
Broken promises

The impacts of
Addax Bioenergy in
Sierra Leone on
hunger and livelihoods

Executive summary

In 2014, the Swiss company Addax Bioenergy will begin exporting ethanol from a sugar cane plantation in Sierra Leone to the EU. This will be the first commercial quantities of biofuels to be exported from Africa to the EU.

The Addax plantation is often promoted as a sustainable biofuel project, not least by the European Commission. It has also received a sustainability certificate from the Roundtable for Sustainable Biomaterials. However, new research by ActionAid shows that the project is impacting on the food security and land rights of local communities. It is also threatening livelihoods more generally and lacked proper free, prior and informed consent from local communities before starting. The project is therefore not sustainable.

ActionAid has conducted research in the areas affected by the Addax plantation together with local NGOs and experts. This has involved in depth interviews with local community members, especially women. The research found that:

- > 99% of respondents said that hunger was prevalent in the Addax project area
- > 90% said that hunger was due to the loss of land to Addax
- > 99% of respondents suggested that food production had declined in their communities
- > 78% of community respondents said that they have never seen the land lease agreements
- > 85% of respondents said that information provided to communities on the advantages and disadvantages of Addax's investment was inadequate
- > 82% of respondents said they are dissatisfied with Addax's operations.

Research has further shown that:

- > land loss mitigation programmes have failed to provide many communities with sufficient food
- > compensation levels for land loss are poor

- > wages are low at a time when prices and costs are escalating
- > there was a lack of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of the local communities, effectively making this a land grab
- > communities feel that promises were made that have not been met.

The project is financed by a number of multilateral and bilateral institutions. ActionAid calls on donors to demand that Addax dramatically improves the lives of the communities in the project area by (as a minimum): paying better wages and fair compensation; employing local people (particularly the young) on long term contracts; stop further land being taken for the plantation; relinquishing bolilands (important seasonal swamp land for growing rice); and overhauling the Farmer Development Programme to enhance food security after consultation with the communities (and delivering the whole programme free for the duration of the lease). If necessary, this should be done through the renegotiation of the land lease agreements.

As importantly, Members of the European Parliament have an opportunity at a vote during the second week of September 2013 to change the damaging EU policies that drive the rush for land grabs from companies such as Addax. MEPs should vote for:

- > A 5% cap on the use of land based biofuels that can count towards targets in EU biofuel legislation, with a view to phase out the use of such biofuels as soon as possible
- > The introduction of a binding carbon methodology that accounts for indirect land use change (these should be feedstock specific).
- > The introduction of binding social sustainability criteria for all bionenergy, including wastes, residues and other biomass.

Conclusions and recommendations

The project is far from sustainable and is undermining communities' rights. Many people told ActionAid that because their land has been taken, the failure in places of the FDP, poor wages and job insecurity as local prices and costs rise, they now simply do not have enough to eat. Of those interviewed for ActionAid, 99% said there was hunger in their communities and 90% said this was due to the loss of land to Addax.

Overall, 82% of respondents said they are dissatisfied with Addax's operations. But the vast majority (96%) want Addax to stay and make amends.

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