OUR LAND OUR BUSINESS

WORLD BANK'S BAD BUSINESS IN KENYA

LAND GRABBING AND CORPORATIZATION OF AGRICULTURE

In 2008, the World Bank's Doing Business program named Kenya one of its 10 Top Reformers, after the country had implemented a number of pro-business reforms.[1] However, since then, the weakening investment climate and an "unsupportive" fiscal environment contributed to the Bank reconsidering Kenya's inclusion in the Top Reformer group.[2] Kenya dropped from 122nd out of 189 countries in the 2013 Doing Business ranking to 129th in the 2014 evaluation.

Despite the lowering of ranking, the Bank and the Kenyan government have a history of working together to overhaul Kenya's economy through programs that are leading to land grabbing and the corporatization of agriculture. The influx of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the country grew from $729 million[3] to $3.53 billion between 2007 and 2013,[4] and has fueled the government's swift acquisition of land to sell to overseas firms, creating land conflicts and dispossessing thousands of families of their ancestral homes.

BIOFUELS AND CONSERVATION LAND GRABS

Land is a precious resource in a country where 85% of the population relies on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood. However, 89% of the farmers have access to less than three hectares of land.[5] Yet, the Kenyan government has not shied away from evicting local communities in order to lease large swathes of land for biofuel cultivation.[6] In the Tana Delta, 28,000 hectares were leased to UK-based G4 Industries Ltd[7] and another 10,000 hectares to Canadian-firm Bedford Biofuels in 2011,[8] displacing farmers, destroying wetlands, and escalating tribal tensions.[9] Both biofuel firms halted their projects, the former citing ecological reasons in 2011 and the latter in 2013 due to local opposition.[10]

Another instance of land grabbing includes the World Bank-funded Natural Resource Management Project (NRMP) that resulted in the displacement of thousands of indigenous families and other rampant human rights abuses in the name of conservation in Western Kenya.[11] In 2007, the NRMP changed the borders of the Cherangary forest reserves without notifying or consulting with the communities living there.[12] This resulted in the eviction of more than 15,000 Sengwar people–falsely labeled "squatters" on their own land–and 10,000 Ogiek people in nearby Mount Elgon, since 2007.[13] The evictions involved violence and torching of homes and food stores.[14] In April 2013, the World Bank's Inspection Panel acknowledged the "serious issues" raised by the project around safeguard policies of the Bank.[15]

WORLD BANK'S SUPPORT FOR THE CORPORATIZATION OF KENYAN AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for most of Kenya's population and is vital to the country's economy, with agriculture-related activities accounting for more than 50% of the nation's GDP and 80% of its export earnings.[16] The government's development plan, Vision 2030, includes agriculture in its approach to spur strong economic growth to end extreme poverty. The World Bank endorsed Vision 2030 in June 2014 when it launched its 2014-2018 country partnership strategy (CPS) with Kenya.[17] Over the next five years, the CPS, operating in alignment with Vision 2030, will channel $4 billion worth of investments into strengthening the private sector and improving regional competitiveness.[18]

Vision 2030 purports to target "inclusive development,"[19] yet neglects smallholder farming in favor of large irrigation projects, agrochemical corporations, and large-scale monoculture plantations. In January 2014, the president of Kenya launched the Galana-Kulalu Food Security Project, which underscores the misplaced priorities. This flagship public-private program promises to "accelerate Kenya's Green Revolution" by increasing the efficiency of agricultural production through the irrigation of 405,000 hectares of land and expansion of mechanization and agricultural inputs.[20] Furthermore, the plan involves an increased use of chemical fertilizers[21] through a fertilizer subsidy program.[22]

Several World Bank-funded projects support the Kenyan government's vision to increase reliance on imported agricultural inputs and promote agribusinesses: the $5 million Kenya Agricultural Inputs Supply Program approved in 2009;[23] the $82 million Agricultural Productivity and Agribusiness Project, approved in 2009;[24] and the $28 million Enhancing Agricultural Productivity Project, which intends to increase small farmers' access to credit for securing loans to agricultural inputs, approved in 2010.[25] Chemical fertilizers and commercially produced seeds account for the majority of the inputs supported by these programs.[26] Increasing Kenyan farmers' reliance on imported inputs not only causes them to become dependent on foreign agribusinesses, but also compromises the long-term health of the environment as well as national food security.

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Photo: John Musyoka, a family farmer in his sorghum farm, Kivaa, Kenya. © African Biodiversity Network

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