

Local News

Bagamoyo land grabbing denied

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Details Published on Wednesday, 18 March 2015 06:58 Written by
DEOGRATIUS KAMAGI and ORTON KIISHWEKO Hits: 677

The Permanent Secretary (PS) in the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlement, Mr Alfayo Kidata.

TANZANIA has strongly disputed a recent report by a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that claimed Bagamoyo EcoEnergy in partnership with the government is grabbing land from the people.

The NGO, Action Aid, claimed in its report titled “Pulling back from the Brink: Stopping Eco Energy from Land Grab in Tanzania,” that Agro EcoEnergy has pushed out rural communities in order to lease 20,000 hectares of land.

Agro EcoEnergy is developing a project for producing sugar, ethanol and electricity in the coastal town of Bagamoyo. But various government bodies relevant to development of agriculture and land disputed the report as ‘highly flawed’ and “ultimately not representative of the picture on the ground.”

The Permanent Secretary (PS) in the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlement, Mr Alfayo Kidata, said the land allocated for Bagamoyo EcoEnergy investment “belongs to the government of Tanzania and was not initially for villagers.”

Earlier during the day, at a forum on the “Right to Land” organised by Action Aid, the NGO’s Manager for Land and Agriculture, Mr Elias

Mtinda, said the forum was a result of the research that was conducted on



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Ecoenergy Project on the basis of the concern raised by communities residing in Razaba area, where the agricultural project is based.

But the government said the research was highly flawed, noting that land allocated for the BagamoyoEcoEnergy (BEE) Tanzania Limited investment in Coast Region did not initially belong to villagers as alleged by the report.

The PS said instead, the land was under government ownership and had been grossly underdeveloped for years. “It is the government’s desire in collaboration with BEE to ensure that the land is put to the highest and best use for the broader interest of the society and the country,” he stressed.

Disputing the report, Mr Peniel Lyimo, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Presidential Delivery Bureau (PDB), which oversees the project’s implementation on behalf of the government, also said that the land allocated to EcoEnergy was formerly public land that was owned by the government of Zanzibar as a ranch.

According to Mr Lyimo, the government of Zanzibar acquired the land in 1976 after all legal procedures, including compensating its owners, were followed.

However, the farm was abandoned in 1994. “When EcoEnergy project came, the government decided to divide the land and allocate part of it to the company for which a land title was granted in 2013,” he said.

Elaborating further, he said that as a former government land officer, it amounted to false, claims by Action Aid that people in the area were pushed out to pave way for EcoEnergy.

On his part, the Bagamoyo District Council Chairman, Mr Shukuru Mbatto, said that the farm allocated to EcoEnergy has never been a collective farm as claimed by Action Aid in its report.

He said the very few people who lived in the farm before the project was 'cut off date' in November 2011 would be compensated in accordance with IFC standards, which recognises that all those living in the project site before the 'cut off date' are entitled to some form of compensation, which is significantly higher than that offered in accordance with Tanzanian laws.

According to Mr Mbatto, most of the people currently claiming to live in the farm forcefully moved there after their request to do so was rejected repeatedly in 2009 and 2010, but would nevertheless be compensated under IFC standard, something which could not have happened if Tanzanian laws were applied "There are a number of correspondences between the government and representatives of the people who wanted to temporarily move into the farm because their areas of residence were flooded," he said.

Mr Mbatto added that the engagement process of EcoEnergy has clearly been based on free, prior and informed consent with the affected people and communities in difference to what Action Aid is claiming. Instead, he felt that it is Action Aid that should be transparent in their process with the communities.

The Action Aid report further criticises EcoEnergy's outgrower scheme, saying there is very high risk that it is unworkable for small holder farmers.

Commenting on the scheme, Bagamoyo EcoEnergy's Executive Chairman, Mr PerCarstedt, said his company had designed its sugar mill to process approximately 50 per cent more cane than will be grown on its estate to create an opportunity for smallholders in the surrounding villages to become successful cane outgrowers.

Mr Carstedt said that by seeing the potential the scheme has in improving the quality of lives for people in

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surrounding communities and help them to create their own wealth, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which in part advocates for poor rural men and women, has after 18 months of close scrutiny and evaluation of the project decided to strongly support the scheme.

“IFAD and African Development Bank have scrutinised the project and its potential impact on the surrounding communities and is through a very comprehensive programme seeing that up to 100 000 people in a radius of 40 km surrounding the project, can be substantially very positively impacted by the project,” said Mr Carstedt.

Speaking about the scheme, IFAD’s Senior Country Manager, Mrs Mwatima Juma, said the scheme would enable five participating villages to achieve higher stable yields using a private sector driven approach, underpinned by land tenure security, improved infrastructure and access to modern climate-smart production technologies.

“Using a pro-poor business model, the programme will build the capacity of farmers who are now subsistence producers, so they become members of modern commercial farming companies producing sugar cane, food crops, livestock and providing services,” said Mrs Juma.

Mr Salum Mfikirwa, a leader in one of the three already formed outgrower groups from Kiwangwa Village, said he was very surprised by Action Aid claims that EcoEnergy was grabbing their land because the outgrower scheme will be implemented using their own land.

“For us, our biggest challenge regarding land are the ongoing land sales in areas earmarked for the outgrower scheme by some unscrupulous village leaders to rich people coming from Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in the country and not EcoEnergy as claimed by Action Aid,” he said.

“Our biggest hope, after all these delays, is that the project can finally take off. According to the PS, on September 2014, the government

received information from BagamoyoEcoEnergy (BEE) Tanzania Limited, the company investing in a sugarcane farm project in Bagamoyo District that Action Aid Tanzania had undertaken a research and came up with a report alleging that the land allocated to BEE had been grabbed from the villagers.

The report is titled “Pulling Back from the Brink: Stopping EcoEnergy’s Land Grabbing in Tanzania.” He noted that since most of the information in the report is not correct, on 13th October, 2014, the Government invited the Management of the Action Aid Tanzania and shared the Government’s position on the report.

Subsequently, he added, on November 4, 2014, the government organised a second meeting involving key stakeholders for the purpose of providing a forum for consultation and agreeing on the way forward.

In those meetings the following issues were observed: The two parties agreed that the research process was flawed and did not involve representatives of the farmers from the villages in the project area nor did it involve the local government leadership in Bagamoyo District.

They agreed that even officials from relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Cooperatives were not involved.

The report had not been shared with the relevant authorities in the Government and therefore was not informed on what is the actual situation on the ground.

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The research was not cleared by the necessary authorities as per the requirement of the law of the land which predisposed it to errors and mistakes.

Based on the above observations, the PS said the government and Action

Aid leadership agreed to observe the following: That Action Aid would follow the law of the land in conducting its research and therefore allow a wider representation and transparency in conducting its research.

The two parties agreed that Action Aid shall share its research terms of reference with key stakeholders including the government.

That Action Aid will involve the farmers in the relevant villages in a non-discriminatory way, Bagamoyo District Council and the relevant ministries, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Cooperatives and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Human Settlements Development.

That Action Aid will share its research findings with the relevant parties including the village governments in the project areas, Bagamoyo District Council and the relevant ministries.

However, Mr Kidata noted yesterday that despite the above observations and the agreed way forward, to date the farmers and the village governments in Bagamoyo District, Bagamoyo District Council and the relevant ministries have not yet received feedback on the research findings.

However, the government is aware that on February 17, 2015, Action Aid conducted a workshop in which a presentation of the research findings on Bagamoyo EcoEnergy Project was made.

The PS said the government is also aware that Action Aid is continuing with its research and through the Workshop held at Double Tree Hotel on February 17, 2015, that Action Aid has started sharing its research findings with key stakeholders as agreed.

However, the government has noted with concern that Action Aid is avoiding to engage some key stakeholders which would have enriched the research findings making the report more useful to a wider section of stakeholders.

The PS said yesterday that they were again reminding Action Aid to

engage more participants from the relevant villages, ministries and departments as well as farmers in the respective areas.