Mozambique: Monoculture tree plantation projects foster land grabbing, threaten food security

The interest of foreign investors in natural resources, and especially land, has grown significantly in recent years throughout Africa, and Mozambique is no exception. It is in the northern region of the country that foreign investment projects have come to occupy the largest areas of land in Mozambique, primarily for the establishment of monoculture plantations of eucalyptus, pine, jatropha and sugarcane.

The implementation of these projects has been closely linked to land grabbing because, in the majority of cases, local communities have been evicted from their territories to make way for them.

In 2011, the National Peasants Union (UNAC) and the NGO Justiça Ambiental (Environmental Justice) published a study entitled “Os Senhores da Terra” (The Lords of the Land) which offers an analysis of the phenomenon of rural land grabbing in Mozambique for foreign investment projects in the agribusiness, mining and tourism sectors. According to the study, the investments analyzed “have created ever greater conflicts and deepened the poverty, deprivation and vulnerability of rural communities.”

In the province of Niassa in northern Mozambique, Chikweti Forests, a Swedish-Norwegian enterprise with shareholders in the United States and Mozambique, established a eucalyptus monoculture plantation project on an area of 140,000 hectares. No community consultation took place prior to its establishment, in clear violation of the Mozambican land law, which requires investors to have the consensus and approval of the community. In addition, there have been reports of the invasion of inhabited community lands and the restriction of access by local peasants to their “machambas” (family farming plots).

“When the company arrived, I had doubts about turning over my community's lands to them, because I was afraid they could invade the lands of local peasants and force them to move their machambas to faraway forests, where they would run the risk of being devoured by animals,” declared a community leader from Maniamba, Niassa, quoted in the study.

The actions of Chikweti Forests therefore constitute a violation of the human rights of the local communities in the areas where it operates, since they limit their access to their means of production.

In the province of Niassa, 80% of the population lives in rural areas and earns a livelihood from agriculture. These people depend on the land and forest resources to ensure their food security. The implementation of monoculture plantation projects threatens the food security and sovereignty of local communities and creates social conflicts. In addition, monoculture tree plantations destroy native vegetation and compromise local biodiversity.

These large-scale tree plantations are established for the purpose of producing large volumes of raw materials for the agrofuel, timber, energy, pulp and rubber industries. They are also aimed at supposedly offsetting the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the countries of the North, which

leads to their incorporation in the carbon market. In fact, however, these measures will not resolve the climate crisis, but will instead cause ever more problems for the people of Mozambique and all of Africa.

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The publication “Os Senhores da Terra - Análise Preliminar do Fenómeno de Usurpação de Terra em Moçambique” (The Lords of the Land – Preliminary Analysis of the Land Grabbing Phenomenon in Mozambique) (2011) is available in Portuguese at:http://www.cebem.org/cmsfiles/publicaciones/senhores_terra.pdf