

Africa under threat from corporate-driven G8 policies

African agriculture and family farmers are under threat from initiatives from the North; the recent G8^[1] proposals: the “**Global Land Transparency Initiative**” and the “**New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition in Africa**” carry the risk of increasing land grabbing on the continent. A coalition of African civil society organisations expressed its opposition to the New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition in Africa and called this G8 initiative a “new wave of colonialism”^[2]. Let us take a closer look at these two G8 initiatives.

The G8 is currently preparing its next Summit of June 2013 in the United Kingdom; and it is planning to launch the “**Global Land Transparency Initiative**”. The G8 believes that transparency will be achieved by “the voluntary disclosure of information” on large scale land acquisitions by investors, civil society, G8 countries and host states. However, just providing information without any legal consequence attached to possible infringements of national and international law is not likely to change the harmful nature of land deals. Additionally, the voluntary character of the initiative is unlikely to produce any results, because land grabbers will not “voluntarily” admit that they commit human rights violations, such as such as forced displacements and violent dispossessions of local communities, lack of information and participation of local communities, deprivation of local communities’ access to land, water and other resources. What is more, several international organisations^[3] have already developed voluntary guidelines on responsible investment including transparency issues, such as the FAO Guidelines^[4], and they all suffer from the same flaw: there is no binding legislation to implement them. It remains to be seen whether the G8 will effectively implement this initiative and whether it can oblige land grabbers to disclose information on their land deals and, more importantly, whether it can find ways to hold investors and companies that are investing in resources and land abroad **truly accountable** for the possible harm they inflict on local populations.

The second initiative: the “**New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition in Africa**” is based on public-private partnerships and is a corporate driven initiative. In this initiative agricultural investments would disproportionately benefit the large foreign corporations at the expense of the African family farmers. The main goal is to subject African agriculture to the interests of multinational corporations, by increasing corporate investment in agricultural land and inputs through the implementation of programmes in Africa; the so-called **Cooperation Frameworks**. (In total six countries: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mozambique and Tanzania). These Cooperation Frameworks should implement the FAO Guidelines in order to reduce the harmful effects of investment on the local population. However, the Cooperation Frameworks pay lip service to the FAO Guidelines, each citing the following passage: “the G8, the host country government and the private sector confirm their **intention to take account** of the FAO Guidelines”. All cooperation frameworks strive to increase private investment by **facilitating access to land**. As a consequence it will be easier for transnational companies to identify, negotiate and acquire land, thus increasing the risk of land grabbing on the continent.^[5]

For example, the cooperation frameworks of **Burkina Faso** and **Ivory Coast** want to incentivize private foreign investment in land through implementation of new land laws focusing on western-

styled certification schemes. Similarly, **Mozambique** has committed to highly controversial reform of land use rights. **Ethiopia** established a one-window service facilitating all aspects of investment and access to land for all investors. **Ghana** will develop a land bank of “suitable land” and **Tanzania** is mapping land in order to establish a formal title system.^[6] All these examples would provide foreign investors with formal databases and services, which will facilitate land grabs and speculation on land. The cooperation frameworks want to establish the formal title systems in a very short time frame, which makes integrating complex customary and communal rights of family farmers virtually impossible. Additionally, these cooperation frameworks foresee the adaptation of seed laws to the interests of large multinational corporations and as such Africa is at risk of a corporate takeover of its entire food production. The family farmers will lose out as a consequence of these policies, since they will lose land to foreign investors and speculators and since the future seed and food production will be dominated by foreign agribusiness, whose patented products are too expensive for family farmers putting them at the risk of bankruptcy. Family farmers are the backbone of guaranteeing African food sovereignty, they should be supported instead of being squeezed of their lands by large corporations.

With these new proposals G8 countries are turning their back on previous commitments such as the FAO Guidelines and their human right obligations. The Global Land Transparency Initiative seems a recipe for inaction, since the G8 merely proposes “voluntary disclosure of information” by the actors in land grabbing, while it could have asked its member states to implement transparency requirements for multinational companies in their national laws. Furthermore, the G8 countries use their influence as donors to pressurize African governments to adopt policies favourable to multinational companies. Indeed, the latest batch of G8 policies for Africa facilitates access to African farmland for profit-seeking companies; increasing the risk for land grabbing and jeopardising African food sovereignty.

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^[1] The G8 countries include: United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, United States, Canada, Japan and Russia.

[2] Statement African civil society :
<http://www.acbio.org.za/activist/index.php?m=u&f=dsp&petitionID=3>

[3] The World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Food and Agriculture Organisation, all have voluntary Guidelines on responsible (agricultural) investment.

[4] The most extensive Guidelines are the FAO *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*.

[5] GRAIN, “The G8 and Land Grabs”, March 2013, consulted at:
<http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4663-the-g8-and-land-grabs-in-africa>.

[6] You can consult all cooperation frameworks at: <http://feedthefuture.gov/article/unga2012>