



Tanzania farmers accuse biofuel investors of land grab

Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation - Thu, 18 Jul 2013 03:30 PM



Author: **Kizito Makoye**
More news from our correspondents

- MORE ON ENERGY
- MORE ON REFUGEES & DISPLACEMENT
- MORE ON CLIMATE SECURITY
- MORE ON CLIMATE POLITICS



Ali Ngwega, the chairman of Gama Makaani village, within Razaba farm, leads local people in planting trees on the farm in June 2013. THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION/Zubari Musa

BAGAMOYO, Tanzania (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Ali Shaaban was not entirely surprised to see a huge poster erected on his farm warning him not to carry out any agricultural activities in the area.

In the past few weeks the 56-year-old farmer had noticed some white men he didn't recognize driving shiny 4x4 vehicles through his village in Bagamoyo district, about 70km (44 miles) from the commercial city of Dar es Salaam.

And through his archaic radio receiver, he had heard the announcement calling for anyone residing on Razaba farm to leave.

Despite having lived on the farm for decades, Shaaban is now facing eviction as the government prepares to remove hundreds of families from the area to make way for a biofuel investor.

"This is a test of my life," he says. "At this age, where on Earth can I and my family go? There is no other place my children can call home."

- Tweet
- Like
- Google +1
- LinkedIn
- Bookmark
- Email
- Print

JUMP DOWN TO RELATED CONTENT

RELATED SPOTLIGHTS

Biofuel and land disputes



TODAY'S TOP STORIES

China quake death toll at 54, hundreds hurt



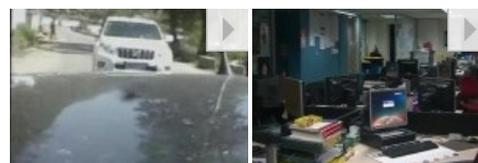
Eight towns in the remote, mountainous area of Minxian and Zhangxian counties sustained serious damage in the quake and subsequent flooding and mudslides, state media said.

EDITORIAL PICKS



Women supporting Mursi stage protest in Cairo

Explosions and firefights in Damascus



Farmers in Tanzania's coastal region are protesting what they see as the government's collusion with land grabbers, investors the farmers accuse of swallowing up entire villages to make way for renewable energy projects.

In Bagamoyo district, farmers claim that Swedish company EcoEnergy acquired 5,000 hectares of community-held customary land after seducing villagers with promises of new schools, hospitals and job opportunities.

EcoEnergy plans to build a sugarcane plantation and an ethanol-production facility at Razaba farm. The company estimates it will produce about 125,000 tons of sugar, 100,000 megawatts of electricity and 25 million litres of ethanol every year.

On its website, EcoEnergy refers to the land as an "abandoned state cattle farm" — it was used as a ranch from 1976 to 1993 — but Razaba is still currently home to an estimated 600 families.

"We have been living in this area since the 1950s," says Ali Ngwega, a village leader in Bagamoyo. "Now the government is branding us invaders just to please someone powerful."

EcoEnergy managing director, Anders Bergfors, dismissed the land grabbing accusations, saying the company had followed the correct procedures to obtain the land.

Bergfors said the company intends to contract small-holder farmers in the area to grow sugarcane and become partners in the project.

"We would like them to form small companies with about 100 hectares per farmer; we will have commercial contracts with them," he said.

According to Bergfors the project is necessary to boost sugar and electricity production, as well as production of ethanol, a form of renewable energy.

Bergfors said the Razaba project would create direct employment of 2,000 people, and another 1,500 could be contract growers for the operation.

But people living on Razaba farm say they are not reassured by the promises.

LOSING LAND

Tanzania's government maintains that living in the area for a long time does not automatically give villagers legitimate ownership of land. "The law is very clear and the investor is the legal owner," said Anna Tibaijuka, Tanzania's minister for housing and human settlement.

Official land title deeds are difficult to get in Tanzania, due to pervasive bureaucracy and corruption. While village land isn't supposed to be sold to outsiders, the lack of paperwork means villagers have little recourse when it does happen.

According to the Tanzania Investment Centre, a government agency, the process of land acquisition requires that investors submit their proposals to the village council via district officials. The village assembly is called to examine the proposals and when a piece of land is approved for investment, ownership is transferred to the government, which can then lease it out for a maximum of 99 years.

The problem is that "once village land is transferred to (the government), the local people lose their ownership rights until the end of the lease," said Abdi Kagomba, a legal affairs manager with the Tanzania Investment Centre.

Over the past few years, disputes with locals over land ownership rights have forced several biofuel companies to suspend or cease operations in Tanzania's Rufiji and Bagamoyo districts.

The Tanzania Investment Centre says there are over 40 foreign companies who have expressed interest in acquiring land for biofuel cultivation in Tanzania. Currently, about 436,000 hectares of land have been earmarked for biofuel production.

Available land and cheap labour make Tanzania attractive to investors, some of whom have been courted by Tanzania's government, experts say.

Around the world, concerns about climate change and energy security are prompting many countries to introduce policies that encourage greater use of renewable fuels. And when the 2012 G8 summit saw the launch of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, which encourages the private sector to invest in African agriculture,

**First pics of
deadly China
quake**

**Major quake hits
New Zealand**

PHOTO PICKS



**Explosion of a Pemex oil pipeline
near Mexico City**

TODAY'S TOP SPOTLIGHT



**The Rohingya exodus from
Myanmar**

Tanzania was one of the first countries to sign up.

PUSHING BACK

But as interest in Tanzanian land grows, a share of farmers in Bagamoyo and Rufiji districts claim they have been the victim of land grabs.

A **June study** commissioned by the Stockholm Environmental Institute, entitled "Biofuel production and its impact on local livelihoods in Tanzania," suggests that the government's encouragement of outside investors has weakened local people's capacity to protect their own interests.

Although Tanzania law directs companies to obtain land through the Tanzania Investment Centre, the study cites cases in which private investors have bypassed the law and negotiated directly with village leaders.

The study also says that most land acquisition deals end up in dispute because investors are seen to have failed to honour the promises they made to local communities.

"In some cases the agreements between investors and local people were made only verbally, but the villagers felt that agreement had been reached" while investors believed that without paperwork they were not obliged to fulfill any promises.

Even if a deal is made legally, the study's findings show that farmers whose land happens to be within investment areas are often unable to negotiate the government's compensation offers.

For the farmers currently protesting the government's deal with EcoEnergy, the study does offer some hope.

"Villages have in some cases been successful in pushing back when they feel their rights are not being respected, even after agreements have been made," the study's authors noted.

Pushing back is exactly what the farmers of Razaba farm plan to do. "We will use every means to defend our rights," says farmer Said Hidaya Mwinyijuma. "No matter how powerful the investor is."

Kizito Makoye is a journalist based in Dar es Salaam specializing in climate change reporting and governance issues.

TOPICAL NEWS



We welcome comments that advance the story through relevant opinion, anecdotes, links and data. If you see a comment that you believe is irrelevant or inappropriate, you can flag it to our editors by using the report abuse links. Views expressed in the comments do not represent those of the Thomson Reuters Foundation. For more information see our [Acceptable Use Policy](#).



comments powered by **Disqus**



[Terms and Conditions](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Privacy and Cookies](#)

[Trust Principles](#)

[Acceptable Use Policy](#)

[Accessibility](#)



**THOMSON REUTERS
FOUNDATION**

[Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Newsletters](#)

Thomson Reuters Foundation is a charity registered in England and Wales (registration number: 803676) Copyright © 2013 Thomson Reuters Foundation