

“WE PRODUCE WHAT WE DON’T EAT AND WE EAT WHAT WE DON’T PRODUCE”

By Fr. Daniele Moschetti, MCCJ

At the end of November, a special and unique pan-African conference on land grabbing and just governance in Africa kicked off in Kenya’s capital Nairobi, just a couple of days before the arrival of Pope Francis in the country on his maiden six-day trip in Africa.

It is the first time and unique initiative planned together by AFJN, AEFJN and the Episcopal conferences of Africa involving bishops, priests, religious, lay people, non-governmental organization and experts in the field.

It has been organized by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN), the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) and the International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies (CIDSE), with the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) as the host. The five-day conference (November 22 – 26) was officially opened by AMECEA Vice Chairman, Archbishop Thomas Msusa of Blantyre (Malawi) who also doubles as member of SECAM Standing Committee. Other members of the other Episcopal conferences were present.

In his opening remarks, Archbishop Msusa challenged the participants at the conference to not only focus on business persons, politicians and other government officials in addressing land grabbing menace but also look within the Church, confirming that land grabbing is also a challenge within Church structures.

Set to discuss the state of land grabbing in Africa, cases of resistance across the continent, and what the Church is doing about the problem, the conference had 160 participants from the continents of Africa, Europe and America, with well over 25 countries represented. However, the majority of the participants, almost 85% of the total, were from many different African countries.

The conference has highlighted the state of land grabbing in Africa with proper statistics and cases of resistance across the continent, as well as Church responses and its increasing engagement on issues of land grabbing. It is increasing the awareness that this is fully part of evangelization and a due cause for the communities of peasants, pastoralists, women and young people who are still depending very much from their land and agriculture.

Land grabbing is a serious problem across Africa, requiring more urgent attention from the governments, civil society and Churches since it threatens livelihoods and food security. It has already dislocated hundreds of thousands of people from their lands, deprived them of natural sources, and threatened their livelihoods. The cry of the African citizens and peasants is increasing saying: “*We produce what we don’t eat; we eat what we don’t produce!*”

Land grabbing is most often described as the acquisition of large areas of land in developing countries by multinationals, international firms, foreign governments, or individuals. In recent years land grabs have increased following the worldwide spike in food prices in 2008, prompting

investors to look toward the global south, particularly Africa, for potential land investment to produce food and bio-fuel for export and international markets. Large tracts of land are also being acquired for speculative purposes, known as “land banking”, where the buyer holds the land and sells it later.

We are witnessing in Africa the biggest land grab in modern history (more than 60% of cases in the world are in Africa) with deals sealed for 39-99 years between investors and African political leaders who, discarding the wisdom of their ancestors: *“We who are alive now, do not inherit the land from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children and grand children”* mortgage the resources of future generations for a “bowl of soup”. Yet investors and their collaborators claiming ownership on the land, act with impunity; violate the rights of the local people relocate them from their homes, their ancestral sacred rites and threaten their livelihoods and that of future generations. This time it is more intense, with more exploiter-participants and achieved through devious “legal” contracts facilitated by Africa collaborators. Land grabbing and corruption runs on the same road.

Among the cases presented during the conference, there is the one involving the project Senhuile SA, which has leased 20.000 hectares of land in the Ndiaël Reserve in Senegal, land used for decades by residents of some 40 villages in the area. This resulted in an ongoing conflict with the villagers, who want the project stopped. The case of farmers in Nigeria's Taraba State and in Kenya, who are being forced off lands that they have farmed for generations to make way for US company Dominion Farms to establish a rice plantation, was also a subject of discussion. Cases involving Bollore land deal in Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Liberia as well as in Sierra Leone and cases from Mozambique, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali were showcased.

This conference took place ahead of Pope Francis' visit to Kenya, Uganda and Central African Republic. The Pope has previously voiced great concern about the issue of land grabbing. In a speech delivered at the UN FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) in Rome in June 2015, Pope Francis warned against the *“monopolising of lands of cultivation by trans-national enterprises and states, which not only deprives farmers of an essential good, but which directly affects the sovereignty of countries”*. The Holy Father also pointed out that: *“There are already many regions in which the foods produced go to foreign countries and the local population is doubly impoverished, because it does not have food or land”*.

Further guidance and indications in relation to the dangers of land grabbing were expressed in the Pope's Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, in which he denounces an exploitative approach towards land while recalling: *“For them (indigenous communities), land is not a commodity, but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for [industrial] agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture” (LS 146)*. In support of *Laudato Si'* and ahead of the climate conference COP 21 in Paris, the bishops' conferences across the world signed on the 22nd of October 2015 an appeal which called for COP 21 *“to ensure people's access to water and to land for climate resilient and sustainable food systems, which give priority to people driven solutions rather than profits.”*

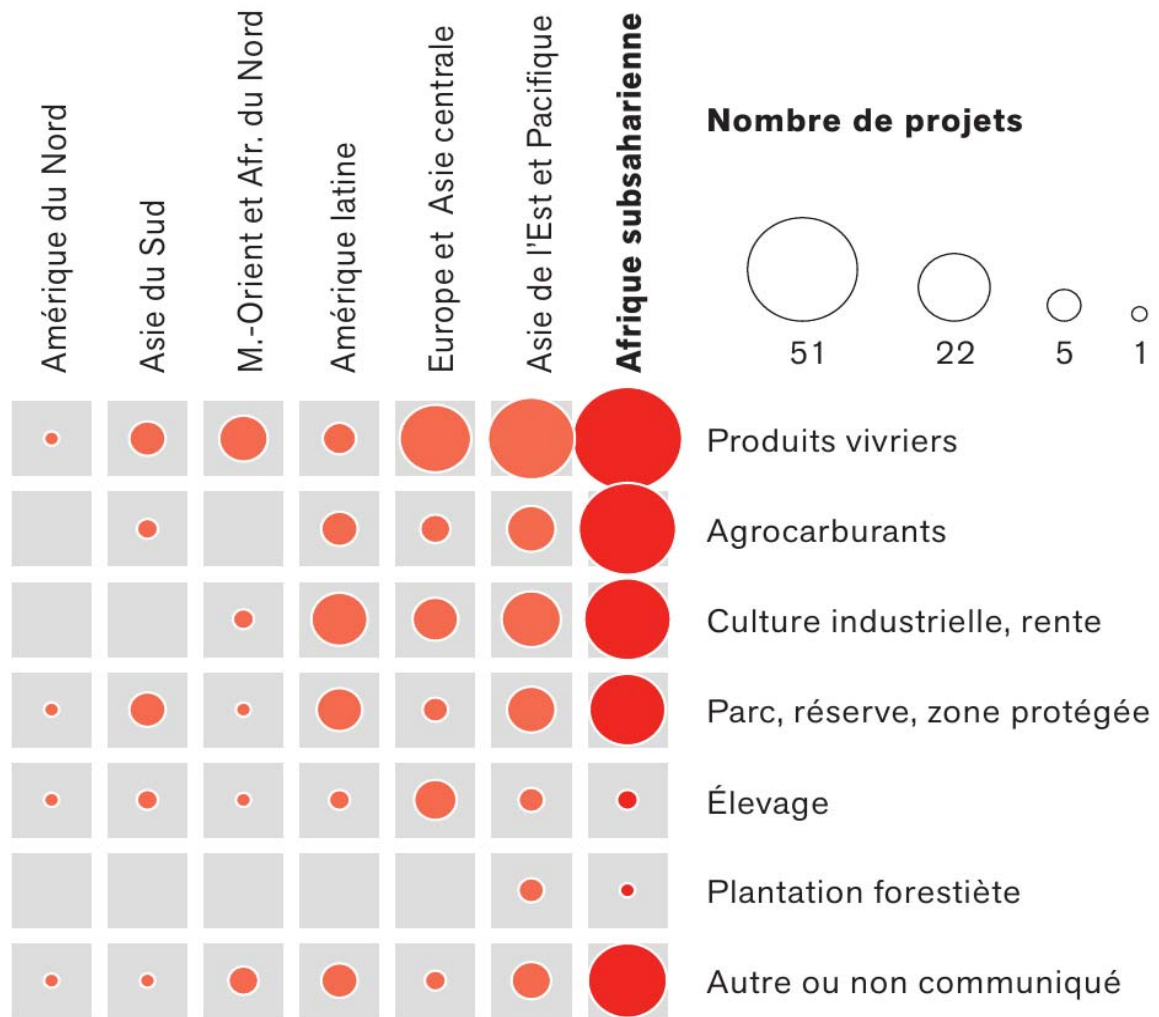
The participants tried to develop strategies to support and strengthen local communities in their struggles to stop this menace, to build resilience and local, national and international networks. As people who care for the poor and marginalized there is the need to increase awareness, actions and

advocate for the oppressed. The participants felt the importance to feel the unity of intents and solidarity and to follow what an African proverb reminds the strength of working together: *“When spider web unite, they can tie up a lion”*. For this reason the written final commitment is mirroring the intensity and the desire of the people of working hard for the future of the people of the Continent. The title of the commitment is also a invitation for all: *“Our land is sacred, our land is our life, our land is not for sale!”* A great hope and challenge for Africans for the people of Africa!

STATISTIC



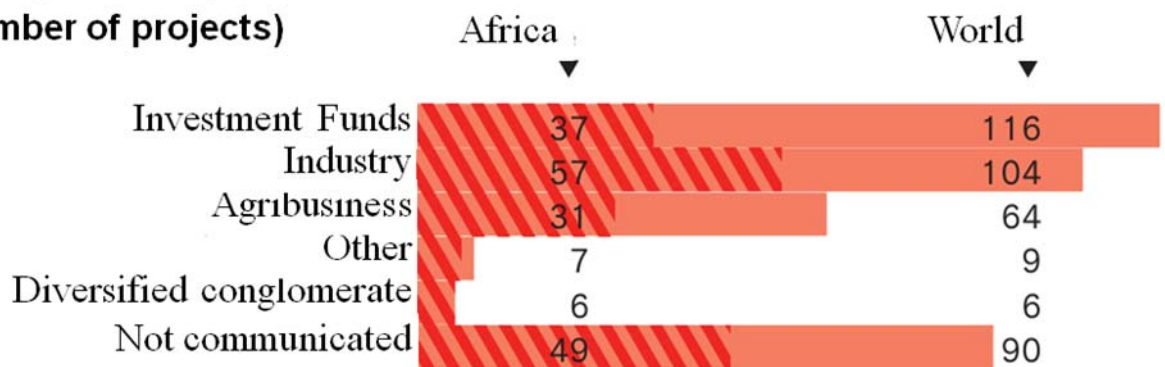
Finalité de l'investissement



Atelier de cartographie de Sciences Po / Afrique contemporaine, mai 2011

Principal activity of the investor

(number of projects)



Source : compilation de Rabah Arezki, Klaus Deininger, Harris Selod d'après les articles de journaux recensés par le site Grain, www.grain.org

Land deals		
Recipient Country	Number of deals	Magnitude (1000 ha)
		Min
<u>Ethiopia</u>	26	2.892
<u>Madagascar</u>	24	2.745
Sudan	20	3.171
Tanzania	15	1.717
Mali	13	2.417
Mozambique	10	10.305
Uganda	7	1.874
DR Congo	6	11.048
Nigeria	6	821
Zambia	6	2.245
Ghana	5	89
Malawi	5	307
Senegal	5	510
Total (27 countries)	177	51.415

***SUDAN: mostly South Sudan**

-SECAM (based in Accra), the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, is an association of all the Catholic Bishops Conferences of Africa and its islands. Since its establishment in 1969, SECAM has shown concern for issues pertaining to human development. For this reason SECAM set up a Department of Justice, Peace, and Development in its Secretariat in Accra, Ghana. SECAM brings all the dioceses in all countries on the continent. SECAM represents almost 20% of the total population of Africa who are Catholics.

AEFJN (based in Brussels), Africa Europe Faith & Justice network, is a sister organization of AFJN founded on the same core values and ethos by European based religious congregations. However, the AEFJN is founded in 1988 to promote more equitable economic relations between Europe and Africa through its advocacy at the EU and currently has more than 43 religious congregations in its membership. AEFJN recently completed case studies on land grabs and “extractivism” in Senegal and Madagascar respectively

AFJN (based in Washington), the Africa Faith and Justice Network, began in 1983 as a response to what Catholic missionary congregations witnessed on the ground in Africa. AFJN was formed to promote more responsible and just relations between the United States and the countries of Africa, and to fight against policies detrimental to Africa. AFJN has 34 organizational members,. From its offices in Washington D.C., AFJN continues its advocacy work with congressional lawmakers and with U.S. administrative agencies.