

Foreign investors welcome

Tags: **Chayton Capital** | **Zambia**

The International Courier
| 02.17.2011

Having unexploited arable land, Zambia rents it to Western companies which grow cereals. Enough to ensure the supply of the national market.



Drawing by Krauze published in The Guardian, London.

Scott Baldauf | The Christian Science Monitor

The hills of this region of Zambia have long been known for the copper that American, British and Chinese mining companies competed for. But this industry, subject to unpredictable cycles of expansion and contraction, now seems destined to soon go out of business. The food crisis of 2007, caused by the growing demand for biofuels which sent food prices soaring, attracted a completely new type of investor. While mining company bosses looked at maps and assessed how much wealth they could still extract from the depths of the earth, new foreign investors estimated how much revenue they could make from fields of corn and wheat. This is how they planned to create tens of thousands of stable jobs which will revive the country's rural economy.

“Africa is an importer of food, even though it has vast areas of fertile land,” notes Neil Crowder, co-founder of Chayton Capital, a London-based investment firm, backed by the World Bank, which has invested 10 million dollars in the local firm Chobe Agrivision to lease 10,000 hectares in the Mkushi region and which plans to soon double this area. “Unfortunately, some of the poorest countries in the world have the highest food prices. As we can reduce transport costs by having farms in Zambia, we decided to set up a model there to supply the country and its neighbors with subsistence foodstuffs – mainly maize, soya and wheat.”

Reference

Chobe Agrivision began implementing its project after obtaining a fourteen-year lease from the government. The company planted maize and soybeans late last year and plans to employ 3,000 local people to harvest crops in 2011. Under the agreement signed with the Zambian government, 80 percent of the production will be exported to neighboring countries and the remaining 20% will be sold in Zambia. Zambia (capital Lusaka), formerly Northern Rhodesia, is a landlocked country in southern Africa, crossed by the Zambezi River. The country was colonized by the British at the end of the 19th century and became a protectorate of the British Colonial Empire until 1964.

Favorable reception

The government of President Rupiah Banda has welcomed this project which farmers. They do not see foreign investment as a threat. "According to the ci between 12 and 15 million, which is not huge, and we have between 30 and the vast majority of which is not exploited", underlines Bradford Machile, the Development. Unlike countries like Madagascar and Mozambique, the minis a major movement to defend farmers and consumers against land "theft", be land. "The land is here. You can't take them and walk away with them," he s:

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The company also plans to connect with local small farmers (many of whom will work on its land) and teach them cutting-edge techniques so they can increase their own production. When it builds its grain mills, it will provide them with increased capacity so that they can also use them for their own account and improve their income.

"In four or five years, Zambia will be a breadbasket not just for southern Africa, but for the entire continent," predicts Stuart Kearns, a former Zimbabwean farmer who runs Chobe's operations in the town of Mkushi. He says small farmers can't afford large center-pivot irrigation systems, in which gigantic nozzles rotate around a pivot to distribute just the required amount of water, but they can learn the zero tech erosion and increases production by retaining nutrients in the soil.

"In some countries, agriculture is looked down upon. "Everyone wants a whi sure agriculture is taught in schools before the stigma sets in," Kearns said. employees, then your neighbors, and everyone takes turns spreading their k

His partner, Fred Wallis, who also had a farm in Zimbabwe, drives up to the plantations and points to the fields of a small farm beyond. Women bent dou on plants before being chased away by a shower of gravel thrown by young undoubtedly be hired and trained by Chobe. "When the Chinese came to the came with their own employees, they took the manganese and they closed t explains Fred Wallis. But when investors like Chobe come, they live like the them how to farm the land better, and when these villagers return home, the land. This is the kind of investment the country needs."