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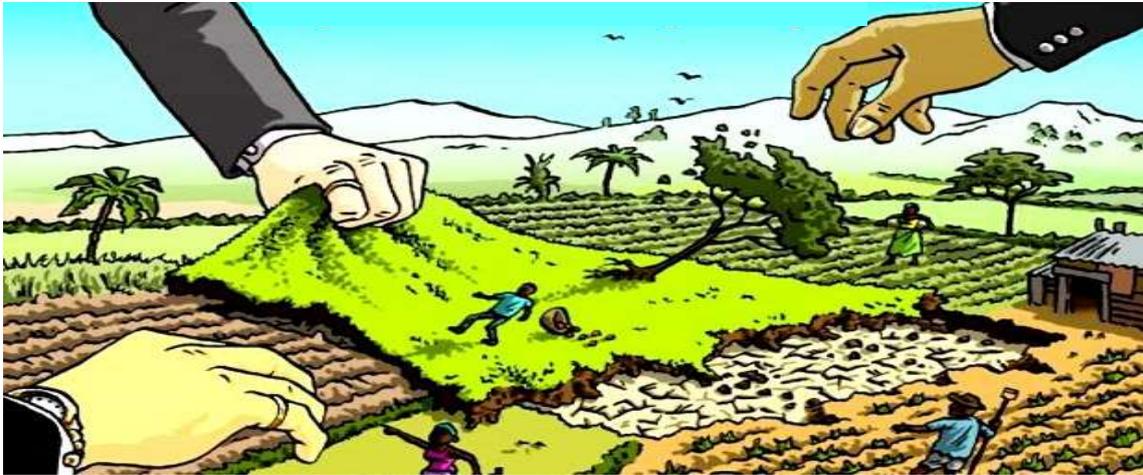
SHEMA

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Newsletter of the actors of the Association Faith and Justice Cameroon

"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God... Love your neighbour as yourself" (Mk 12:29-31)



TOGETHER LET US STAND FOR FARMLAND IN AFRICA

The Abidjan Declaration on Land Grabbing

Editorial: Africa is not for sale

There are hundreds in sub-Saharan Africa to claim, at the cost of their lives, that their land is not for sale or to claim a fair compensation for a space they have been forcibly deprived of. Their cries remind us of Naboth's face of Ahab in the first book of Kings in chapter 21: "The Lord forbid me to yield the inheritance of my fathers." Unfortunately, Jezebel takes away his life and Ahab takes his vineyard. The denunciation of King Ahab by Elijah shows that the role of the prophet is not only the defense of the honor of God, but also the defense of the rights of the people. It is with this in mind that we dedicate this issue of our Newsletter to the reminder of the right of the poor to the land for housing and food (farming): understanding land grabbing, its impact on our society and our economy, hearing and joining the civil society appeal from the Abidjan Conference (21-23 November 2018) that was devoted to the search for endogenous solutions to the phenomenon of land grabbing in French-speaking Africa. Faith and Justice took part in this reflection. Our conviction is that together we can protect agricultural land and ensure food sovereignty in Africa.

A word from the Church

Increasingly worrisome is agricultural land grabbing by transnational companies and States, which not only deprives farmers of an essential asset, but directly undermines the sovereignty of countries. There are now many regions in which the food produced is exported and the local population becomes doubly poor because it has neither food nor land. Then what can be said about the women who in many areas cannot own the land they work, with unequal rights that prevent serenity in family life due to the danger, from one moment to the next, of losing the field? Yet we know that in the world the global production of foodstuffs is for the most part the work of family farms. Therefore, it is important that the fao strengthen partnership and the projects for family farms, and motivate States to regulate the equitable use and ownership of land. This could help to eliminate the various forms of inequality, now the focus of international attention.

Pope Francis to the participants to the 39th Session of the F.A.O., 11 June 2015



Farmer victim of eviction at Lawa, Mayo Danay Division, Far-North Region, Cameroon, 2016

UNDERSTAND & ACT...

Land Grabbing: definition et implications

Land grabbing refers to the agricultural land rush by companies, including multinationals. It is not a new phenomenon. In Latin American countries, American companies settled down to exploit the opportunities associated with the demand of the international banana market. Those countries have been referred

to as the "banana republics" due to the influence of U.S. companies on the local economy as well as their political omnipotence: they determined the regimes in place.

The phenomenon can also be seen in the land rush on the occasion of colonization for political prestige and economic needs (settlement, farm and mining, outlets).

One of the common features is that land grabbing usually leads to the violation of the rights of local farmers.

The peculiarity of the phenomenon today is that it intervenes in a context marked by the recognition of the sovereignty of the "victim" states or the countries of the victims. It often involves private actors (multinational companies), although one can imagine and recognise that the countries of origin of such companies are never far from the negotiations. The stakes are colossal. It is often a matter for countries to feed their people or to ensure the survival of their businesses through the supply of raw materials. State owned companies are not left out.

Another characteristic is that the phenomenon intervenes today in a context marked by the 2008 crisis where like real estate and food, agricultural land is increasingly the subject of speculation. In fact, they are a safe haven for some investors, as food production (for agro-fuels or food) has become capital.

Such a rush seems to be a godsend for African countries like Cameroon faced with ever-increasing import levels of food products. Major

Land grabbing occurs when land acquisitions occur under one or more of the following conditions:

- Injustice and non-respect of human dignity;
- Violation of human rights including economic, social and cultural rights
- Violation of the applicable laws (national and international);
- lack of transparency;
- without prior consultation and consent of the communities concerned;
- Risk of concentration of land power in the hands of a single natural or legal person;
- Without fair, proportionate and sustainable compensation.

investments and intensive agriculture are considered the panacea for solving food security problems. International financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank promote the competitiveness of African economies through the adoption of land-incentive legislation. Since 2010, Cameroon, like some other African countries, is committed to reforming its land legislation to that effect.

While the approach can be commendable in that it seeks solutions to real problems, studies show that the impact of this rush is highly negative in socio-economic terms. It is noted, for example, that agribusiness-grabbing industries create many precarious jobs. Moreover, we would speak of new slavery, as the working conditions (salary, security, working time...) are in

many cases disrespectful of human dignity. Many will spend days in an agribusiness for a pay of about one thousand francs per day.

Another impact is the fact that, despite the availability of arable land, companies are settling in by taking the land exploited by small farmers. They do not go too far away from the first installation or from places with improved accessibility (with good roads) for costs control reasons.

In general, reform projects often make a big part of economic development from the top, leaving aside other uses of land such as worship and cultural approaches. At the end of the day, the objective of food security could to be achieved, but there will still be a serious problem of sovereignty, food sovereignty indeed.



Sensitisation workshop on land grabbing organised by Faith & Justice for Consecrated Persons, Garoua, 2017

SOCIAL PHENOMENON /

Land grabbing: Declaration of the Francophone Africa Regional Conference on the theme "Land grabbing in Francophone Africa: identifying and promoting endogenous solutions to the problem" Abidjan, 21-23 November 2017

Original text in French – unofficial English translation

"God created the heavens and the earth... The Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and take care of it" (Gn1,1; 2,15)

In creating heaven and earth God wanted man to work on the earth for the good of all. But driven by selfishness, he fell into the sin of hoarding with all the ensuing consequences. Based on the word of God and the teaching of Pope Francis on Environment in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato si* (LS), and following the Continental Conference on Land Grabbing held in Limuru, in Kenya, in November 2015,

We, archbishops, bishops, priests, religious men and women, Imams, traditional chiefs, village chiefs, pastoral agents and civil society actors meet in a Francophone Regional Conference on "Land Grabbing in Francophone Africa: identifying and promoting endogenous solutions to the problem" and make the following declaration:

Land is life. Land grabbing is a serious phenomenon that challenges every conscience. The food, energy and financial crises of the years 2000s accelerated the massive influx of capital investment in land, considered as a financial asset and commodity, causing a huge and unprecedented wave of land grabbing in Africa.

This land grabbing is packaged under the guise of "economic growth", "development" and "food security" for Africa. In reality, it is an open road to local, national, international companies or institutions that use customary, religious, military, political, and politico-administrative elites of African nations to perpetuate the economic models that tend towards the grabbing of the African land, waters and natural resources.

Land grabbing widens the gap between the poor and the rich in Africa, where millions of people whose livelihoods are tied to natural resources, including land and water, do not have the basic minimum to lead a decent life. Frequent wars and conflicts in Africa, terrorism, rural exodus, forced displacement, internal and international migration and increasingly shrinking spaces for civil society are perverse effects of this system. Unfortunately, this state of affairs becomes a recurring issue that breeds the sin of indifference (see LS, 14), whereas the victims are human beings like each of us and not mere statistical data.



We observe that all these threats to life are persistent and go contrary to the basic needs of humanity, internationally recognized human rights, evangelical tenets and African religious, social and cultural values.

In view of all the above we declare:

1. Water, seeds and especially land are not and should not be a commercial commodity. The earth is our mother (see LS, 1);
2. The concept of "giving more value to the land" must be fundamentally revised to integrate the African environmental, traditional, spiritual and social dimensions. Human existence goes beyond numerical figures or finance!
3. There is an urgent need to stop land grabbing in Africa in all its forms;
4. We stand in solidarity with the families and communities affected by this threat, who are struggling to take control of their lands and resources, especially those who have lost relatives, and land rights activists who are constantly persecuted;
5. We condemn the criminalization, arrests, imprisonment, persecution and killings of the victims of land-grabbing, activists and land rights defenders. We reassure the victims that they are not alone in their struggle and we commit ourselves to using all available legal procedures to encourage and support them in their noble struggle;
6. We commit ourselves to continue the study and implementation of trade agreements, food security programs, economic investments and development programs either offered to Africa by the international financial institutions or elaborated by our African States;
7. We call upon African Governments to ensure the effective implementation of the "Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Governance of Tenure" (VGGT) and the "African Land Policy Framework and Guidelines" (CLPFA) in their country while at the same time respecting the principles of food sovereignty;

8. Ongoing land reforms in countries should be transparent, inclusive, participatory, consensual and centred on the human person and the Common Good (cf. LS, 183);

9. We invite National and Regional Episcopal Conferences to be more proactive in their commitment to land issues. They should endeavour to create a space for information, training and advocacy in collaboration with the Civil Society Organizations and all persons of good will, for the protection of our common house, the earth (Cf. LS, 13). For, as an African proverb says: "When spiders unite their cobwebs, they can tie a lion".

The similarity of experiences of expropriation and spoliation leads us to recognize that the convergence of our actions and our strategies will help to bring Africa out of this great evil.

The earth belongs to God. We all entrust ourselves to divine Providence, which is never wrong in its plans. May it accompany each of us in the search for justice, peace and respect for human rights and the Common Good.

Abidjan, 23 November 2017



Faith & Justice Team at the Abidjan Conference with Fr CHIKA, Executive Secretary of AEFJN. From left to right: Me Christophe TIYONG, Fr CHIKA, Fr Armel FOPA, Mr Vandi FACHE

The extent of the phenomenon

Estimates of the scope of land acquisition, published in September 2010 by the World Bank, showed that over 460,000 square kilometres (180,000 sq mi) or 46,000,000 hectares (110,000,000 acres) in large-scale farmland acquisitions or negotiations were announced between October 2008 and August 2009 alone, with two-thirds of demanded land concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa... The most recent estimate of the scale, based on evidence presented in April 2011 at an international conference convened by the Land Deal Politics Initiative, estimated the area of land deals at over 80 million ha.

Of these deals, the median size is 40,000 hectares (99,000 acres), with one-quarter over 200,000 ha and one-quarter under 10,000 ha. 37% of projects deal with food crops, 21% with cash crops, and 21% with biofuels. This points to the vast diversity of investors and projects involved with land acquisitions: the land sizes, crop types, and investors involved vary wildly between agreements...

Investment in land often takes the form of long-term leases, as opposed to outright purchases, of land. These leases often range between 25 and 99 years. Such leases are usually undertaken between national or district governments and investors.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_grabbing

Land grabbing in the light of the socio-economic reality of Cameroon: the case of SOCAPALM

Cameroon is not spared by the land grabbing phenomenon. Development projects implemented in partnership with some multinational companies leave the local population landless. This is why since two decades, local populations are fighting against SOCAPALM (a company invested in palm oil' sector) with SOCFIN and Bolloré as majority shareholders. In addition to a lease of close to 58,063 hectares conceded by the State after expropriation on the basis of public utility, SOCAPALM has undertaken a vast campaign of extension of the perimeter of its exploitation, this in violation of the provisions of the lease and to the detriment of the small farmers and producers of palm oil living around its plantations. Environmental degradations due to the hyperactivity of this company is increasingly felt. It has negative impact on the rights of the residents to a healthy environment as the populations of Mbongo, Eseka, Dibombari, Mbambou and Kienké in the regions of Littoral, South and Centre respectively, are now living a high rate of air pollution, land pollution and water pollution. Most of small farmers and palm oil producers of these areas saw their activities shutting down due to the lack of arable land. Even swampy shoals, which are normally forbidden from exploitation, are recovered with a voracious appetite by the company. For idle residents, the only options of reconversion as a SOCAPALM employee remain a privilege because the company rarely recruits the native workforce.

SOCAPALM's bulimia of land, as well as that of many other foreign-owned agro-industries operating in Cameroon (Herakles Farm / SGSOC, PHP, CDC, HEVECAM, SAFACAM ...), demonstrates a high interest for the land and all what it offers as opportunities in terms of development. How can we capitalize on this resource while safeguarding the rights of the local population especially the most vulnerable? How can the state of Cameroon, the guarantor of rights and freedoms, better protect the small local farmers against the land grabbing' phenomenon? Consecrated persons through Faith and Justice plead with other church organizations and CSOs, for the protection of human right to land and other resources like water. An African proverb says: "Money is good, but man is better, because he responds when called".