

Foreign Voices



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Zambia's food security at risk

A nation's or community's availability to grow enough food is connected to various issues such as availability of fertile land, farming inputs and human labour. At the governmental level effective land administration is a crucial aspect that needs to be addressed to ensure food security.

The term food security refers to the availability of food and one's access to it. A household is considered food secure when its occupants do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. This definition shows that it is less important for food security how many tones of maize or rice a country produces; rather it is the access to food that is decisive for people being food secure.

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**„Zambia's claim to be food secure
has not been fulfilled yet“**



Land policy in Zambia

In Zambia, peasant farmers are the ones who grow food, especially maize, to feed the nation while the commercial farmers focus on cash crops. Therefore the peasant farmers and their cultivation should be the focus of every food security policy. Land as the most important factor to food security should be available especially for this group. However, the current land administration in the country makes it difficult for poor Zambians, mainly peasant farmers, to access the much needed land for cultivating maize, groundnuts, cassava and sweet potatoes just for home consumption.

Zambia's land administration is governed by the Constitution, general law and principally the Land Act of 1995. The procedure of passing the 1995 act clearly revealed the government's reluctance of involving the concerns of civil society in the context of land policy. Before 1995, a previous land act was successfully prevented by civil society's strong resistance. In a second attempt in 1995, the government did its best to avoid civil society taking influence on land policy again. It invoked the urgent procedure in parliament allowing it to undertake all three readings of the land bill in one sitting. The government did not involve the traditional leaders, the nongovernmental organisations and the general public in the process of enacting the Land Act. While the other stakeholders started to organise themselves to comment on the law, the government announced that it had already enacted the legislation.

A very controversial issue connected to the Land Act of 1995 was the government's intention to promote foreign land ownership and investment especially in rural areas. The primary objective behind the act was to promote the liberal economic system in land which means promoting land markets and the possibility of selling traditional land to foreign investors. The act did not sufficiently provide safeguards to prevent landlessness among rural poor people and the eviction and marginalization of special groups. A research carried out by Kitwe District Land Alliance on behalf of Caritas Zambia – Ndola on the effectiveness of the Land Act of 1995 showed that the land act is not pro-poor in the sense that it favors more the rich people and foreigners as opposed to the local people. Zambian land has been vested in the state through the President since colonialism. The 1995 Act aimed to reverse first President Kenneth Kaunda's socialist-oriented pro-traditional tenure system which encouraged informal and state land ownership. It emphasises the President's control over land not as means to protect land from exploitation; rather it ensured President's power to alienate land and sell it to foreigners up to 99 years at the expense of the indigenous people.

Challenges for civil society

The process of the 1995 Land Act reveals the difficult situation civil society faces in Zambia as the government is very reluctant to involve other stakeholders in their policies and legislative processes. Due to a lot of criticism on the 1995 Land Act, committed activists founded the Zambia Land Alliance (ZLA), an organisation dedicated to represent vulnerable groups and push for a responsible land policy in Zambia. The fundamental aim of ZLA is to hold the government and decision makers accountable

for their policies. Up to now, ZLA has continued to engage the government, communities, the general public and other stakeholders in discussions concerning the Land Act of 1995. The aim is to sensitise the general public to these policies by acting as a conveyor between government and civil society as well as to provide information about land related issues. The organisation has also been creating conducive environments for policy makers to meet with their electorates and discuss land issues through public forums and radio programs.

Continued and effective collaboration in land related issues, policies and laws both at national and regional levels is another role Zambia Land Alliance tries to fulfil. This enables organisations at national and regional levels to share information, experiences and to compare notes in land related matters, policies and laws. The commonality embedded in African culture, tradition and way of live could be a role model for land administration and management and the way policies and laws are enacted.

Conclusion

It is important to underscore the strong relationship between good land policies and food security. The Zambian scenario showed that due to bad policies, the poor people had only limited access to land resulting in increased poverty levels at community and national levels. Most of these poor Zambians have ended up settling on private land and being referred to as squatters simply because they cannot afford to own a piece of land on their own. Furthermore the lack of access to land leads to decreasing agricultural production of poor people. The current policies and laws only advantage rich and foreign investors to own big chunks of land on their expense. This situation clearly shows that Zambia's claim to be food secure has not been fulfilled yet.

Imprint

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