

RURAL COMMUNITIES EXPRESS DISMAY: “LAND GRABS” FUELLED BY BIOFUEL STRATEGY

March 2007

More than sixty people met in Durban on March 5th 2007, to discuss the South African government's Draft Industrial Biofuels Strategy, which is open for public comment until the end of March. The undersigned NGOs, individuals, farmer organisations and rural communities from KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga who attended the workshop, express our extreme disquiet and consternation with the strategy.

We believe that both the Biofuels strategy and the associated public consultation process are fundamentally flawed. As affected rural communities and organisations, we are astounded that we have not been properly informed and consulted about the strategy. What makes it all the more unforgivable is that the anticipation of a subsidised Biofuels industry is precipitating massive “land grabs” of municipal commonages and traditional communal and tribal land in the former independent homelands. While the DME pays lip service to developing Biofuels to meet local energy needs, deals have already been struck for large-scale plants to export Biofuels to the European Union. In the process rural farming communities are coerced into signing over their land for a pittance for industrial plantations of canola, maize and soya¹.

We note that the draft strategy aims to contribute to South Africa's development goals through job creation, transformation as well as reducing the negative impacts of energy consumption on the environment, but find little detail in the strategy on how this will be achieved. Instead we have found the strategy to be preoccupied with economic instruments that will facilitate large corporate involvement in Biofuels with trickle down economic benefits to the poor at best, and

¹ For instance in the Eastern Cape, the Provincial Biofuels Task Team and Eastern Cape Development Corporation, revealed plans to plant canola on 500,000ha of the most arable non-irrigated commonage and communal land in the former Transkei and then process it into bio-fuel at a plant in the East London industrial development zone. R1.5 billion will be spent on fencing and liming this land to prepare it for monoculture. Furthermore, while local communities forego their existing diverse food gardens and communal grazing lands, multinational companies like Monsanto will collect on government agricultural subsidies through the Massive Food Production Programme by providing seed, chemical inputs and even mechanisation on the farmer's behalf. The EC Premier's State of the Province Address for 2007 confirms that an initial 70,000 ha of irrigated land in the Umzimvubu valley is to be placed under canola monoculture in the next season.

potentially disastrous consequences due to the expansion of industrial agriculture into new areas.

We call on government to redraft the Biofuels Strategy in its entirety, including full participation of potentially impacted communities so that a new strategy emerges that emphasises the development needs and priorities of poor communities, particularly in rural areas.

In particular, we suggest that the Biofuels strategy should aim at:

- addressing energy poverty within a context of integrated energy planning and rural development, with the genuine participation of rural communities, particularly women;
- adopting an integrated energy planning approach, which must include “true green Biofuels” such as biogas and ethanol gel and so forth;
- making an unequivocal commitment to improving public transport systems with a view to reducing South Africa’s dependence on fossil and now, liquid fuels;
- Providing the economic enabling environment for decentralised, community-owned Biofuels plants based on biodiverse and organic agricultural production that ensure rural energy and food security;
- Ensuring that economic instruments (subsidies, levy reductions and tax incentives) are targeted specifically to create small and cooperative Biofuels enterprises premised on best social and ecological practice;
- Including strategies to improve infrastructure, training, technical support, marketing and access to the Biofuels market in rural areas for rural communities; and
- Specifically excluding the use of staple food crops, large industrial plantations of monocultures, genetically engineered organisms and prime agricultural land in the production of Biofuels in South Africa.

We further call on government to place an immediate moratorium on large-scale bio fuels projects and to stop the “land grabs”.

SIGNED

1. ACUSO Project
2. African Centre for Biosafety
3. Biowatch
4. Buyambo Seed Bank
5. Centre for Civil Society (Environmental Justice project), University of KwaZulu-Natal
Diakonia Council of Churches
6. Earthlife Africa eThekweni
7. GRAIN
8. Intuthuko Yesiziwe
9. Institute for Zero Waste in Africa (IZWA)
10. Kwa-Ngwanase Farmers Association
11. Sigidi Trust - Bizana
12. LAMOSA
13. Lindizwe Help Group
14. OR Tambo Farmers Association
15. OR Tambo Youth Farmers Association
16. PCD Vreyheid
17. Siyakha Project
18. Syazama Youth
19. Tafuleni Co-op Project
20. Timberwatch
21. TWIG
22. Ubuhle Project, Justice and Peace
23. Uvuyo Holdings
24. Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA)
25. Women in Agriculture Rural Development
26. Women's Leadership and Training Project (WLTP)
27. Zamukuphila
28. Zululand Economic Development Agency

Individuals: Peter Gilmore - Durban, Atul Padalkar - Durban, Mdimadi Mathenywa – Makhatini Flats, Fi Mntungwa - Underberg, Penny Zeffertt - Kroondal

Additional South African support:

1. Ekogaia Foundation
2. Farmers Legal Action Group – South Africa
3. Safe Food Coalition
4. South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA)

International support:

1. Edmonds Institute
2. Gaia Foundation, UK
3. Stop BP-Berkeley

For more information please contact:

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- for more information on the workshop please contact Mariam Mayet on Cell: 083 269 4309 or Email mariammayet@mweb.co.za and Vanessa Black on Cell: 082 472 8844

**Additional submissions from organisations in support of the above
Durban Bio-fuels Workshop Statement**

Earth Harmony

The Massive Food Programme in the Eastern Cape is an alarming example of the way the global economy undermines food security. I have had a close up view of what has been happening in one of the villages I work in the Cala area and I am convinced that the only people that benefit from the programme are the suppliers of agro-chemicals, seeds and equipment. In Sifondile village the Programme has been running for three years. In the first year there was no crop at all due to late planting of hybrid seed with a long growing season, frost killed off the maize before cobs were formed. In the second year yields ranged from 257 kg/Ha to 2 286 kg/Ha and

the average yield was 1 379 kg/Ha. The cost of producing this maize was R1.68/Kg. The quality was very poor as frost occurred before the cobs were fully mature.

People in the same area practicing Natural Farming methods and using their own saved seed of short growing season maize produced a vastly superior quality crop at a cost of less than 28c/Kg. This can be summarised by saying that people practicing Natural Farming produced high quality maize at a cost of less than 28 cents/kg while the Massive Food programme produced a markedly inferior quality of maize at a cost of R 1.68/kg. In addition Natural Farming produced a significant quantity of beans and pumpkins from the same area as the maize was grown in. This cannot be done in the Massive Food fields as the herbicide used kills off these crops.

This year in Sifondile village the average yield for the Massive Food Programme was less than 1000Kg/Ha at a massive cost of R3.73c/Kg. Again farmers practicing Natural farming in the area achieved much better results in fact they improved on the previous year.

When this programme was introduced farmers were told that the government would bear the full cost the first year, but from the second year onwards farmers have to start contribution with the farmer contribution increasing incrementally at 25% per annum so by the end of the 5th year farmers should be bearing the full cost.

Last season the input costs were R3 500/Ha. Even if farmers achieved good yields (which they are not) they would not receive enough from the sale of the crop to cover these input costs. The programme is thus putting farmers into an impossible financial position and is also decreasing diversity as farmers cannot intercrop in the traditional way which provides good food security.

In fact loss of diversity goes further than the loss of different crops that normally are grown together with maize. There is also the loss of the tried and tested seed cultivars that farmers traditionally save. There is also a loss fauna and flora due to the chemicals being used.

The chemicals in themselves are also a serious hazard for the people as well. There are no storage facilities in the village and I have personally observed dangerous chemicals in one case stored in the same room as children keep their clothes and in another case stored in someone's kitchen. I have a picture of bags marked POISON STORE AWAY FROM FOODSTUFFS with the cooking pots stacked behind them!

The other area I am particularly concerned about is GM in general but Bt Maize is of special concern. This is being promoted by Monsanto with government support. We simply have no idea what impact eating maize which is effectively an insecticide is going to have on people who already have compromised immune systems. No other country in the world has allowed a staple food to be genetically modified let alone one that has been modified to work as an insecticide. This is very serious indeed.

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Timberwatch

Timberwatch, a national coalition of South African environmental NGOs, fully supports the sentiments expressed in the statement issued by participants at a workshop held in eThekweni earlier this month.

The draft bio-fuels strategy document recently released by government for public comment has been broadly criticised on numerous grounds, but also appears to be a crude effort to force South Africans and especially Eastern Cape rural communities to support a preposterous plan to sell their land, water, biodiversity and traditional wealth for a song.

In the process, affected communities would have to sacrifice their sustainable livelihoods at the altar of the conspicuous, subsidised over-consumption of energy that is characteristic of nations in the industrialised north. Similar government plans to allow the timber industry to appropriate large tracts

of Eastern Cape community land for growing industrial tree plantations would compound the negative impacts of the crazy bio-fuels strategy if it was ever implemented.

While most of the benefits of the government's bio-fuels plans would flow into the deep pockets of money-lusting multinational corporations, the many damaging social and environmental impacts of this plan would mainly affect poor rural folk, especially women and children. As has already been seen where timber plantations have blanketed the landscape in many parts of the world, indigenous peoples are displaced, losing access to the natural resources that sustained them for generations.

It is vital that government should heed the concerns of civil society organisations, as well as those of the labour sector as expressed in COSATU 's highly critical analysis of the proposed bio-fuels strategy.

Wally Menne
Chairperson
Timberwatch Coalition
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