

It's time to end **land grabs**
and establish
food sovereignty
in Gambela

A report by



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Front cover: *Small-scale sorghum farm in Gambela region, Ethiopia.*
Photo credit: Apernga Othow Agid

Introduction

Since 1999, the Anywaa Survival Organisation (ASO) has been working to support the Anuak (also known as Anywaa) Indigenous people of Gambela in defending their territories, culture, livelihoods and food security against corporate and state-sanctioned violence. ASO has also been committed to reporting the human rights abuses by corporate and state entities against Gambela's civil society and against the Anuak and other Indigenous communities in the state, such as the forest-dwelling Majang. Though the work of ASO began earlier, the 2003 Anuak massacre, where more than 400 Anuak men and boys were killed by Ethiopian military forces, made the organisation a crucial voice and platform for the Anuak community. Following the massacre, the Ethiopian government targeted Anuak and other domestic human rights activists and journalists who were attempting both to raise awareness around the 2003 massacre and to hold those responsible accountable for the violence that had been committed. In response, ASO sprang into action and became one of the few remaining voices advocating for the international community to hold the Ethiopian government accountable for what was an ethnically-based genocide. Despite recognition of the severity of the situation in Gambela by the international community – including a call by the European Union in 2004 for “a public and independent enquiry into suggestions of involvement by members of the Ethiopian military in violence directed against innocent civilians”¹, human rights abuses against the Anuak continue.

The year 2007 saw the escalation of a different tragedy affecting the Indigenous peoples of Gambela – with equally devastating consequences – as the Ethiopian government displaced large populations of Indigenous Anuak and Majang communities from traditional lands, water resources and forests through so-called villagisation programmes and aggressive government projects that involved the allocation of millions of hectares of land to agro-businesses, both foreign and domestic. Any opposition to these land grabs has been met with repression, the Ethiopian government often stating that such forced displacement was carried out in the name of development, and that any opposition would be considered a threat to national security. As a result, thousands of Anuak have been forced to cross the border into Kenya and find sanctuary in Nairobi's overcrowded refugee camps.

For ASO, it is essential to bring what has been happening on the ground in Gambela to the attention of the international community and to support local people in advocating for an end to government-sanctioned violence against them. Since its inception, ASO has worked with local contacts to document human rights violations and land grabs, has reached out to international partners to bring attention to the situation, has encouraged and assisted journalists and researchers to cover recent events in the state, and has attended countless international fora in order to continue raising the grievances of Gambela's people. Some of the individuals working with ASO within Ethiopia have been arrested or have been forced into exile where they are still harassed and targeted by the Ethiopian government.

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¹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PESC-04-33_en.htm?locale=EN

ASO has sought to gather as much information as possible about the large-scale agricultural projects in Gambela and their impacts on the livelihoods, food security, human rights, and environments of the local communities as well as the land conflicts that are linked to these projects. These efforts have been badly affected by the political situation prevailing in Ethiopia, where the government views civil society and grass root activists as a threat to national security and has imposed repressive measures to prevent these groups and individuals from collecting and sharing information. The government's strict control and surveillance over the collection and sharing of data and information—both statistical data and information about the experiences on the ground, has complicated ASO's efforts to assess and expose the current realities. Nevertheless, the evidence ASO has been able to gather is sufficient to reach some clear conclusions about the government's land policies in Gambela.

This report highlights the clear failure of the Ethiopian government's development policies in Gambela. It is a call for an end to violent repression and the top-down policies forcibly imposed on the people of Gambela. It is time for a new approach to development, one that is based on the cultures, aspirations and world views of Gambela's indigenous peoples, and that seeks, first and foremost to ensure their well-being and control over their territories.

The Indigenous peoples of Ethiopia

This report views Indigenous peoples through the definition of the UN Special Rapporteur Jose R. Martinez Cobo who, in his study 'On the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations', stated:

"Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system."

This definition accurately reflects the state of Indigenous peoples in Ethiopia, as a vast majority have experienced historical settlement and marginalization by European colonial powers and the Ethiopian state. Throughout the 20th century until the present day, Ethiopia's Indigenous peoples have been victims of injustices, forceful evictions, destruction of their cultures and environments, discrimination and widespread violations of their human rights.

Today, there are more than 20 different Indigenous peoples in Ethiopia. Many occupy vast areas along the low lands near the country's international borders (South Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan), their numbers estimated at 15 million, constituting an estimated 15 per cent of Ethiopia's population. These small-scale farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers, and hunter-gatherers are increasingly faced with food insecurity, forceful eviction, human rights abuses and adverse environmental impacts. Ethiopia's various constitutions (1931, 1955, 1987; 1995) have consistently failed to recognise the political and cultural institutions of Indigenous peoples and their environmental management knowledge, thus undermining the food sovereignty and security that they have developed over centuries. Government development policies – supported by the World Bank – have only undermined their livelihoods and seriously threatened their continued existence.

Concerns raised about these gross human rights abuses, forceful evictions and environmental destruction have fallen on deaf ears. For more than a decade, despite continued media campaigns, advocacy and research on the impacts of land grabs, dams or vil-lagisation programmes, little progress has been made. Despite considerable progressive

development in international legal regimes aimed at the protection of Indigenous peoples, Ethiopia, the second most populous country on the African continent, has neither ratified ILO Convention 169 nor voted on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).² The country's constitution also avoids any reference to the existence of distinct and unique communities that ought to benefit from these international legal regimes. The lack of legal recognition in the constitution reflects the prevailing rise in systematic discrimination and human rights abuses targeting Indigenous peoples in the country's remote regions. In particular, the government's introduction and promotion of policies such as the construction of irrigation dams, large-scale commercial agricultural investments and villagisation programmes has had serious impacts on Indigenous peoples' livelihoods, food security and on the human rights abuses perpetrated against them.

Ethiopia's dire context

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front is a coalition of four regional political parties that has ruled the country since the demise of Dergue regime in 1991. The coalition, after a five day internationally sponsored national conference, resolved to establish a four-year transitional arrangement and to restructure the country into a federal government based on ethnic settlement patterns and linguistic classifications (See administrative map below). The restructuring was necessary to address historical injustices based on land distribution inequalities and economic and political disparities among different ethnic groups, as well as to bring to an end the centralisation of power in Addis Ababa. However, the project of devolving political power to newly ethnically-based regional states failed to deliver the intended results. Today the ruling TPLF led coalition continues to hold a firm grip on power, and regularly uses its power to undermine regional and local autonomy. The government continues to design and develop policies and projects from the capital and impose them on member states with major impacts on peoples' lives. Such top-down development policies and projects have been counter-productive to poverty eradication and addressing inequalities among diverse ethnic groups.

Despite Ethiopia's moderate economic growth, a large proportion of its population remains below the national poverty line and the country continues to trail behind in the Global Hunger Index.³ The food security situation remains grim, owing to population growth, poor governance, conflicts, fluctuations in production, drought and other factors. Hunger and malnutrition are most acute in rural areas where agriculture plays a dominant role as a source of household income. In 2010, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation estimated that between six and seven million rural Ethiopians experience chronic food insecurity and about 13 million suffer food insecurity seasonally.⁴

The government's top-down policies and projects have played a direct role in worsening the food security situation of rural pastoralists, small-scale farmers and hunter-gatherers. This is apparent with the government's land investment policy and villagisation programme, which have increased violent conflicts, environmental destruction and competition over scarce resources in the targeted areas. In 2014, violent conflicts broke out over land and other resources between Ethiopian highlanders and Majengier indigenous communities in the Gambela region⁵, where these two programmes have been aggressively implemented. Similarly, in 2015, the government's plan to expand the capital city into neighbouring rural areas saw students and farmers taking to the streets in protest for fear of small-scale

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2 <https://www.iwgia.org/images/documents/indigenous-world/indigenous-world-2017.pdf>

3 <http://www.foodsecurityportal.org/ethiopia>

4 <https://scialert.net/fulltext/?doi=ajar.2015.55.68>

5 <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/24057-land-grabbing-fuelling-violent-conflict-in-gambela-region>

farmers being displaced from their lands. The protest had significant political implications, sparking divisions within the ruling political party which declared a 10-month state of emergency. The political crisis eventually resulted in the resignation of the Ethiopian Prime Minister.

Such internal tensions have been building up for years, often manifesting in ethnic conflicts, such as those between the Anuak and the Nuer, the Oromo and the Amhara, or the Oromo and the Somali. These conflicts and many others are rooted in poverty and inequalities, competition over scarce resources, degradation to the environment and a lack of effective political space within which tensions can be resolved. The Ethiopian government has managed to navigate these failures and continue to brutally repress any opposition to its policies with the consistent support of Western powers and other foreign partners. Despite its increasing use of violence against protestors and the complete absence of democratic space in the country, little concern has been expressed by international governmental actors and international aid continues to pour in. The record shows that these governments are more interested in Ethiopia's "stability" and geostrategic position within the troubled East Africa region than they are about the welfare and rights of the Ethiopian people. However, in recent years, the increasing opposition to the EPRDF, culminating in their declaration of a six-month state of emergency in 2016, has placed the spotlight on the Ethiopian government's policies. In 2017 the European Parliament took the unusual step of calling for a United Nations-led independent investigation into the killing of protesters in Ethiopia.⁶



Administrative map of Ethiopia.

6 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/18/european-parliament-demands-investigation-ethiopia-killings>

Food insecurity

Ethiopia is among the world's most food insecure countries. In 1984/85, Ethiopia suffered a serious drought that impacted the lives of around 8 million people and was responsible for the death of one million people country-wide. Between 1999-2000, droughts led to the death of 100,000 people in pastoral areas,⁷ whilst the food security situation once again became severe in 2015. With the effects of climate change, the country is expected to remain highly vulnerable to famine into the future as it is predicted that climate change will lead to recurrent droughts in some parts of Ethiopia and heavy rainfall in others, both of which will reduce the amount of agricultural land and thus crop production. For example, in Gambela, a 2006 flood damaged around 1,650 hectares (ha) of the land planted with maize and therefore reduced crop production by 20 per cent (Gambela Region Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency, 2007), leading both to an overall loss of income and to food shortages and malnutrition in the state.⁸

The government has shown little interest in supporting local people to produce foods, such as improving transport networks to markets or supporting farmer seed systems. The government's focus has been on foreign investors, and it has allocated lands to them without consultation or compensation. A farmer interviewed by ASO in a refugee camp in Nairobi stated, "They just ignore our genuine claims to our ancestral lands and invite others to come and take our land because they claim that the land belongs to the government."

While the government denies there is a link between its land investment policy and a social engineering project, farmers see a direct connection. Aotehr refugee in Kenya interviewed by ASO said,

"We were forced to gather at settlement sites and deceived of available land for cultivation and basic social services such as clean water, health clinics, and education facilities for our children. We then realised that the promises were part of government propaganda strategies to evict us from our land and lease the land to investors. Today, our food security situation has not improved since we moved to settlement sites. Instead, figures are made to show that villagisation programme is a success story and there was no link with land investment. Our situation is made worse by some farmers being bribed to give inaccurate information about services at villagisation sites."

This complex and dire food security situation could be made worse by the effects of climate change. The region's population is increasing significantly, putting pressure on the natural environment, water resources, and the poor and inadequate basic services and infrastructures. For more than six decades, the Gambela region has been hosting hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese refugees; mainly Nuer. Today, there are more than 400,000 South Sudanese refugees in more than six refugee camps in the region. Also, the land investment projects have encouraged the migration to Gambela of unemployed people from other parts of the country. These demographic changes are already having a noticeable impact on the environment, as lakes are drying up and there is increased competition over resources.

Land grabs conflicts and food security

In Ethiopia, land is the primary source of livelihoods for about 80% of the rural Ethiopian population. In this context, development policies that restrict access to land increase competition for lands and inevitably lead to tensions and violent conflicts. In recent years, the

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7 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-late-rains-cause-worry-most-somali-region>

8 <http://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=79973&printable=1>

government's land investment policy and its controversial settlement programme have significantly contributed to a rise in ethnic tensions and violent conflicts. Academics, media, and NGOs alike have documented the rising trends in land related ethnic tensions and violent conflicts. In 2012, the Oakland Institute released a report that exposed the grim reality of how land investments were driving conflicts in the lower Omo Valley – a United Nations Heritage site and home for about 200,000 pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities.⁹ Similarly, ASO reported incidents of violent conflicts in Gambela; such as an attack by armed men on the farm of the Saudi Star Company that left a dozen dead including a Pakistani national, as well as conflicts involving Majang and Majangier hunter-gathers in 2012 and 2014. As land is cleared and water diverted for new commercial farms, the loss to local communities is real.

In Gambela, the focus of this report, the allocation of vast fertile lands to foreign and domestic investors is playing into the already tense and hostile relationships that exist among different local ethnic groups. For generations, the Gambela economy has been based on small-scale agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing and hunter-gathering. But these different forms of food production, so central to the food security and livelihoods of local people, are being undermined by the government-supported land grabbing for large-scale agricultural projects and the growing social problems connected to the crisis in neighbouring South Sudan and climate change. In recent years, there has been an alarming growth in numbers of refugees from South Sudan as well as cross border attacks on local communities. This is happening in a context where there is a long history of ethnic tensions and land related conflicts. In this already troubled region, where inadequate and poor basic services and infrastructures are overwhelmed by the influx of refugees, the promotion of large-scale commercial agriculture is exacerbating tensions and violent conflicts and putting the region's food security at risk.

Ethnic tensions and violent conflicts have also been experienced in other parts of Ethiopia that have also been targeted by the government's land investment policies. The Ethiopian government's major dam project is indicative of its treatment of those living in pastoral areas. The construction of the Gibe III dam on the Omo River has already caused various social and environmental impacts on the livelihoods, food security and environment of Indigenous peoples in Ethiopia's Lower Omo Valley region and Kenya's Turkana region. With a population of about 300,000 pastoralists in these northern arid regions, the dam seriously impacts the flow of water to Lake Turkana, the only source of life for animals, birds, fish and human beings. The primary aim of the project, other than to meet domestic demand for electricity, was to supply the regional market with electricity that would in turn earn foreign currency. Half of the 1,870 MW generated by the dam are set aside for exports to neighbouring countries: Kenya, Djibouti and Sudan.¹⁰ But the other component of the project is to create a large irrigated area for commercial agricultural investment, on lands currently occupied by Indigenous peoples.

The Gibe dam will thus disrupt the lives of hundreds of thousands of marginalised and disadvantaged people who largely depend on the natural flow of water. They will be displaced, denied and deprived access to vital natural resources and will also suffer the impact of natural destruction, resulting in food shortages and insecurity. So far, the construction has supported agricultural investment on about 150,000 ha for the cultivation of sugar cane and cotton.¹¹

The cultivation of plantation crops that consume large amounts of water, such as sugar cane, will no doubt also have a drastic effect on water levels. The full impacts, though not immediately visible, could prove irreversible in the long run. Despite concerns expressed by

9 https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/Report_EngineeringEthnicConflict.pdf

10 <http://theconversation.com/fears-over-ethiopian-dams-costly-impact-on-environment-people-80757>

11 <http://iss.ucdavis.edu/iss-journal/features/challenging-the-construction-of-ethiopia2019s-gibe-iii-dam>

NGOs about the lack of consultation with Indigenous communities by the Ethiopian government, nothing has been done to address this issue. Indeed, as noted by NGOs in a 2009 letter, there are “grave risks for Indigenous communities in southwestern Ethiopia, due to major environmental changes the dam will cause and grossly inadequate mitigation.”

Development by displacement I: Ethiopia's land investment policies

The Ethiopian government keeps telling the world that the country will soon edge into the category of middle-income countries, led by a process of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. But year after year, the country remains in the ranks of the world's poorest and it is agriculture, not industry, that remains the main source of employment and gross domestic product.¹² Ten million Ethiopians - about one in ten people in the country - now depend on humanitarian assistance for their food needs. The vast majority of these people are from pastoralist and Indigenous communities in Ethiopia's lowland regions. Ironically, these are the areas that have been targeted by the government's rural land policies - both the villagisation policy, which claims to provide isolated communities better access to social services, and the land investment policy, which is supposed to generate access to foreign currency and rural employment.

In 2016, ASO conducted numerous interviews with refugees in Nairobi who had recently left Gambela. They confirmed that there was serious food insecurity and widespread human rights abuses occurring in the areas where the government had forcibly resettled people under the villagisation programme.¹³ They also made clear what ASO had already concluded: that there is a tight connection between this resettlement programme and the government's policy to lease lands to foreign and domestic investors.

According to one of those interviewed, “Land grabs and the villagisation programme are twin government policies to displace us from our ancestral lands. We were relocated involuntarily for our lands to be given to investors. I returned [back to my land] and found that our homes were destroyed and investors clearing the lands. I then decided to leave for exile for fear of being branded as anti-development and suffer government intimidation, harassment and other adverse consequences.”

Food security has never been a priority for either of these programmes. The villagisation programme systematically displaces Indigenous peoples from fertile lands to areas where food production and access to water are much more difficult. Meanwhile, these fertile areas are offered to outside investors who typically use the lands to produce non-food crops like flowers or cotton, and who mainly produce for export markets. The food security of local communities is undermined by these land deals, which rob them of the resources they need for their own food production. The government has sought to justify this policy by saying that it is targeting “under-utilised” lands so as to make them productive. The reality, however, is that these lands are critical to pastoralists and small-scale farmers whose customary rights to the land are violated.

Overseeing Ethiopia's ambitious land policy is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's Agricultural Investment Support Directorate, which was established in January 2009 and which was soon re-branded as the Agricultural Investment Land Administration Agency (AILAA). The aim of this agency is to negotiate large land lease agreements (over 5,000 ha) with foreign and domestic investors. By 2012, it claimed to have identified around 4.8 million hectares of land as suitable to lease out for commercial agriculture projects. More recently, it has been claimed that 3.6 million ha have been identified by the government for commercial agriculture development. Of these, 2.2 million ha

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12 <https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/the-poorest-countries-in-the-world?page=12>

13 Field interview among settled communities in Gambela.

are administrated through a Federal Land Bank, of which approximately 500,000 ha were awarded to investors by 2016. Another 1,600,000 ha were awarded to investors through regional governments, with over half of the lands having been allocated to foreign investors, as opposed to domestic investors.¹⁴

The lands that were identified for commercial agriculture are within four administrative regions: Gambela; Benishangul-Gumuz; Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People (SNNP); and the Afar region.¹⁵ It is estimated that more than half of the land area acquired by foreign investors is located in Gambela (Barbanente and Aisbitt, 2016: 5). Indeed, Gambela and Benishangul-Gumuz clearly stand out in terms of the relative size of land acquisitions in comparison to other regions of the country (Barbanente and Aisbitt, 2016:10).¹⁶ (See map at the end of this document)

Gambela is an obvious target of the government's programme because it is blessed with a large land area suitable for agriculture and with abundant sources of water. Traditionally, the Indigenous Anuak people of the area have used these lands for subsistence farming, grazing, and hunting, while the four main rivers that flow into the White Nile provide them with bountiful fishing grounds. But their continued use of these lands and waters is now under threat due to the agribusiness projects that have been launched in the region with the support of the Ethiopian government.

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14 GIZ, presented at the Project Launching Workshop, Bishoftu from 15.- 16.07.2016.

15 https://crawford.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/publication/crawford01_cap_anu_edu_au/2016-11/cswp1602.pdf

16 https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2868817

Table 1. Land deals with foreign companies in Gambela since 2007 compiled by ASO and GRAIN

Company or fund	Main foreign owner or investor	Base of foreign owner or investor	Hectares (ha)	Status	Summary	References
BHO Bioproducts PLC	BHO Bioproducts	India	27,000	Cancelled	In May 2010, BHO Bioproducts signed an agreement with the Ethiopian government giving it a 25-year renewable lease for 27,000 ha in Gambela on which the company could grow cereals, pulses and edible oils. Locals say they have lost grazing lands and access to water and were never consulted about the deal. In April 2016, it was reported that BHO had its land lease terminated by the AILAA, after only developing 3,000 ha of the land area it leased.	http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/18593 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/19428 ; http://farmlandgrab.com/stories/201604190793.html ; https://landportal.info/news/2016/03/ethiopia-agency-quits-offering-land-large-scale-agricultural-investments
Karuturi Agro Products Plc (Ethiopia)	Karuturi	India	100,000	Cancelled	Bangalore-based Karuturi Global Ltd, founded by Sai Ramakrishna Karuturi, is the world's largest producer of roses. In 2008, Karuturi started to invest in farmland and agricultural production in Africa through its Dubai holding company, Karuturi Overseas. It began by acquiring a long-term lease on 11,000 ha in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia and a 50-year renewable lease on 100,000 ha in the Gambela Region, with an option for another 200,000 ha. Its Ethiopian subsidiaries include Ethiopia Karuturi Global, Ltd. —also known as Ethiopian Meadows Plc, Gambella Green Valley Plc (Ethiopia) and Karuturi Agro Products Plc (Ethiopia). The company intended to produce some palm oil and sugar, but primarily rice and wheat for export, and claimed to have secured a 40,000-tonne/year supply agreement with Djibouti. Beyond Ethiopia, Karuturi had intentions of acquiring farmlands in Tanzania and Sudan. However, by 2015, the company was loaded with unpaid debts and its main assets in Kenya had been seized by its creditors. Only 1,200 ha of its lands in Gambela were cultivated. In December 2015, the Ethiopian government announced it would be cancelling the land lease, leaving Karuturi only with an option to retain the 1,200 ha it has under cultivation. Karuturi sought to challenge this decision, but in September 2017 the company finally announced it would be exiting Ethiopia. In December 2017, it was reported that the company was once again in negotiations with the Ethiopian government, with the backing of the Indian government, to retain 7,000 ha of its original concession in Gambela	http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/18548 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/19832 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/19329 ; http://www.icra.in/files/pdf/2011-June-karturi.pdf ; http://allafrica.com/stories/201503022858.html ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/23028 ; http://www.thereporterethiopia.com/index.php/news-headlines/item/3045-karuturi-under-the-spotlight ; http://qz.com/417710/the-lesser-known-story-of-indias-role-in-ethiopian-land-deals/ ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/24709-naivasha-karuturi-seals-debt-buyout-deal-planning-comeback ; http://farmlandgrab.org/25644

Company or fund	Main foreign owner or investor	Base of foreign owner or investor	Hectares (ha)	Status	Summary	References
Ruchi Agri PLC	Ruchi Group	India	25,000	Minor development	In April 2010, Ruchi Group's subsidiary Ruchi Soya, one of India's largest vegetable oil producers, signed a contract with the Ethiopian government giving it a 25-year lease on 25,000 ha in the Gambela Region for the production of soybeans, with an option to double the area to 50,000 ha. The Ethiopia project is overseen by its local subsidiaries Ruchi Ethiopia Holding Limited and Ruchi Agri PLC. By 2015, Ruchi was growing soybeans on 1,000 ha and had cleared an additional 2,000 ha. The Indian company had invested an initial US\$78 million in its Ethiopian subsidiary, which by May 2016 had accumulated losses of US\$6.8 million	http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/18592 ; http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/media-advisory-indian-agriculture-investments-ethiopia-boon-or-bane ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/22851 ; http://www.ruchisoya.com/2015-16/Ruchi%20Ethiopia%20Holding%20Limited%20-2015-16.pdf
Toren Agro Industries Plc	Tekron Group	Turkey	6,000	Minor development	Land lease signed in September 2011 with the Ministry of Agriculture for a 6,000 ha cotton and soybean farm in the Gog District of Gambela.	http://openlandcontracts.org/contract/ocds-591adf-7435167933/view#/ ; https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/21752-ethiopia-army-attack-kills-and-displaces-farmers
Sannati Agro Farm Enterprises Pvt. Ltd	Sannati Agro	India	10,000	Unclear	In October 2010, India-based Sannati Agro of Hyderabad signed a contract with the Ethiopian government for a 25-year lease on 10,000 ha of land in the Gambela Region. It plans to cultivate mainly rice for export to the US. It began its farming operations in 2011 and claims to be "progressively growing year after year".	http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4479-grain-releases-data-set-with-over-400-global-land-grabs ; http://www.sannati.com/
Verdanta Harvests	Lucky Group	India	3,012	Minor development	In 2010, Verdanta Harvests, a subsidiary of India-based Lucky Group, obtained a 25-year lease from the Ethiopian government for the production of tea and other crops on 3,012 ha. In October 2013, local people who had been displaced by the project destroyed some US\$140,000 of the company's buildings and machinery. By 2015, the company had only brought 143 ha under cultivation with another 158 ha having been cleared. That year the Agricultural Land Investment Administration Agency issued a first warning letter to the company for not having developed the lands as obligated in its contract.	http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/media-advisory-indian-agriculture-investments-ethiopia-boon-or-bane ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/21660 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/22772-attack-on-indian-owned-farm-in-ethiopia-turns-spotlight-on-land-policy ; http://allafrica.com/stories/201607261079.html ; http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/attack-on-indian-owned-farm-in-ethiopia-turns-spotlight-on-land-policy/article5314720.ece

Company or fund	Main foreign owner or investor	Base of foreign owner or investor	Hectares (ha)	Status	Summary	References
Saudi Star PLC	Al Muwakaba for Industrial Development & Overseas Commerce (MIDROC)	Saudi Arabia	10,000	Partial development	Saudi Star PLC is a company owned by Saudi billionaire Sheikh Al Amoudi, with backing from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as part of its initiative to outsource food production overseas. In 2009, the company signed a lease with Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture, for 10,000 ha of land in the Abobo District of Gambela. The company then began construction of a rice farm, with plans to grow one million tonnes of rice per year to generate US\$1 billion per year in export revenues. Al Amoudi also owns Ethiopia's largest livestock operation, Elfora Agroindustries, and Horizon Plantation, a joint venture with Jemal Ahmed and Malaysia's AgriNexus that was reported to be pursuing a 58,000-ha oil palm project in Gambela.	http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/18591 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/18344 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/2716 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/19049 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/19938 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/19888 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/21912#sthash.LpngGRpT.dpuf ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/24898 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/25068-saudi-investor-s-ethiopian-farms-to-raise-coffee-tea-output#sthash.4WaWJ3ko.dpuf ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/25036-saudi-star-donates-26-tractors-and-30m-birr-to-gambella-farmers-and-youth#sthash.OZBuKlSo.dpuf ; http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/24898-ethiopia-midroc-announces-8-billion-birr-expansion-for-midroc-gold-elfora#sthash.FGWJaML.dpuf ; https://ig.ft.com/sites/land-rush-investment/ethiopia/ ; http://farmlandgrab.org/24295 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/23019 ; http://farmlandgrab.org/20937 ; http://www.theworldfolio.com/interviews/why-invest-in-ethiopian-agriculture/3934/ ; http://openlandcontracts.org/contract/ocds-591adf-9604461339/view/#/
Green Valley Agro. Plc.		India	5,000	Unclear	Lease signed with the Ministry of Agriculture in January 2012 for a 5,000 ha cotton farm in Abobo District, Gambela. The status of the project is not clear.	http://www.ipekpp.com/admin/upload_files/Report_3_52-Prospects_2523493963.pdf
Hunan Dafengyuan Agriculture Plc.		China	25,000	Cancelled	Lease signed in November 2010 with the Ministry of Agriculture for a 25,000 ha sugar cane farm in the Dima District of Gambela. By 2012, the company had abandoned the project, apparently due to lack of infrastructure for the project in the area.	http://openlandcontracts.org/contract/ocds-591adf-3697697327/view/#/ ; Deborah Brautigam, Will Africa Feed China?

Company or fund	Main foreign owner or investor	Base of foreign owner or investor	Hectares (ha)	Status	Summary	References
JVL Oversea PTE Ltd.		India	5,000	Cancelled	Lease signed with Ministry of Agriculture in June 2012 for 5,000 ha in the Dima District of Gambela for a cotton farm. In September 2015, the Ethiopian Agricultural Investment Land Administration Agency repossessed the land from the company for failure to develop the land and to deliver on its contract.	http://openlandcontracts.org/contract/ocds-591adf-0402798819/view#/ ; http://www.fanabc.com/english/index.php/news/item/3885-agency-takes-back-land-from-three-firms
Saber Farms Plc		India	10,000	Cancelled	Land lease signed in May 2011 with the Ministry of Agriculture for a 10,000 ha soybean and cotton farm in the Dima District of Gambela. In September 2015, the Ethiopian Agricultural Investment Land Administration Agency repossessed the land from the company for failure to develop the land and to deliver on its contract.	http://openlandcontracts.org/contract/ocds-591adf-0529976027/view#/ ; http://www.fanabc.com/english/index.php/news/item/3885-agency-takes-back-land-from-three-firms

Data obtained from the Gambela Investment Agency by researcher Fana Gebresenbet indicates that between 2003 and 2014, 420 land deals were made, totalling over 545,000 ha in the region. Most of the land deals are within the traditional homelands of the Anuak, although many land deals also affect the traditional areas of the Majang and areas occupied by the Nuer. Also, according to the same data, most of the land deals took place between 2008 and 2010.¹⁷

These numbers are largely in line with the information that ASO and GRAIN have compiled. As can be seen from Table 1, many of the land deals with foreign companies that have been signed or announced through media reports have collapsed. ASO's interviews and communications with Anuak farmers and local authorities in Gambela indicate that the situation is similar in the case of lands that have been allocated to domestic investors. Many of the businessmen from Addis Ababa who acquired large plots of land in Gambela using bank loans, have left the plots vacant and used the money for alternative business purposes. Recent reports indicate that only 12 per cent of the land allocated in Gambela under the government's land investment programme is actually being farmed, and fewer than half of the investors who have been allocated land leases and preferential loan arrangements have even bought agricultural machinery.¹⁸

The most well-known case in Gambela of these land grab scandals is that of the Indian cut flower company, Karuturi Global Limited. In 2008, in the wake of a global food price crisis, the company decided to begin investing in agricultural crop production. The Ethiopian government invited it to lease a massive swath of 300,000 ha of fertile land in Gambela to produce various food crops. But, six years later, by 2014, Karuturi had failed to bring more than 5,000 ha under production - and local people were reporting to ASO that operations at the farm had completely shut down. As the government became aware of Karuturi's lack of capacity to farm at such a scale, it reacted by reducing the size of the land allocation. It began with a reduction to 100,000 ha in 2010 and then to 1,200 ha in 2015. In September 2017, the company announced it would finally be exiting Ethiopia altogether, but demanded compensation, claiming that the government had decided to "unilaterally and illegally cancel our investment and trade license."¹⁹

Over its nine years of implementation, the Karuturi project displaced local people, caused deforestation and other environmental consequences and contributed nothing to local or national food security. Given the various tax incentives the company was offered, it also provided little, if any, revenue to the country and no decent jobs for locals. In March 2013, 92 Ethiopian workers at Karuturi's Gambela site filed a complaint with the Department of Labour and Social Welfare claiming that their salaries were delayed by up to 20 days and that the company did not provide identity cards, safety equipment, medical treatment or proper residence. The department found workers living in cramped metal shacks without proper ventilation.²⁰

The Karuturi case reveals much about how the Ethiopian government has been distributing lands to foreign investors. No due diligence procedures were carried out to assess the environmental, social and economic impacts of the project or the project's feasibility. Basic

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17 Fana Gebresenbet (2016), Land Acquisitions, the Politics of Dispossession, and State-Remaking in Gambella, Western Ethiopia, in: *Africa Spectrum*, 51, 1, 5-28: <https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/afsp/article/download/921/92828>

18 <http://www.borkena.com/2016/12/26/esat-bezhisamint-land-grab-gambella-story-corruption/> ii http://landmatrix.org/media/filer_public/ab/c8/abc8b563-9d74-4a47-9548-cb59e4809b4e/land_matrix_2016_analytical_report_draft_ii.pdf

19 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-21/karuturi-demands-compensation-from-ethiopia-for-failed-land-deal>

20 <https://www.grain.org/e/4885>

issues, such as the capacity, experience and financial ability of the company to carry out such a daunting investment venture in a remote part of the country were not properly considered by the government before it provided Karuturi with an astoundingly large area of land. As such projects require large financial inputs and heavy machinery, even the company's claim to have invested US\$150 million was not nearly enough, and the firm, which had an overall worth of only US\$115 million²¹, was unable to raise enough capital to develop the lands it acquired from the government in Gambela.

In November 2017, news broke that the Indian government was assisting Karuturi in negotiating with the Ethiopian government for the company to maintain rights to 7,000 ha of its initial Gambela concession.²² But ASO communications with the affected communities indicate that they have already started to rehabilitate these lands for their own use. If Karuturi does succeed in holding on to this 7,000 ha section of land, it will be a second experience of land grabbing for the communities.

The Karuturi debacle is part of a wider problem. Numerous other agribusiness projects have also failed under the government's land policy, with many incidents of financial mismanagement or even fraud. Another Indian company, BHO, for instance, pulled out of Ethiopia after it failed to repay a loan from the Ethiopian development bank intended to develop 27,000 hectares of land.

The situation became so bad that the government recently suspended its agricultural investment loan scheme, while the Prime Minister launched an investigation into the government's agricultural investment programme in the Gambela region. The report from that investigation, which was not made public but was viewed by certain media, found numerous irregularities, such as a case of loans being issued for a single plot of land to about 400 different domestic investors. Similar cases of mismanagement and fraud under the government's land policy have led to the arrest of officials, investors, brokers and land experts.²³ According to Ethiopian media, the report from the Prime Minister's office cites cases of loans being diverted to non-agricultural activities or of agricultural machinery and inputs being imported duty-free and then not being found on the project sites.²⁴

This reckless implementation of the government's land policy is also adding fuel to ethnic tensions. For the Indigenous communities of the Gambela region, it is clear that the Ethiopian government authorities are giving preference in the allocation of lands to domestic investors who are aligned to the ruling EPRDF coalition or who are from the Tigray region, which is the political base of the EPRDF. One expert from the Gambela Land Administration and Environmental Protection Authority claims that the proportion of Tigrigna-speaking investors is above 90 per cent of the domestic land investors in the region.²⁵ Local anger and frustration with the government's land policies thus risks boiling over into a generalised resentment towards non-Indigenous people living in the region.

The environment is a major casualty of the government's misdirected land policies. The Ethiopian constitution and its subsidiary legal instruments are supposed to provide protection of the natural environment from the damaging effects of development programmes or projects. For all such projects, the law requires that environmental impact assessments are conducted prior to implementation. These procedures should clearly be followed for large-scale commercial agricultural projects, given the high potential for deforestation, loss

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21 <http://businessworld.in/article/Indian-Farmer-s-African-Safari-/08-11-2014-65074/>

22 <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/27693-the-indian-company-karuturi-global-requests-to-resume-its-operations-in-ethiopia>

23 <https://ethsat.com/2016/12/ethiopia-thirteen-arrested-following-fraudulent-land-loan-scandal/>

24 Ibid

25 4, Western Ethiopia, in: *Africa Spectrum*, 51, 1, 5–28: <https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/afsp/article/download/921/928>

of biodiversity and damages from the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides (Davis, et al., 2015; Desalegn, 2011 and Cotula, et al., 2009). Agribusiness projects also have major impacts on water sources, which are not only critical to local people but also to communities living downstream.

The main source of water for the Nile river basin is found in the adjacent regions of Gambela and Benishangul-Gumuz, in the Ethiopian lowlands. This source is necessary to the Nile's high-water volume. Any large-scale agricultural projects in these two regions will divert significant amounts of water from the Nile, which could lead to shortages downstream, raising tensions among Nile basin nations, particularly with Egypt which utilises approximately 60 per cent of the Blue Nile waters.²⁶

One of the largest land deals in Gambela is with Saudi Star PLC for a 10,000 ha rice plantation between Perbongo and Pokedi villages in Abwobo (Abobo) district, 25 miles from Gambela town. The company operates on land previously occupied and used by local farmers along the Alworo river, as well as lands that are part of the Gambela National Park. The company was awarded these lands without an environmental and social impact assessment.²⁷ ASO conducted interviews with affected communities in 2012. According to the community members, an environmental and social needs assessment was never conducted for the project, nor were they ever consulted about the land lease agreement. "The land was given by the government without our input," said one local farmer.

The local communities also complained about lack of restrictions and control on the use of water, with the result that the Alworo river, which is the life line for Anuak communities, is drying up. The company's actions to divert water from Alworo river, rather than using water available from the dam, severely threatens the local communities' livelihoods, as it creates a shortage of water for farming, fishing, grazing and gaming activities essential to the communities.

One of the main arguments put forward by the investors and the government to justify the large-scale land deals in Ethiopia and elsewhere is the creation of jobs. But, in ASO's communications with affected local communities, it is clear that much of the workers hired for these projects, especially when it comes to the few better paying jobs, are not from the local communities. Local people are only hired for seasonal work, usually on a day rate, at very low wages, and for tasks that are dangerous and exhausting. One of the only studies that exists of working conditions on large farms in Gambela was carried out at the Saudi Star rice farm in 2014 by researchers from the University of Gondar. They found that 92 per cent of workers on the farm are categorised as "temporary" workers, with an average wage of only 382 birr per month (US\$19). For this measly amount, the workers have to work long hours. According to the study: "75.27 per cent of respondents were working for 48 hours per week and 24.8 per cent were working for more than 48 hours". They also found that 94 per cent of the workers reported receiving no safety training and that 37 per cent of the farm's workforce reports injuries every year, with six workers saying they were so badly injured that they had to be hospitalised.²⁸

It is for such "benefits" that the Indigenous people of Gambela are being forcibly removed from their lands. These poorly paid and dangerous jobs can in no way replace what the people have lost by losing their lands, waters and forests to the big farming companies.

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26 <https://e360.yale.edu/features/vanishing-nile-a-great-river-faces-a-multitude-of-threats-egypt-dam>

27 The intricacies of large scale agricultural investment in Gambella Region, Ethiopia

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28 <https://occup-med.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12995-017-0153-x>

One woman from Ilea village, which was taken over by the Karuturi project, told ASO: "We used to collect construction materials from the forest. Now that the company has destroyed our natural environment, we are left to use maize stalks for construction." Another woman from the same village told ASO: "Before we used to collect fruits, fish and farm cash crops on the land. The company, without regards to our culture and way of life, cleared the forest, blocked streams, and denied us access to our farm lands. We no longer access Shea trees and other fruits vital for our resilience to food insecurity. And because of the company operations, our fish stocks have been reduced."

Given such conditions, local frustrations with the land deals can boil over into violent conflicts. One such incident occurred on 28 April 2012, when unidentified gunmen stormed the Saudi Star Agricultural Development PLC compound, leaving one Pakistani and four Ethiopian employees dead.²⁹ In response, the Ethiopian army unleashed a deadly attack on the local communities living adjacent to the Saudi Star farm. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that, on the day after the Saudi Star attack, Ethiopian soldiers shot and killed four of the company's Anuak guards, accusing them of complicity in the attack. They then entered nearby villages where they arbitrarily arrested scores of young men and committed rape and other abuses against local villagers. Hundreds of villagers from the area fled to neighbouring South Sudan to seek safety.³⁰

Development by displacement II: Ethiopia's villagisation programme

Of all the disasters that the Ethiopian government's land policy has generated in Gambela, whether in terms of finance, labour, or the environment, none is more profound than the displacement of Indigenous communities. This displacement can only be fully understood when examined in conjunction with the government's villagisation programme.

Resettlement is not a new government policy in Ethiopia. Mass evictions of Indigenous Anuak for commercial agriculture were first initiated in Gambela in 1979 when the government set up irrigation schemes on the Baro River and brought in settlers from the highlands to set up farms. In the 1980s, Ethiopian authorities launched several other programmes to move massive numbers of people out of their traditional territories. This was done under the justification of protecting them from drought, famine, or civil conflicts, or with claims that the resettlement was necessary to enable them to become more modern and to access key social and economic services provided by the government.³¹ During that decade, the military regime resettled about 60,000 Ethiopians from the highlands of Tigray, Wello, Shewa and some parts of Southern Ethiopia to the Gambela region, near to the border with what is now South Sudan.

This involuntarily resettlement of culturally and linguistically distinct populations to the territories of Gambela's Indigenous peoples not only had serious social and economic impacts but also environmental consequences. Many Indigenous Anuak had to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighbouring countries. In 1988, Cultural Survival collected and documented stories from displaced Anuak in the Sudan which revealed the horrific scale of abuse and violence committed by Ethiopian authorities against the Anuak in their villages, forests, and en-route to Sudan.³²

However, the Ethiopian government's most recent mass resettlement initiative, known as the 'villagisation programme', is unprecedented in its scale and scope. Within three years

29 <http://capitalethiopia.com/2012/05/08/unknown-gunmen-attack-al-amoudis-commercial-farm-5-dead/>

30 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/28/ethiopia-army-commits-torture-rape>

31 <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/anuak-displacement-and-ethiopian-resettlement>

32 Ibid.

(from 2010-2013), it planned to resettle about 1.5 million culturally and linguistically diverse and distinct communities, who identify themselves as Indigenous peoples. The Indigenous peoples that were targeted also share the common hallmarks of both political and economic marginalisation and a dependence on lands and other natural resources that the government and foreign companies want to access for large-scale projects, such as mining, tourism, and agricultural plantations.

The Ethiopian federal government has always denied any connection between its villagisation programme and the leasing of large areas of land for commercial agriculture. But a 2011 investigation by Human Rights Watch found that "the villagisation program is taking place in areas where significant land investment is planned and/or occurring." This was particularly the case for Gambela where the programme was most advanced and where the government planned to relocate some 45,000 households over the project's three-year life span. According to Human Rights Watch, affected villagers were told directly by local government officials that this was the underlying reason for their displacement and the same was repeated to Human Rights Watch researchers by local government officials tasked with carrying out the programme.

The Human Rights Watch report concluded that the areas of land in Gambela provided to investors under the government's land investment programme, such as the Abobo, Itang, and Gog *Woredas*, and along the Baro and Alwero rivers, are the very areas where the first year of the government's villagisation programme was focused. The two biggest agricultural investment projects, the Saudi Star and Karuturi projects, both involved areas of land where local people were displaced under the villagisation programme.

People were also displaced in Gambela under the villagisation programme to make way for mining projects. For instance, in 2016, Stella Trade and Industry Plc. was granted a ten years gold mining concession with Ethiopian Extractive Industries and Transparency Initiative on 255 square km covering the Benchi-Maji zone and Anywaa zone in the Gambela region.³³ The area allocated for commercial gold mining is already used for traditional small-scale mining activities and, as such, the project would deprive local communities of access to the mining areas and their traditional income generating activities. In 2013, these traditional gold mining activities in the area generated around US\$50 million through the sale of 1160 kg of pure gold.³⁴

In another case, in September 2017, the Ethiopian Ministry of Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas signed a gold mining agreement with the Nankay Company to extract alluvial gold on 2.04 square km in Abobo district in Gambela.³⁵ The Indigenous Anuak from this area live along the Chiru River and rely on its water for drinking, food preparation, and farming but the gold mine will contaminate the water with arsenic.

The interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch and ASO of villagers in Gambela affected by the villagisation programme make it clear that the relocations were not done voluntarily, as claimed by the government, nor for the benefit of the local people. In Gambela, the programme was implemented with "widespread human rights violations, including forced displacement, arbitrary arrest and detention, beatings, rape, and other sexual violence. Residents have been denied their rights to food, education, and adequate housing."

"We want you to be clear that the government brought us here... to die... right here.... We want the world to hear that government brought the Anuak people here to die. They brought us no

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33 <http://www.2merkato.com/news/alerts/4559-ethiopia-stella-granted-gold-mining-license>

34 <http://allafrica.com/stories/201307190719.html>

35 <http://www.thereporterethiopia.com/content/ministry-awards-small-scale-gold-mining-license-chinese-company>

food, they gave away our land to the foreigners, so we can't even move back. On all sides the land is given away, so we will die here in one place."

Anuak elder displaced by the villagisation programme

The government appeared to have paused the implementation of the villagisation programme in 2013 after considerable public outcry and increasing pressure from donors who were forced to react to growing evidence of connections between their assistance to the Ethiopian government and its villagisation programme. It is unknown how many people in total were displaced by the villagisation programme, but recent interviews carried out by ASO with refugees from Gambela indicate that those who were displaced are still unable to return to their traditional territories.

Voluntary Guidelines

A comprehensive non-binding international land investment regime was agreed to in 2012 after a long period of negotiations involving different stakeholders, governments, civil society, NGOs, and private companies. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), aims to regulate agricultural investments in the face of numerous challenges. These challenges include the lack of capacity of local communities, local authorities, national agencies, and civil society to effectively apply the provisions of VGGT, a weak legal and institutional framework of land investment target countries, and rising disputes and conflicts over scarce resources. The EU and some other western governments have provided funds and other assistance to governments and international organisations to develop capacity in the implementation of the voluntary guidelines. Ethiopia, a country at the heart of land investment projects, is among the main recipients of this assistance from the EU and some western governments.

In 2016, the German and Ethiopian governments signed an agreement worth 3.3 million Euros (3 million from EU and 3 hundred thousand from the German government) to support Ethiopia's responsible agricultural investment. This bilateral accord was said to fall under the EU's land governance programme, which provides support to ten African countries including Ethiopia, as well as the joint partnership declaration between Ethiopia, the UK, US, and Germany to support rural land administration and land tenure security. Despite reference to the VGGT as a basis for the agreement, there is no evidence that the implementation involves the active participation of civil society, local communities, and local authorities. Implementation is heavily centralised within the Ethiopian Agricultural Investment Land Administration Agency and GIZ, the German project implementation partner. Moreover, the lack of transparency surrounding how the project will secure customary land rights of Indigenous peoples and facilitate investment that supports local farmers also violates the VGGT.

Such a single handed, and non-transparent approach to the implementation of voluntary guidelines in a country with chronic drought and famine, land disputes and conflicts, political instability, and rapid environmental degradation offers little solution to the adverse impacts of agricultural investment on local communities, the environment, and the food security of the poor and vulnerable.

Time to close the door on land grabbing in Gambela

After two and half decades of despotic and iron fisted rule, Ethiopia is at a turning point. In 2015, the government's plan to expand the capital city into surrounding rural areas brought wide-spread protest over concerns about the mass eviction of small-scale farmers. Dozens of protesting students and farmers were murdered, and thousands were arbitrarily rounded

up and sent to prison. The protest, which originated out of concerns for rural peoples' livelihoods and the protection of land rights, has since thrown the regime into serious political crisis. While the regime could collapse at any point, given the explosion of long standing rifts in the ruling coalition, increasing conflicts throughout the country, and the government's inability to control the ever growing mass uprising for political reform and an end to repression of dissent, the situation could degenerate into further excessive force against innocent civilians.

Activists, media, researchers, and human rights groups anticipated the adverse consequences of the government's ill-conceived land deal policies on rural communities and have consistently opposed them. The authorities, however, refused to listen and would only talk about the supposed benefits; employment opportunities, technological advancement, and foreign direct investment earnings. It is now clearly apparent that these benefits were far removed from reality. The land investments only generated seasonal employment and high levels of food insecurity and dependency on food handouts among previously self-reliant and food secure communities. In a nutshell, the land investment policies are a dismal failure. Yet, unfortunately, the government is still unwilling to listen to the people and change course.

Despite the government suspending its most destructive social engineering policy, the villagisation programme, ASO has received information from local sources that the programme has recently been put back into operation, notably in districts along the South Sudan border that were previously not impacted by the programme. The government, it should be recalled, initially conceived of the programme's implementation on a phase by phase basis. It is time for change. The focus of policies must be on building the capacities of local food and farming systems which must be run with respect of the local Indigenous peoples' control over their land and territories. They must be able to define the type of development projects that they want. Any government programme that aims to improve local food production must involve small-scale farmers and pastoralists in its development and implementation who must be allowed to determine the terms on which any outside investment in agriculture can occur and define what role the agencies must play in employment creation and food production, if it is allowed to proceed.

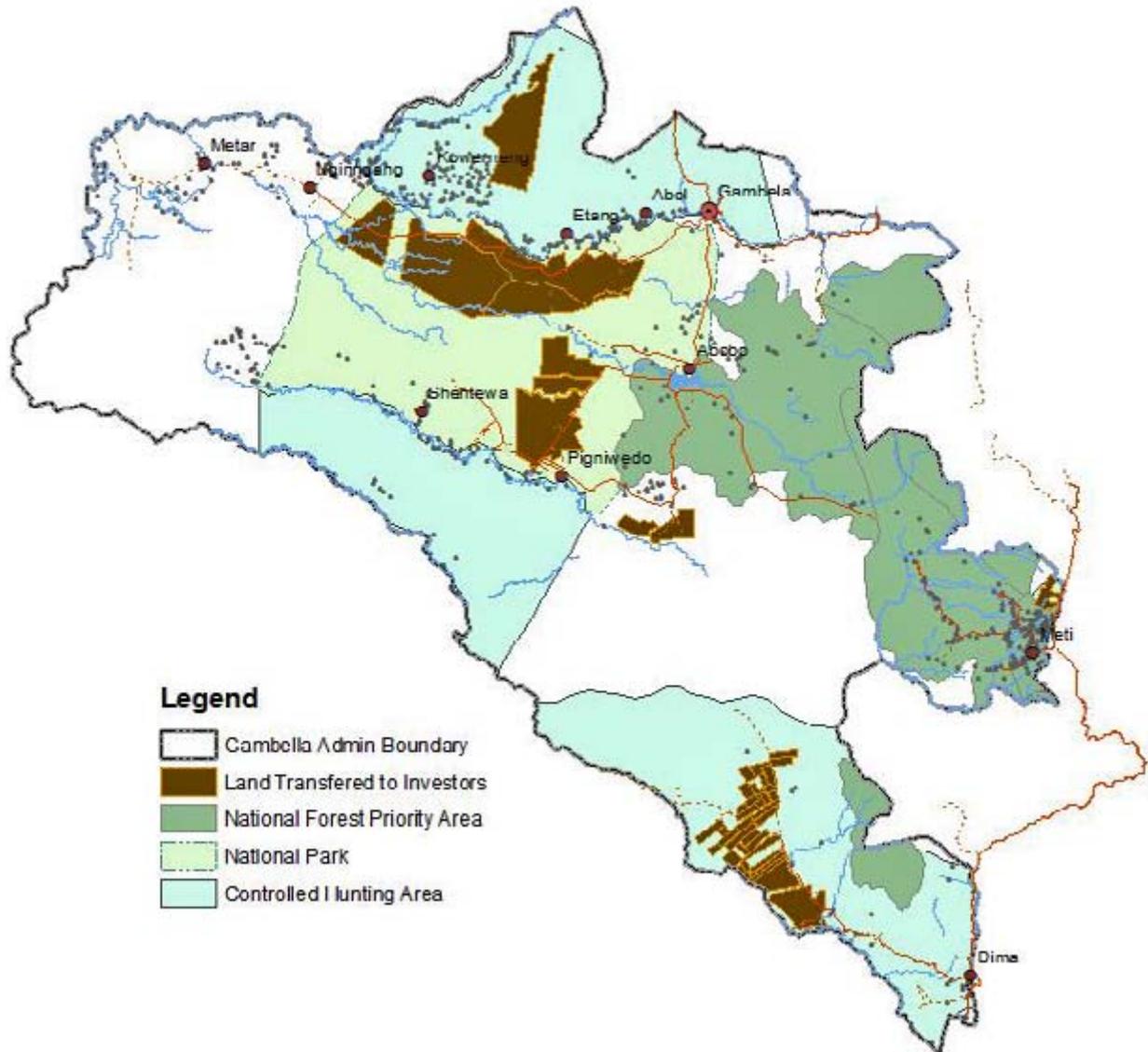
The Ethiopian land investment policy and villagisation programme has targeted rural Ethiopian peripheries largely occupied by indigenous peoples in Gambela, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Lower Omo Valley in the south west part of the country and central and eastern Ethiopian regions. In this context, a coordinated effort is required among Ethiopian Indigenous peoples whose livelihoods, land rights, and natural environments have been impacted by government policy. In the past few years, ASO has made efforts to bring together communities affected by land investment and the villagisation programme by providing forums to share experiences and strategies on how to deal with the adverse effects of government policies. During consultation with stakeholders, Ethiopian Indigenous communities have realised the importance of working together to ensure that their control over lands, resources, territories, and destinies are respected by authorities.

This has not been easy in the context of brutal repression of dissent by the government. Our on-going efforts to build strong networks on issues such as land rights, food security, human rights, and environment, require international support and solidarity from groups outside of Ethiopia. ASO believes that the support that the Ethiopian government receives to build capacity in the implementation of VGGT can be useful. However, it cannot proceed without the active and free involvement of Indigenous peoples, pastoralists, farmers, and fisher people as well as civil society, which so far does not appear to be happening. The VGGT implementation process will require a show of leadership and a stable political climate to involve key stakeholders in national land discourse. With the current volatile political atmosphere and the government's intolerance to criticism, it is essential to monitor the

progress of VGGT's implementation and how this affects the situation of food security for the poor and vulnerable.

Map from GIZ, presented at the Project Launching Workshop, in Bishoftu from 15 to 16 July 2016.

Transferred Investment Land to Investors



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