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## Zambia: Grabbed by the agrofuel stampede

In Africa, agrofuel initiatives are proliferating in many countries including Zambia, where jatropha has been selected as the main crop to produce biodiesel while sugar cane, sweet sorghum and cassava are chosen for bioethanol.

A research undertaken by Matongo Mundia (1) in 2007 explains that “As on the rest of the continent, much of the drive for biofuel developments in Zambia comes from talk of achieving energy security and supporting social and economic development. However, there seems to be a lack of clarity over whether investment and targets are aimed at production of biofuels for the Zambian market or for export.”

The Zambian government has supported and endorsed the production of agrofuel but the sector is fairly new in the country. The report identifies *D1 Oils* -- a UK-based global producer of biodiesel -- and *Marli Investments* as the main drivers of agrofuel production. Through the Biofuels Association of Zambia (BAZ), the agrofuel industry has been trying to get incentives such as minimum agrofuel blends for all consumers, and the provision of incentives that may fuel capital for the development of the sector.

“It seems that companies such as *D1 Oils* may be promoting biofuels as a domestic energy strategy, in order to open the door to amenable legislation, while really intending to focus biofuel production on the export market. The likelihood that biofuel production will ultimately be targeted at export markets, and fail to benefit Zambians, is supported by the fact that Zambia has no biofuel refining facilities and *D1 Oils* are building a refinery in Durban, South Africa. Once the product has left the country, the greater buying power of the European consumer will undoubtedly prevail”, explains the report.

A shared fate in most places where large-scale agrofuel schemes have been launched is that of deforestation and displacement: “66% of Zambia’s landmass is comprised of woodlands and forests, some of which are of special importance such as those in the river headwaters (catchment areas), forest reserves and game parks. Only about 26% of Zambian woodlands and forests could be used for further agricultural productivity such as crops for agrofuels. However, even without clearing more forests for agriculture, Zambia is already experiencing very high levels of deforestation. In a recent statement, Copperbelt Province Minister Mr. Mwansa Mbulakulima intimated that a de-gazetted forest reserve will be given to investors (The Post, 4th May 2007). It is not yet public knowledge whether this give-away will go towards biofuel production, or to other industry developments. However, this indicates that biofuel developments leading to deforestation will not find many obstacles from local or national government.”

“There are serious questions in Zambia about land availability for conversion to agrofuel production, and the impact it will have on farmers, food production, forested areas and indigenous peoples. The Lands Act of 1995, provides for the conversion of customary tenure to leasehold tenure, and many investors have already used this provision to expropriate land for investment purposes. The government of Zambia has intimated that they want to adopt a market oriented land policy, and the new draft land policy also looks to be taking these strategies forward.”

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A strong opposition to agrofuels has been rapidly mounting up challenging both the alleged “carbon neutral” solution they claim to be and their environmental and social impacts. In November 2007, several African civil society organisations made “An African Call for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Developments” (2) calling for a moratorium on new agrofuel developments on their continent. “We need to protect our food security, forests, water, land rights, farmers and indigenous peoples from the aggressive march of agrofuel developments, which are devouring our land and resources at an unbelievable scale and speed,” reads the call.

They warn that “the agrofuels ‘revolution’ is geared to replace millions of hectares of local agricultural systems, and the rural communities working in them, with large plantations. It is oriented to substitute biodiversity-based indigenous cropping, grazing and pasture farming systems with monocultures and genetically engineered agrofuel crops. In addition, the millions of hectares of what the agrofuel-pushers euphemistically call ‘wastelands’ or ‘marginal soils’ are to be turned to ‘productive’ fuel production, conveniently forgetting that millions of people in local communities make a living from these fragile ecosystems. And where there are no indigenous farming systems to replace, one just takes the forests. In the driver’s seat are the multinational corporations that manage these kinds of huge monocultures best and already control the international market for agrofuels.”

And they conclude: “We can ill afford to lose our food, forests, land and water, if we are to meet the challenges of climate change and food insecurity. We therefore ask our African governments and those of the North to stop and think. We urgently call for a moratorium that can protect Africa from the many threats of the new and dangerous Agrofuels stampede.”

Article based on information from:

(1) “Agrofuels in Africa – The impacts on land, food and forests”, African Biodiversity Network, July 2007, *Biofuel case study: Zambia*, Matongo Mundia, commissioned by Clement Chipokolo, [http://www.gaiafoundation.org/documents/AgrofuelAfrica\\_Jul2007.pdf](http://www.gaiafoundation.org/documents/AgrofuelAfrica_Jul2007.pdf);

(2) November 2007, An African Call for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Developments, <http://www.africanbiodiversity.org/media/1210585794.pdf?PHPSESSID=0c91fabd2a80b164ffb52f594d4da9c5>