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## Biofuels War: The New Scramble for Africa by Western Big Money Profiteers



Written by **Sam Aola Ooko**

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Published on September 6th, 2008 in Africa, Ethiopia, Europe, Ghana, Global, Tanzania, United States of America



Biofuels war has broken out in Africa. Newspaper headlines have not proclaimed it but the gist of it is already out. Big money profiteers from Europe and United States are rushing to Africa in a new scramble for the continent, transforming large swathes of arable land into massive biofuels plantations.

Local but poor populations in many parts of Africa are increasingly being driven deeper into economic obscurity

 yet 60% of them still depend on agriculture for survival. Another 60% of that eke out a living by subsistence farming and animal husbandry.

The World Bank has been [sitting on a secret report](#) since April that says biofuels are responsible for the global food crisis; food prices have risen 75% because of the impact of the search for alternative fuels through the use of food products.

African civil society is [calling for a moratorium](#) on new biofuels investments in Africa amid concern that that the biofuels revolution will bring more food insecurity, higher food prices and hunger to the continent.

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In Tanzania, thousands of farmers growing cereals like corn and rice are already being evicted from fertile land with good access to water, for biofuel sugar cane and jatropha plantations on newly privatized land.

According to the anti biofuels investment campaigners, whole [villages are being cleared or grabbed](#), but families have been given minimal compensation or opportunities for their loss of land, community and way of life.

Endangered wildlife are not spared too. It is claimed one European investor has been granted 13,000 hectares of land in Oromia state; 87% of which is the Babile Elephant Sanctuary, a home to rare and endangered elephants.

Spiegel Online reported today how African governments and local farmers were being showered with promises by these big money spenders out on a green gold mad rush on the continent and further questioned if the frenzy was a form of economic colonialism.

Sun Biofuels, a British firm, has been granted free of charge a 99 year lease by the Tanzanian authorities to put 9,000 hectares or 22,230 acres of farmland under biofuels crop in exchange of a paltry \$20 million (€13 million) corporate social responsibility investment to build roads and schools, among other amenities.



This deal follows dozens others involving firms from Netherlands, the United States, Sweden, Japan, Canada and Germany, the German website reported. It is emerging that the US and Europe may be in a [trade war over biofuels subsidies](#).

To prove that the biofuels scramble has [nothing to do with alternative fuels but profit](#), profit and more profit, Spiegel reported that Prokon, a German company switched from its primary business of producing wind turbines to growing *jatropha curcas*, now the catch phrase of African biofuels, in a land area the size of Luxembourg. It is a

shrub with toxic seeds which contain a high percentage of oil used for candles, soap and biodiesel production.

But skeptical European scientists, alarmed by the impact of biofuels on skyrocketing food prices, are pushing the European Union to back away from its commitment to eco-fuel. Part of this skepticism, however, means that while the Western world pursues biofuels, caution demands that other lands must be found to cultivate the crop, and Africa fits the bill.

With China also looming in the picture, Africa could just be the perfect battle ground of the Biofuels Armageddon. Sadly, her role, as in most other economic wars, will be that of the grass on which two elephants fight.

*Image credits:* (Top): Edwardyanquen; and (above) Treesfff at Flickr under a Creative Commons license

Tags: activism, agriculture, Alternative Fuels, biofuels, environment, global food crisis, green, jatropha curcas

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### 3 Comments

1.



*Tyson Bennett* said on September 8th, 2008 at 1:48 am

Dear Sam,

Excellent article, what you are doing is vital for all Africa at this time. Jatropha based biodiesel has the potential to greatly help or harm Africa. Someone needs to keep a close eye on each project and report any injustices along with the positive effects to the wider world.

In this way public pressure can be placed on those not operating ethically and investment channeled to those companies that are doing the right thing. From my experience Jatropha Biodiesel has many positive effects in Asia. I believe that it can do the same in Africa. However, the African nations and people will have to be vigilant.

Regards,  
Tyson Bennett

2.



*Meghan Sapp* said on September 8th, 2008 at 7:21 am

Biofuels offer African countries not only a value-added export product, but also a way to off-set expensive petroleum imports through local production of biomass-based fuel for transport and electricity. But with all good things, there is the potential for exploitation.

One of the first steps in avoiding this exploitation is to work closely with governments in order to establish domestic biofuel policies and clear outlines for investment. By establishing guidelines early on, in an open and transparent forum, countries can set the stage for sustainable investment in biofuels that benefits the country and its citizens while protecting its workers, landowners, small-scale farmers and environment.

Leaving these kinds of policies until too late risks creating a "land grab" situation that leaves farmers and rural populations out of the potential benefits that biofuels offers.

Partners for Euro-African Green Energy (PANGEA) calls on all African governments to establish domestic biofuel and biofuel investment policies before allowing intensive investment to begin. A Brussels-based NGO, we offer a hand to those governments interested in pursuing sustainable policies and a voice for local producers in the European policy sphere.

3.



Adam said on September 9th, 2008 at 7:21 pm

We don't need to get fuels such as ethanol from bio sources. We can get all we need from our garbage with the use of Plasma Converters. These impressive machines safely and economically process wastes (hazardous or not) in any form, rendering them harmless. From this waste various alternate fuels such as ethanol and hydrogen are derived. Plasma Converters are from 1,000 to 100,000 times cleaner than current EPA emissions standards; no stack is required. While transforming garbage into ethanol and hydrogen the machine regularly achieves a volume reduction of 300:1. Because of this technology incinerators are a thing of the past (thank God). Even the best incinerators pour out disgusting amounts of dioxin and furans. That's the stuff that makes flipper babies. Landfills, formerly stinky liabilities, are now potential sources of energy and revenue. Plasma Converters represent a paradigm shift regarding how we perceive waste and recycling. And wouldn't it make much more sense to keep corn as a food rather than an expensively processed "fuel"? I find rhetorical questions annoying too, sorry about that. Don't take my word for it. This information is out there and easily accessed. Look at Startech Environmental Corp. or "howstuffworks.com".

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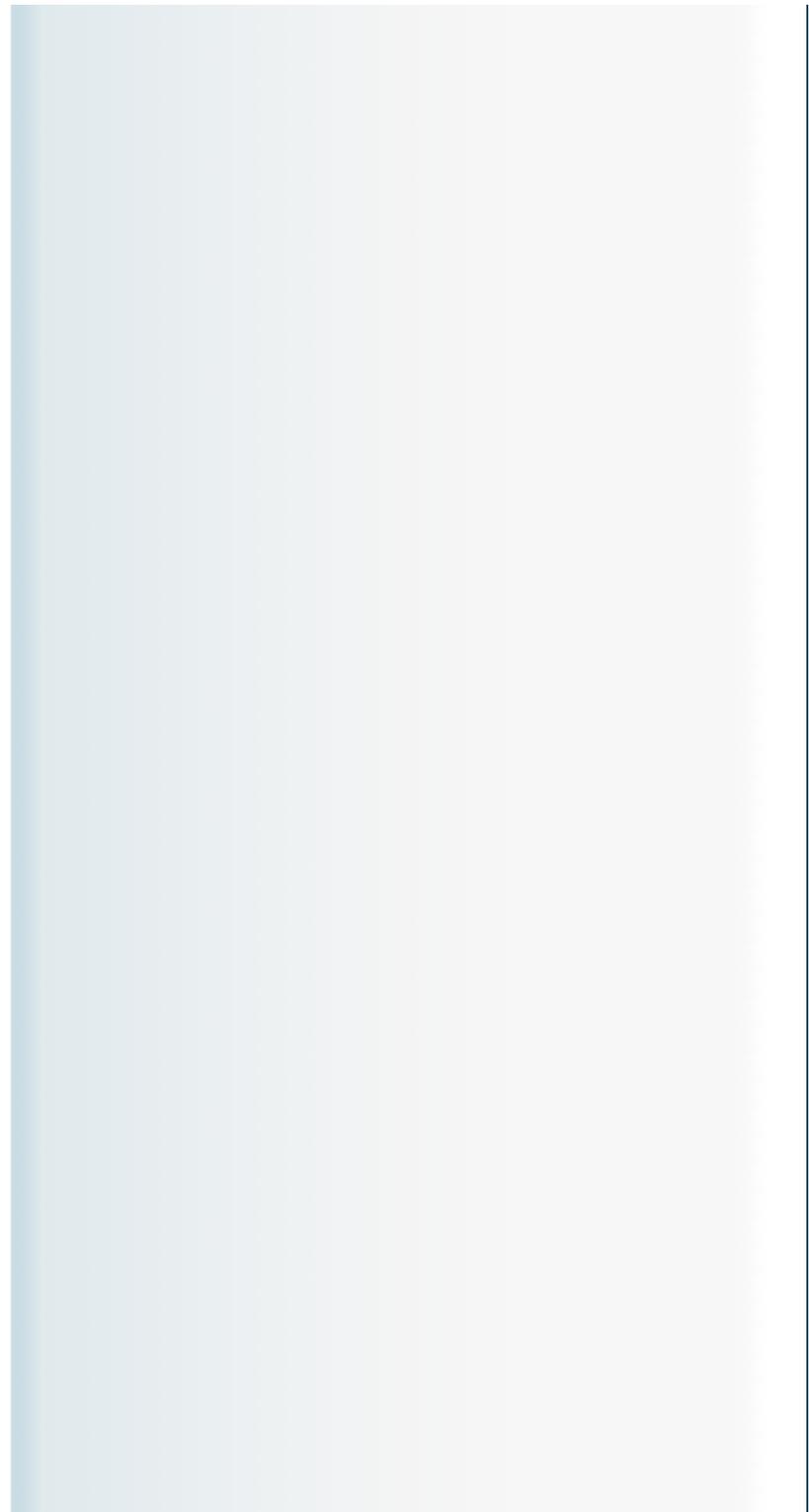
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