concerned. However, some things are certain. **Secrecy, corruption and the denial of human rights are integral to the present form of land-lease in Africa. It is therefore, in most cases, a rip-off of Africa’s people, land and resources.**

The benefits of land-lease are flowing out of Africa, and Africans are again, as in colonial times, being unjustly exploited.



Love Thy Neighbour

In its work for Justice and Peace the Church seeks development consistent with Catholic Social Teaching. This aims to establish a sustainable and equitable world where people are put before profit and the future of our planet before short-term interests.

The greed, corruption and denial of human rights that have become evident in land-lease deals are in direct contradiction to this aim. They also violate the principles of human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity and the common good, upon which Catholic Social Teaching is based and which reflect the core Gospel call to love our neighbour.

Land is much more than an economic asset: it also has a social, cultural, spiritual and environmental function. Recognising this, the 2009 African Synod of Bishops stressed the need to protect land as a resource for future generations. It also specifically criticised the secrecy and corruption around land-lease deals. *“If the Church is serious about being the voice of the poor, it must bring this hidden agenda out into public discussion and defend the land rights of traditional communities against corrupt leaders and greedy investors.”*

Pope Benedict XVI also criticised the exploitation of Africa’s resources both by external interests and by African politicians and businessmen who seek to ensure *“their own prosperity at the expense of the well-being of the local population.... I call upon the Church in Africa to encourage political leaders to protect such fundamental goods as land and water for the human life of present and future generations... **Acting in concert with all other components of civil society, the Church must speak out against the unjust order.**”* Africae Munus 2011

Land Reform?

Big business conglomerates want to impose western free-trade and land ownership systems on Africa. They are being assisted in doing so by international organisations such as the World Bank, the American Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) that administers US Aid programmes and by the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID).

The World Bank is encouraging the commercialisation of African farmland by "supervising" land reforms that aim to establish western-style property systems based on land registration and land titles that enable the buying, selling and trading of African land. The American MCC has made the acceptance of free-trade, including the creation of a private land market, a precondition to receiving US aid assistance.

The imposition of western land registration and title systems facilitates a legal

but unjust transfer of land usage and ownership away from rural communities and into the hands of land-grabbers. This in turn facilitates commercial industrial scale agriculture rather than the sustainable and environmentally sound farming that African communities need.

The effects of the imposed western systems are well summed up in a Report issued by the UK charity War on Want. This is highly critical of the role played by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID). It states:

"DFID has been using hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money with the express purpose of extending the power of agribusiness over the production of food, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. While this will increase the profits of corporate giants such as Monsanto, Unilever and Syngenta, it threatens to disempower small farmers and rural communities and condemn them to long term poverty". The Hunger Games. 2012

A case in point

Changes imposed by western business interests are having a real effect in Africa. Here is one example.

In 2004 there were, in one region of Ghana, a total of 65 local producers growing pineapples for export. An MCC programme focused on increasing pineapple production was initiated. It began by using satellite imagery to map land to develop a property system based on title deeds with a market value. The result today is that the total pineapple export market in the area concerned is now controlled by two multi-national's and three foreign sub-contractors.

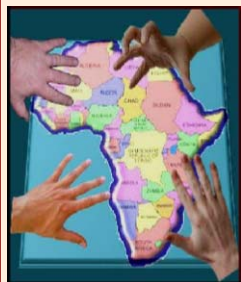
At present the MCC is running programmes in 19 African countries.

Africa - Eight of the world's top ten land-lease countries are in Africa.

South Sudan - has leased over 4 million hectares.

D R Congo - has leased over 2.6 million hectares. One documented lease has granted a European investor a 99-year lease of 179,000 hectares at an annual cost of just \$0.07 a hectare.

Uganda - The 2012 Oxfam Report "Land and Power" tells of the suspected eviction of more than 20,000 people to make way for a plantation run by a UK company.



Tanzania - companies from the UK, Germany and Sweden have leased 650,000 hectares for bio-fuel production. They requested 4 million hectares.