

Agrofuels in Africa: Tiptoeing in the Minefield of Hunger

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The global political economy of agrofuels emerging since 2007 appears set to intensify hunger among the countries and rural peoples of Africa. One of the key concerns about agrofuels is the massive land grabbing, which invariably has implication on food production. Attempts are made to present the use of tropical countries as agrofuels farmlands as something being done in the best interests of the people. Although the impacts of agrofuels vary by region, analysis suggests that already-vulnerable people and communities bear a disproportionate share of the costs of agrofuels development, particularly for crops already embedded in industrial production systems, which are equally staple foods. The point to note is that the production of agrofuels is not aimed at local consumption, but for export. It is such that African staple food crops such as oil palm, cassava, corn, groundnuts, sorghum, sweet potatoes, etc., are being used to produce bio-ethanol. Already, most staples across the continent are under severe attack and assault by agrofuels giants and their biotech partners. The central argument of this paper is that the emerging agrofuels reinforces the precarious food security problem. The process and structures of agrofuels increase pressures on the tropical forests and further wrest control of resources from subsistence farmers and rural peoples. Based on historical evidences, this paper analyses the consequences of proliferating agrofuels in the face of existing hunger crisis in Africa. This will be done by drawing both on recent studies on agro-fuels expansion and on the political economy literature on agrarian transition in Africa.

Key words: Agrofuels, Food, Hunger, Rural people, Crops