

Envirocare under Tanzania Land Alliance with HAKIARDHI, conduct a fact finding mission In Mpanda District.

By SAMSON SITTA

Following land grabbing saga at Mpanda District (in refugee settlements of Mishamo and Katumba), Envirocare in partnership with Tanzania Land Alliance (TALA), under auspices of HAKIARDHI undertook a fact finding mission to Mpanda District from 17th to 24th July, 2011. About 7 villages were visited both in Katumba and Mishamo refugee settlements.

A team of 10 people from Envirocare (represented by Samson Sitta), HAKIARDHI, LHRC, LEAT, JET, Mwananchi newspaper, The Guardian, ITV and Channel 10 participated in the mission.

The rationale behind this mission is to investigate on land grabbing issue in Mpanda that involved AgriSol investors from USA and representatives AgriSol Energy Tanzania, Ltd.

From the mission it was found out that, on 11th August, 2010 Mpanda District Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding with AfriSol Energy Tanzania Limited, for Conducting Feasibility Study at Katumba and Mishamo area. This is a way forward to investment of this area for GMO crops and animals. It is alleged that this investment deal is conducted in high secrecy.

Mpanda community members are not aware of anything that is happening, while Agrisol investors have already taken soil samples in the area. A lot of things are being reported, including involvement of high ranking government officials.

Further it was found out that, Mishamo and Katumba settlements, about 4050 km² area are still harboring refugees (Hutu). These are waiting for allowances from TAMISEMI under its resettlement plan. They are to be resettled in different regions of Tanzania and acquire Tanzania citizenship.

However, various concerns were raised due to the nature of conducting this investment issue, as shown hereunder;

- Will food security be achieved?
- How about effects of GMO on traditional seeds?
- Do the leaders who further this deal know about the aftermath of GMO?
- What about the refugees who are still in the areas, are they ready and willing to move out?
- Do we have enough land for cultivation in Tanzania to the extent of giving all this land to investors?
- Has Environmental Impact Assessment been conducted?
- And the most important question is; How are local community members in the area going to benefit while they are not even involved in the affairs of the deal?

In line with questions / concerns above, it was found out that;

- There are incongruous objectives between investors and Mpanda district council. Investors aim at cultivating highly mechanized agriculture with GM crops while on the other hand Tanzania laws do not allow GMOs, under strict liability clause.
- There is ignorance of local communities (purported beneficiaries / likely victims) on the Agrisol issue. No awareness raising has been conducted so far to villages around the area or information whatsoever about the coming huge investment.
- Non-participation of the local leaders and purported beneficiaries / likely victims in the Memorandum of Understanding between investors and the government.

Signing of this MOU involved high ranking officials of Mpanda District Council and delegation from Dar es salaam, while excluding ward councilors and village executive leaders in the area in question.

- The issue of 99 years lease as signed in the MOU between Mpanda District Council and AgriSol Energy Tanzania Ltd, shudders many.

- Most of the officials who were asked about GMOs and effects, seemed to applause the same, claiming that it is going to solve food security. It seems they either do not understand or underestimate the aftermath of GMOs

- There is a lot of secrecy in all dealings of the Agrisol issue, which brings suspicion among the people.

- In accordance with clause 4.6 of the MOU, Agrisol shall as condition on Right of Occupancy: pay Tshs 200/= per acre as payment of land rent per year and 500/= per hectare per year for land under cultivation to the Council as fee. These are so ridiculous, how can you lease land that would have been used by Tanzanians for agriculture or livestock keeping for 700/= per acre, while there are lots of land conflicts throughout the country?

Therefore, in light of the findings above different recommendations were made, that;

- The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, should hold and if possible strengthen the Strict Liability Clause on GMOs. This is the only shield for importation of GM products in Tanzania. Some of the reasons as to why we do not need GMOs include GM Companies are pushing for GMO worldwide for commercial purposes. This type of food has a terrible history of toxic contamination and public deception. All they want is to monopolize the world's food supply and control agriculture industry through supply of seeds, toxic pesticides and industrial fertilizers. This will eventually kill the organic soil that we have. In fact allowing GMOs is going to be an economic disaster for farmers. On top of that, GM food will not solve the food crisis. A 2008 World Bank Report concluded that increased biofuel production is the major cause of the increase in food prices. GM giant Monsanto has been at the heart of the lobbying for biofuels (crops grown for fuel rather than food)? while profiting enormously from the resulting food crisis and using it as an opportunity to promote GM foods! The climate crisis was used to boost biofuels, helping to create the food crisis; and now the food crisis is being used to revive the fortunes of GM industry.

- Mpanda District Authorities should scrutinized rationale and interests of AgriSol, test their relevance to the district development plans and make sure GM crops and animals are not imported since it is unlawful in Tanzania, as per strict liability clause (supra). Also the district authority is supposed to create awareness to the people in areas of potential investment before inviting investors, this will avoid land conflicts like the way it happens in Dar es salaam and Loliondo. Again, the District Council should make sure 27 villages which are to be incorporated under out growers scheme are facilitated in making Village Land Use Plans, acquired Village Land Certificates and offer villagers customary land titles for their farms and plots.

- Civil Society Organizations should provide trainings and awareness raising seminars to Mpanda local government leaders and citizens on the pros and cons of GMO. More education is needed on land rights in Mpanda since only one village, Mpimbwe has done Land Use Plan. Also facilitation for acquisition of Village Land Certificates and customary land titles is very important in this place.

- As for Citizens in general, it is high time we question actions done by government leaders instead of sitting there. Patriotism is not featured in current leaders, if citizens abhor absolute obedience without question, they will end up being sold themselves. It is undeniable fact that most of investment treaties / contracts are done dubiously by leaders who only plot to benefit themselves and their families.