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## Who is Selling Papa's Land? Africa is not for Sale!

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### **Abstract:**

*It is now commonplace in some major Nigerian urban and semi-urban settings to spot boldly written notices on buildings and plots of Land warning unsuspecting prospective buyers that such premises are not for sale. This absurdity is the tip of an iceberg of the colossal scam afoot the second scramble for Africa. Africa's fatherland, Papa's land, in the words of the late generic musician, Sonny Okosson, is today being put up for sale. A massive inflow of foreign capital is taking advantage of this "open door." In the first scramble, Africa was taken by the force of arms, and now systematically by an alignment of financial muscle and political collaboration. Behind this are chants of the poor masses of African farmers, pastoralists and the urban poor whose lands are being grabbed saying "Africa is not for sale!" Thus looking closely at the spurt of land grabbing in Africa, in the spirit of this desperate and rancorous chorus of the affected people, we are forced to ask many questions. Is Africa in the dawn of a new development initiative? If so, are the proofs of the devastating consequences of doing this in a continent that has for too long being in the backwaters of the global economy, something to just dismiss with the wave the hand? Is Africa not again dancing to a new music churned out by its Patrons? Will the voices of the affected African people crying in the wilderness of deprivation not triumph? How much of Africa has been grabbed and how far can this go on? The answers to these questions will try to tell the story of land grabbing in a subservient continent with enormous resources that are hardly being used to benefit its people.*

### **1. Introduction**

The phenomena of land grabbing in Africa has become a subject of considerable attraction to different strokes of persons affected or involved in this new toga of what should better be known as the age-old burden of Africa. This paper will attempt to look at the critical ramifications of this subject raising questions as to the political and social dimensions of the new scramble for Africa.

A lot of Africa's choicest lands have within the last few years been cornered by agribusiness companies including speculators around the world, putting the continent on the fray again. Thus, if we take note of the fact that the continent has not yet fully recovered from the ravages of colonialism, having ridded itself of that yoke only within the last half a century, the current convocation of land grabbers within its shores should alarm us. The debate generated by this new thrust of the capitalist penetration of Africa range from the obscurantist apologia of its sponsors to the fury and chagrin of the media, civil society groups and civil rights organizations. It is expected that the academia will transcend these trajectories to locate the immediate and long term implications of this development.

### **2. The Africa Leadership Gap**

This is why our discussion on land grabbing in Africa from the perspective of this paper would focus more on the political economy issues it generates, in as much as, who is grabbing, how much has being grabbed, and who is paving the way for this to happen, disregarding and drowning dissenting voices, are kept in clear view. The manner and ways in which Africa's land is currently been snatched from helpless and impoverished urban and village farmers and pastoralist is the most explicit manifestation of the continent's leadership gaps. This cannot happen in Europe or America. Behind the jumbo and sundry land deals is a big power vacuum, characteristic of poor leadership. The fact that these land deals are conducted on terms that are not determined by the people and in their best interest proves this point. The whole idea of doing "business" with the livelihood of the people, whose lands are being appropriated without regards for their future and the future of their countries, cannot fall in place with a focused and patriotic leadership. By leadership, we are here referencing a class that holds power, a class that has the responsibility of protecting the hearth, *Papa's* land from both explicit and implicit violations of the last line of a collective patrimony. In the context of this paper, this leadership class is broad based, who, with a firm grip of state apparatus, snatch lands from mostly rural people with significantly low literacy rates. We would look at three key indicators in this regard. Firstly, for these African leaders to even woe and allow land grabbing in a context like this, smacks of a poverty of commitment to good governance and a deliberate avoidance of responsibility, simply playing possum while they should be wide awake. These leaders are fiddling with and frittering away the lands on which millions of Africans grow their crops hunt and pasture their animals. Secondly, the land deals are characterized by shabbiness, carelessness, ill preparedness, and corruption on the part of the African leaders (Cotula L etal 2009). In the third place, there are no clear cut and precise regulatory provisions built into the contract agreements to checkmate the investors who may exploit existing loopholes (Cotula L etal2009). It is therefore clear that African

leaders, by this token, approach the land deals negotiations in more or less an ad hoc manner, not caring to employ strategic thinking to underscore the point that these African leaders still relish the carrot of international capital not minding the hidden stick that goes with it. Indeed Africa seems to have lost the art of self determination as exemplified by the nationalist struggles and the armed resistance that led to the decolonization of the continent.

### **3. Africa: A Pearl In The Global Economy**

The role played by Africa in the development of the global economy can never be over emphasized. These roles have always been critical, at points when the global economy needed a kick to move on. Thus, it was the labour of black Africans that Europe enslaved to solve the labour riddle of the new world that subsequently birthed the mercantilist and later on the capitalist economy<sup>3</sup>. And as the industrial revolution runs its full course, still it was the enormous raw agricultural resources of Africa that was well sought after to oil the wheels of the industrial economy. At this stage, there was no need to grab land but to control and monopolize the market for these raw materials eliminating all encumbrances along the way such as African middlemen. In this way Africa could not effectively dictate prizes for their goods. Africa is noted to be the richest continent in the world in terms of its natural endowments but also paradoxically, the poorest because of centuries of exploitation and bad leadership. For example, Zambia which is the seventh largest producer of copper in the world is said to be getting only 0.06% of the profit generated by the industry for its people (Miriam Mannak 2012). Thus as far as it concerns the continent, the years of serving the global economy has not been able to eradicate poverty in spite of its enormous natural resources. Africa is indeed a continent of assorted natural resources, the statistic of which is very alarming. Uranium, a very precious mineral resource is, for example, found in all the major regions of the continent from South Africa to Algeria and from Mali to Somalia. Africa has 90% of the world's platinum deposits, 50% of its gold deposits. It has 70% of the world's coltan deposits and 50% and 30% of its gold and diamond reserves, respectively (Africa Business October 2011). This is not to talk of its abundant sunlight and wind power. Africa has however failed to convert these resources to break dependency and poverty, which now looks like an intractable albatross, before which our leaders seem helpless. These leaders for this reason still believe that help can come from outside, hence the open door they created for land grabbers, hoping they would produce miracles for the people.

### **4. The Burden of Africa**

It was the underdevelopment school of thought that forcefully chronicled the incalculable damage Africa suffered from the dawn of mercantilism. How Africa was weakened and domesticated by Western imperialism to continue, infinitum, in its service is clearly demonstrated by this school. It is now being argued that we should not blame our woes purely on the whites and the colonialism they imposed on us (colonialism to blame). Be that as it may, the fact still remains, and, that is the fact that since our integration into the world capitalist system, our legs have never really been freed from the stocks of the system, our Independence notwithstanding. And really this kind of independence is only in name, not posing any difficulties to the dictates of international capital that can easily fall back on the continent for its resources and services. The point we are making is the fact that Africa has not yet rid itself of the negative legacies of colonialism. Should we blame colonialism for this or not. Maybe not, for how can we explain the half a century of independence most African countries have enjoyed without developing the capacity to act independently, if not for their poor leadership? It is this poverty of leadership that we designate as the burden of Africa which threw the continent open to land grabbing. This may perhaps force us to look at the impact of colonialism from the analysis of Franz Fanon who emphasized its worst forms in the colonization of the mind. Can African leaders truly be seen as people who are predisposed to act independently when confronted with choices that behooves on them to prove their sovereignty vis- a- vis the wishes of international capital. This capital knows that Africa has not developed to the point where it can make independent choices when it comes to relating in the international environment of the global economy. They are not able to speak on equal terms, in that context, with their developed counterparts. But truly, we may even leave the development argument aside, without devaluing its essence and the problems it has wrought, and assess our situation from another angle. This is because we must not have a super economy or be a super power before we are at liberty to act independently, determining what is good for us and how we should go about realizing it, being fully prepared to stand up to whoever feels that doing such will jeopardize his or her interest. Our incapacity and inability to do this particularly at the political level in the context of the global economy is the burden we are talking about. It is like eating with a broken tooth.

### **5. Land Grabbing or Recolonization**

The first question we must ask at this point is as to whether the on-going scramble for land in Africa, commonly referred to as land grabbing, is in the interest of the continent? Are the people scrambling for the continent's land doing so primarily with the intention of helping Africa surmount her developmental challenges? No. This is far from the political economy cloud behind land grabbing. Before further developing this theme, there are other issues we must sort out first such as the justification for the present push for land in Africa. The argument is that land grabbing is covered by bilateral trade and investment agreements and that what is happening is a pure matter of economics of scale, and investment in a "free" market environment as, Direct Foreign Investment. The Flurry of literature, especially from the World Bank and other related organs of the United Nations, cast an effective façade of analysis on the matter which should clearly be seen as a smoke screen. In fact even the concept of land grabbing is not accepted by this line of argument (Cotula, L etal 2009---40) Lorezo. The suitability of the concept of land takings in Africa as essentially an issue of land grabbing is questioned and regarded as merely the chants of media and civil rights groups. Therefore, Land grabbing, a concept that may even be regarded as an understatement of the essence of the subject matter, is simply dressed in the garment of development intervention and as a harmless addition to the economies of the continent-in spite of the apparent evidence in the

literature to the contrary. The literature, as spurned out by apologists of the process is expected to fine tune all practices relating to the process of land grabbing which they do in a grand fashion that is akin to the spirit of the historic Berlin conference.

## 6. The Push Factors

It is quite true that no economy is insulated from the inevitable vagaries occasioned by climate change, natural selection and the changing patterns of economic fortunes and performance and our reactions to them. One of these is the cyclical boom and bust syndrome in the dynamics of the capitalist economy. And although the foundations of the capitalist economies remain firmly grounded in the traditions that keep them going, they necessarily have to find solutions to the changes created by the bust. Between 2007 and 2008, the global economy experienced a major jolt, (may be arising from the sheer brunt of heavy military expenditure to combat "terrorism".) The jolt nevertheless, vibrated across the globe, forcing capital depreciation, heavy job losses and many other negative developments likened to only the great depression of the 1930s. Before this bust, the globe had been warming up at an alarming rate due to gas emissions into space, causing considerable fears of a major Catastrophe if the situation is not addressed. The west began to find ways of reducing gas emissions through encouraging the use of biofuels while heavily investing in carbon sequestration projects. Thus, Agriculture that was about a decade before this time considered a "sunset investment" suddenly jolted to the front burner of international business. For the bust already referred to, had in the face of an all time high in fuel prices, in addition to the bending of global agriculture to service the biofuel industry, pushed up food prices by up to 30% (Cotula, L etal 2009----52). The threats this development posed to food security, set the agenda for land grabbing of which Africa as usual, became the choicest place to turn to. The peculiar problem of the Gulf States who are battling aridity, also find land in Africa very attractive in the quest of securing food security for their nations. Saudi Arabia for example had to abandon wheat production to save its dwindling fossil water resources from being exhausted (Cotula, L etal 2009----53). The Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, formed in 1970, also came in handy at this time. Its Director General in Khartoum recently said that the food security of the Arab nations can only best be secured through "international land acquisitions", arguing that Sudan alone can feed the whole of the Arab World through land acquisitions (Cotula, L etal 2009----45).

Global Concerns about the destabilization of national ecosystems, is making many countries, including third world countries in South America and China to increase their import of wood and agricultural products thereby shifting from net exporters to net importers of these products, to save their ecosystems. China, for example, increased its soya bean import from Brazil while increasing large scale land acquisition in Africa all in the overall direction of land grabbing (Erik Lambin and Partrick).

## 7. The "Open Door"

In this unfolding drama in global agriculture, it is Africa that has its doors widest open to the capital chasing land around the globe. A satellite depiction of the geography of global agriculture shows that Africa has the widest openings, in terms of land availability, even though this may be a mirage. However, the study shows that the regions of the world with intense agriculture are the North American Corn Belt, the European Wheat- Corn Belt, the Ganges flood plains and Eastern China. The depiction shows Sahelian Africa, which happens to be a part of the "hot bed" of land grabbing, to be least intensively cultivated (Ramkuty and Foley 2008). ( Navin Ramanlaitty). Africa is therefore said to have the largest underutilized land in the World. The chief executive of a big firm with huge investments in land in Arica said that in a continent, with this kind of record, "land values are very inexpensive (Cotula ,L etal 2009----59). The Lander brothers, Hugh Clappertons, Henrich Barths, Mungo Parks, Living stones and Stanleys of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are now replaced by the science of satellite imagery which has provided a most "comprehensive survey of global agriculture potential." It posits that 80% of the World's reserved agricultural lands are in Africa and South America. Between 1995 and 1996, the same process of satellite imagery, put the total cultivable land in Africa at 805 million hectares, of which the report claimed only 197 ha are under cultivation. This estimate is said to carry a 10-20% margin of underestimation (Cotula, L etal 2009---59-60). (Lorenzo 59-60)Another estimate says that ½ of the world's cultivable lands are found in only 7 countries, namely Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Argentina, Bolivia and Colombia (Cotula, L etal 2009----60).No wonder then, that Africa is in the center of the Global land rush with its generous share of global land resources.

## 8. Why Land Grabbing Should Be Seen As A Form Of Recolonization

To secure food security and contain the raging energy crisis their related problems, the land grab frenzy is first and foremost characterized by heavy capital investment. The sources of capital are mostly private, Sovereign Wealth Funds and Governmental Investment funds. As of 2009, a survey of 7 countries Madagascar, Ghana, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Senegal showed that about 1 trillion dollars 919,981,235 dollars had been ear-marked for investment in Agriculture in these countries. The report went on to say that this figure is an underestimation of actual figures involved in land grabbing in these countries due to difficulties arising from "data access constraints". (Cotula, L etal 2009----43)

This is indeed only the tip of the ice berg of the financial muscle involved in the land grab process in Africa. Taking the whole continent into consideration, as earlier said, this is like injecting an army of occupation. These monies have not come to develop Africa for Africans; it has been injected to solve the problems of the investor's home countries.

## 9. The Negotiations

With their monies in hand, these investors came to the negotiating tables better equipped, better informed knowing what they want. They come knowing that the countries they are negotiating with an encumbered predisposition, almost like with cup in hand, especially as many of them depend on foreign aid. Ethiopia, for example, that has been enormously grabbed, is one of the world's largest recipients of humanitarian aid and development assistance. In 2009 such an assistance amounted to 700,000 tonnes

of food and 1.8 billion pounds (John Vidal the Guardian 21/3/2011). The World Food Programme, created by the United Nations in 1962, spent \$635 million dollars in Sudan in 2008 (the Economist March 18<sup>th</sup> 2010). It spent a total of \$2.2 billion in the whole of Africa south of the Sahara. For its 2010 intervention, the Food Programme budgeted \$2.6 billion. In 2009, a Wall Street Journal reporter, reported that over ½ a billion people are undernourished in Africa according to estimates supplied by the US Department of Agriculture—53% higher than 1992 figures (reason.com/archives/2009/07 [is food aid for Africa working] July 17<sup>th</sup> 2009). On account of these food problems and diet discrepancies, Africans generally spend a greater percentage of their aggregate income on food. Thus, while the American comparatively spends only 10% of his or her income on food, their Kenyan, Egyptian, Nigerian and Ethiopian counterparts, spend 46%, 48%, 73% and 79% respectively on the same item from their incomes {African Business 2011 p 8}. The meaning of this, is the fact that Africa's land is being grabbed with many Africans living on empty and rumbling stomachs. What a contradiction which is all the same being exploited during the negotiations. There are many other loopholes that are being exploited by a conspiracy conjured by the grabbers and African leaders. One such loophole is the fact that only between 2 and 10% of lands in Africa are under title deeds. (Cotula, L et al 2009---75). Based on this, some African governments adopt the strategy of nationalizing the lands which they later turn over to land grabbers. (Cotula, L et al 2009---74). Madagascar has a lot of land that has been declared unproductive only for such lands to be handed to the land market for global land grab. In some other places, the land is declared empty, only to evict people farming on it to make it available for lease. In Tanzania, for example, up to 1000 rice farmers were evicted out of a piece of land declared "general land" to make it available to grabbers. (Cotula, L et al 2009---73) Another loophole that is exploited in this process of land grabbing is the near absence of using the principle of "Free Prior Informed Consent" (FPIC) in most or even all African countries. FPIC is article 13 of the 2007 UN declaration on the rights of indigenous Peoples as it relates to the use of their land for projects. The principle therefore subsumes the rights of indigenous Peoples that give them the right to freely say yes or no to proposed developments on their lands. Where such attempts are made, it is mostly only on paper because what is considered as local engagement is consultations with village elders and the elite (Cotula, L et al 2011) The manner in which the negotiations involving large-scale African land deals are done, reminds one of the tricky and clandestine tactics used by the 19<sup>th</sup> century European nations to make African rulers to sign away their freedoms in so called peace and defense pacts. For if there are no booby traps imbedded into these deals, why is it that the entire gamut of the negotiations are not conducted publicly. The negotiations are couched in secrecy, as basically behind closed door transactions with the critical contents of the deals not known by the people dispossessed. [Cotula, L et al 2009--- p68] The study by Lorenzo faults the African side of the negotiations saying that they approach them with an ad hoc attitude of anything goes instead of strategic thinking. The study, even at the risk of absurdity, offered African leaders an advice to invest in capacity building to be able to develop the skills of negotiating (Cotula, L et al 2009---p68) what an advice to African Leaders who are supposedly not well informed in the art of selling **Papa's** land.

### 10. The Tenure

How long these companies are to hold the land leased to them in the negotiations range from 50 to 99 years during which time they are to operate on them, fully protected by the legal clauses in the contract documents, which are predicated, not on the laws of the land, but on international law. This protects the companies against arbitrary changes as arbitration in cases of disputes is placed beyond the jurisdiction of the operating countries. This bestows on the agric companies that grab land in Africa ample freedom to operate. For they are not under any obligations to integrate their activities with the rest of the economy. This in essence means that their activities will not have backward and forward linkages with the rest of the National economy, since their approach is to operate as enclave agricultural enterprises. Thus the so called promises to assist employ and use the locals, end up as mere platitudes aimed at giving empty hopes to a people that are parting with their land, at least for the rest of their lives. This is predicated on the fact that with the huge investments involved in the deals; the basic orientation of the companies is obviously in the direction of lessening the cost of production by deemphasizing operations that depend on human labour, as time goes on. The overall picture is that these companies designed to operate as production enclaves, are organically separated from the traditional economy, with its paraphernalia of foreign technology. For they will by this design, not be technically able to pass on their knowhow to the locals they expropriate.

### 11. Resisting Land Grabbing

The long chequered story of Africa, especially Africa south of the Sahara, can make one weep in lamentation. Between 1500 and 1850, it was robbed of a valuable part of its population to the slave trade and now they are pouring in to grab its very valuable land. Africans who lost their loved ones to the slave trade, particularly mothers from whose bosom children were snatched, definitely, helplessly resisted this painful separation. Today, the same people whose forebears lamented the loss of their loved ones are themselves also helplessly resenting the loss of their land to land grabbing. The saga of African leaders collaborating with the slave traders to facilitate the sale of their people is being repeated in another mode, with African leaders today facilitating the lease or sale of large tracts of land under the current spade of land grabbing. As in the case of the relationship between children and their parents, the relationship between the African and his ancestral land is not impersonal. As Lorenzo...put it, it is spiritual. It is personified intricate used as a measure of one's pride and dignity. Taking land from the African is like taking sweetness out of his life. And indeed this should be expected because Africa with its huge level of stagnation, has predominantly remained agrarian having failed to fully hop into the industrial age. In this condition, the common people lack the capacity to resist with any success against onslaughts such as land grabbing. Like an Ethiopian dispossessed farmer said "what power do we have to stop them? We just stay silent"(the Guardian John Vidal 21 2011).

## 12. The Concluding Issues

From this study, it is clear that the rush for land in Africa that gave rise to land grabbing is not an African initiative to develop a home grown strategy for development. It is a phenomena thrust upon the continent known to not only be a depopulated continent but one that has only about a ¼ of its cultivable land under cultivation. Not only that, Africa is known to have many of its National Governments running aid prone economies which makes very vulnerable to manipulation by international capital.

So far, as per World Bank surveys, over 35 million hectares of land have been grabbed at the continental level- a figure which Friends of the Earth contest. And why not, considering how the land deals, as earlier said, are transacted behind closed doors. (John Vidal). The African elite who should defend the people are themselves part of the land grab process. For it is on record that they grab lands only to look for foreign partners to develop or resale or lease out to them (John Vidal 2011). In this regard, there are exceptions like in the case of a Nigeria organization, *The United Small and Medium scale Farmers Association of Nigeria* (USMEFAN) whose activities are known to include educating farmers against the dangers of large land acquisitions (Grain 11/5/2011). For this reason it is only the silenced voices of the dispossessed is heard on the political scene of the dangers of land grabbing. Africa leaders are apparently oblivious of the threats to their sovereignties embedded in the land grab process. It is only the dispossessed poor, who are first generation victims of the process, that are crying out "Africa is not for sale". Africa which heavily relies on agriculture cannot afford to lease out its best agricultural land to agric business companies that are free to repatriate 100% of their produce. This means that the countries of the world are only using African soil to secure food security for their people. A big parting question this study would want to raise is whether or not, land grabbing in Africa is not a step to the decolonization of Africa in the manner that the pacts signed in the 19thc paved the way for the colonization of the continent. After the first tenure of the contract ends what happens to the land and the huge investments on them. What is in the contract papers in this regard?

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