

FoodSPAN / AAG IFSN PROJECT:

**REPORT OF FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES
ON LAND GRABS, BIOFUEL AND
FOOD SECURITY, ASHANTI REGION**



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Ensuring Food Security For All

1.0 Introduction

As part of the follow-up activities on the land grabbing, biofuel production and food security campaign under the IFSN project, FoodSPAN Coordinator, the Assistant Coordinator and the FoodSPAN Middle Zonal Network Leader, J K Owusu of Environmental Protection Association of Ghana (EPAG), Kumasi conducted a numbers of visits to the affected communities of farmers in the Scanfuel (now Scanfarm) Company operational areas in the Agogo area of the Ashanti-Akyem North District, during the period from 3rd to 7th June 2011. The team held meetings with the chiefs in the Agogo traditional council, the management of Scanfarm in the area. At the regional level, the team also visited and held meetings with the Ashanti Regional Coordinating Director, the Ashanti Regional House of Chief in Kumasi, and the Ashanti-Akyem North Deputy District Coordinating Director.

Discussions at the meetings and interactions during the visits largely centred on enhancing the interface among the affected communities and farmers of the land grabs for biofuel production, the bio-/agro- fuel Company mainly the Scanfarm, and the House of Chiefs/Traditional Council; key among the issues were compensation for affected farmers, partnership or profit sharing between Scanfarm and the displaced land owners / users.

Interactions with the communities/displaced farmers revealed another interesting development with serious implications for food security and poverty reduction such as, the acquisition of more tracks of land in the Afram Basin by another company called the “Afram Plantations” and leasing of large land to some individuals and “Fulani Herdsmen” for cattle rearing with destructive activities of the ruminants on food crops in the areas.

Owing to the importance of the issues, the team strategically included a journalist from the GNA Ashanti Regional office, to afford media coverage of the land grabs for bio-/agro-fuel production and other activities and their effects on food security and poverty reduction in the Ashanti-Akyem area, in the media.

2.0 Meetings with Community Members/Affected Farmers’ Groups; and Scanfarm Chief Operations Officer - Friday, 3rd June 2011.

In the morning of 3rd June 2011, the FoodSPAN team visited and held a meeting with the affected farmers in the Agogo community. The purpose of this meeting was to be updated on issues/agreements reached at the meeting of the stakeholders in the Scanfarm land grab, held on 25th January 2011. This meeting was held with the leadership of the affected community association executives, elders and the youth.

Discussions at the meeting revealed that the chiefs were still engaged in indiscriminate sale of lands to individuals for other activities such as cattle rearing, which is resulting in displacement of more farmers and consequently affecting food crop production. The

community members also reported another development that is threatening livelihoods and food security among small scale farmers: the invasion of “Fulani Herdsmen” engaged in the destruction of farm produce such as water melon, plantain and tomatoes, and threatening lives of indigenes by assaulting them. To this effect, the team witnessed a gathering of inhabitants, notably the youth who were contemplating mass action on the Herdsmen. The gathering expressed fears for some “big powers” behind the happenings. For instance, they mentioned Nana Akuoko Sarpong, the “Omanhene” of Agogo and Council of State member, as one such powerful person behind the land deals. They also indicated connivance of the police in their apparent failure to curb the lawless behavior of the Fulani nomads in the area.

The community members also informed the meeting that the biofuel company, Scanfuel has carried out some extensions and evictions contrary to their promises not to carry out these activities at the 25th January 2011 meeting.

Later in the afternoon, the team together with some representatives of affected farmers, including Mr. Seth K Amoah, Secretary of “Agogoman Citizens Association” visited the Scanfarm offices in Agogo, and held meeting with the Company’s COO, Mr. Michael Eshun.

During the visit, it was realized that the Company’s name had been changed from “Scanfuel” to “Scanfarm” and that it had won the 2010 National Best Maize Farmer Award during the National Farmers’ Day Awards in December 2010.



In these pictures: The symbolic turn around in name change of company from Scanfuel (Left) to Scanfarm (Right)

The FoodSPAN Coordinator, Dr. Queronica Quartey, in her opening remarks made particular reference to the 25th January 2011 meeting; she stated that the purpose of the meeting was to follow up on the agreements reached to ameliorate the conditions of land owners and users whose lands were acquired for the project. It was also to be informed on developments in order to facilitate effective and harmonious relations with the stakeholders in the community. She recalled that key among the issues was the agreement to increase the lease amount/compensation from GHC15.00 per acre for 50 years, renewable to another 25 years, to GHC30.00 per acre for 15 years.

In his response, the COO indicated that though the follow-up meeting was necessary, it should not have been at the Chief's place as earlier indicated in the letter. The COO informed the meeting that all affected farmers had been paid the new amount of GHC30.00 per acre for 15 years. To this Mr. Seth Amoah retorted sharply that not all of them. Accordingly the COO showed the samples of the addendum that reflected the agreed changes to the initial agreement.

The farmers on their part raised the issue of some people collecting money behind the rightful owners who actually declined the terms of acquisition. They also stated the issue of some farmers being paid less than the approved amount for a certain number of acres. Further they stated their displeasure of Scanfarm's refusal to stop clearing and working farming lands whose the rightful owners formally wrote to inform the company about their disapproval.

The COO indicated that the Company even withdrew from the lands of some farmers who were prepared to offer their lands for limited period such as three-year period for free. This decision was informed by the fact that the Company could not recoup their investment for only three years. He gave an example of the "Obuor" family, who were ready to give their land for free for three years when the Company requested for 5 years.

The COO also updated the meeting on the issue of annual ground rent be paid to the Traditional Council, indicating that the Lands Commission was to determine how much to pay as ground rent to the council based on registration. The affected farmers, however, indicated that the agreement should reflect that the ground rent should be paid to the individual land owners. According to the COO, the Company had been written to by the Traditional Council to that effect.

He added that the Company has a budget for its corporate social responsibility. According to the COO, the Company informed the communities of the operational area such as "Nso Nyame Ye", "Baama" and "Dikusen", to indicate the development project they preferred, and that Dikusen had done that, while they still awaited those of "Baama" and "Nso Nyame Ye" communities.

On the issue of partnership on the project, i.e. a share / percentage of profit to be given to affected farmers; the COO indicated it would be done once the company begins to make profit, besides the payment of ground rent. He said that GRPS, a consultant, is yet to come back to finalise this. To Mr. Seth Amoah's concerns about who deals with company as the individual land owner or the true owners, it was understood that it was appropriate that more information on the partnership arrangement be made available to the farmers. It was also understood that, there was the need to find a neutral person for proper independent assessment of the true values to determine percentage of profit to be paid as partnership.

In related other matters, the COO informed that recognizing the intricacies of issues of land owners, land owners and land users, the Company were not longer carrying out evictions at all. To question of how many farmers are affected, it stated they were 53 people covering 1,084 acres. However, Mr. Seth Amoah said the figure represented only those who heard of

the announcement. The COO informed the meeting that, though the Company targeted planting 620 hectares, it currently covered 592 hectares.

Reacting to the alleged publication of 400,000 hectares of acquired land for biofuel production, the COO said it currently stands at 13,058 hectares, though it was originally 19,000 hectares; he said the 400,000 was the founder's initial anticipated figure. Another important piece of information was that the Company had abandoned the *jatropha* plantation, and is currently doing soya beans and maize (with plans for out-grower schemes through a new Company, Golden Oil Seeds and Agricultural Company Limited, in which Scanfarm owns 51% with Ghana Nuts to give technical support). It was recognition of the MOFA awarded the Company the 2010 National Best Maize Farmer Award.

In his closing remarks the COO indicated that the Company believes in operational and industrial peace. According to him, it is in this vein that although the traditional leaders offered the land, they still recognized and prepared to negotiate with the people, the affected farmers. In this regard the Company is running an open office.

A key challenge noticed during the interaction was that there had been no free information flow between the Company and the affected farmers due to lack of regular interaction. It was realized that the issues of ground rent and partnership should be pursued to ensure that it duly addresses the needs and rights of the affected communities.

3.0 Meeting with Some Chiefs at the Agogo Traditional Council; And Some Community Members - Saturday, 4th June 2011

In the morning of Saturday, 4th June 2011, the team visited the Agogo Traditional Council, and interacted briefly with some chiefs. This was necessary in order to arrange for another meeting in the following week to facilitate an interaction session between the chiefs and the farmers, since the chiefs are the ones who sell the land to the Company and individuals. Key among the issues raised by the chiefs at this interaction was the apparent lack of communication between them the affected families.

The team then proceeded to hold an interactive session with affected communities under the operations of Scanfarm at Afrisere. At this meeting were a good number of men and women farmers from the Afrisere and surrounding communities. Community members spoke of the Scanfarm Company still clearing more lands and destroying more land marks. According to them, the Company's activity is thereby making it difficult for the affected farmers in the communities to determine the true ownership and to allow demand for compensation. In view of the need to hold evidence in the fight for the rights of the affected people, the team device means for the communities to register as many affected farmers as possible, by providing them with papers with a format for completion.



In these Pictures: A cross-section of community members at a meeting at Afrisere (Left); A group pose after the meeting (Right)

At this meeting it was also revealed that more lands have been sold to another company called Afram Plantation, and this is threatening the livelihoods and food security of over 30 farming companies in the Afram Basin, stretching from the Ashanti-Akyem North District into the Sekyere East District, of the Ashanti Region.

After the meeting, the team in the afternoon moved into other communities in the Afram Basin, namely Samso and Moshie-Panyin, and interacted with some community members to know the extent of these threats on their livelihoods and food security. In these communities, those present confirmed the threats they are suffering from this new Company's acquisition of lands they have lived and worked on for their lives. They team asked them to inform as many other affected communities' members as possible to gather for a meeting with them at Moshie-Panyin, the following Monday, 6th June 2011. They were also asked to register as many affected people in the communities as possible.

The key challenge in these communities is that there is lack of telecommunication coverage, and this makes it very difficult to keep communication and information open. They appeared helpless regarding who to deal with directly on these threats to their existence. It was also observed that the Afram Basin where the new land grab is being carried out, extends into another (Sekyere-East) district and another traditional area (Kumawu), and so requires the extension of the campaign on land grabs, biofuel and food security campaign outside the Ashanti-Akyem North District.

It was also observed that Scanfarm was not effectively communicating with the affected communities of farmers, as they failed to establish land marks before embarking on more clearing of lands for their project.

4.0 Resting, Reflection and Planning - Sunday, 5th June

The team spent the Sunday, 5th June 2011 reflecting on the emerging issues, as well as planning for the meeting scheduled for the rest of the period.

5.0 Meeting with Regional Coordinating Council, Visit to Regional House of Chiefs, Meeting with Agogo Traditional Council; and Brief Meeting with Community Members at Moshie-Panyin - Monday, 6th June 2011

The team, in the morning of Monday, 6th June 2011, held a brief meeting with the Ashanti Regional Coordinating Director. He was given amply information on the key issues on land grab for biofuel production and food security, as well as FoodSPAN's documented position on the issues in the Agogo and Afram Basin area of the region. It was hoped that this would keep him in the know as one of the key policy implementers in the region, so as to get the issues to be included in his briefing to the Regional Coordinating Council and the Regional Minister.

Later in the morning, the team moved into the House of Chiefs to deliver a letter from FoodSPAN seeking their audience. Attached to the letter were compilations of copies of petitions written by the affected communities and farmers in the Agogo area. Consequently, the team managed to secure space for interactions with the 8-man Standing Committee of the Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs, in order to facilitate a discussion of the issues of land grab, biofuel and food security with the granted audience by the chiefs. This was to be held on Tuesday, 14th June 2011, the Committee's next meeting date.

After visiting the House of Chiefs in Kumasi, the team then travelled into the Agogo area, where it first called at the Traditional Council to hold meetings with the chiefs. Some representatives of the affected communities and farmers were present at this meeting.



In this Picture: A pose with the Chiefs at the meeting in the Agogo Traditional Council

At the meeting it was again confirmed that there had been very little interactions between the Traditional Council and the affected communities of farmers. The chiefs expressed their concerns about the sale of lands by some individuals for cattle rearing activities, particularly by “Fulani Herdsmen” that is affecting food production and community peace in the area. They indicated that paramount on their agenda is the welfare of the people and therefore

called for more open interaction between the Traditional council (the chiefs) and the people who work on the land (the farmers).

6.0 Meeting with the Deputy Coordinator, ANDCC; and Return to Accra - Tuesday, 7th June 2011

In the morning of Tuesday, 7th June 2011 the Coordinator and the Assistant Coordinator of FoodSPAN visited the Deputy Coordinating Director of the Asanti-Akyem North District, to follow up on the issues of the land grabs, biofuel production and food security in the area, with particular reference to the DISEC report. The said report made certain recommendations that FoodSPAN ought to find out whether they were followed through. Notable among them was the recommendation that a committee should be set up to carry out forensic investigation on the operations of Scanfarm. It was revealed that the District Coordinating Council is yet to set up the committee.

The key challenge noted was that the DCC was preoccupied with the issues of security threats and disturbance resulting from the “invasion” of the “Fulani Herdsmen” in the Agogo area, which could be seen as a threat to national security.

In effect there had not been any revisits to the issues regarding Scanfarm’s land grab and the concerns of affected farmers. However, the FoodSPAN Coordinator appealed to the Deputy Coordinating Director to inform the DCC and the DCE of the need to attend to certain key issues; the forensic investigation of the Company’s operations. She noted that this would help in establishing doing the due diligence for the proposed partnership.

The journey back to Accra started after the meeting with the Deputy Coordinating director of the Ashanti-Akyem North District in the afternoon.

7.0 Meeting with the Standing Committee, Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs – Tuesday, 14th June 2011.

This meeting took place on Tuesday, the 14th June 2011, in the Ashanti Regional House of Chiefs, at Manhyia, Kumasi. The Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator and Middle Zonal Network Lead of FoodSPAN with 14 farmers’ representatives from the affected communities in Agogo and Afram Basin participated in the meeting with the 8-man Standing Committee of the House. This was a follow-up on the strategy of enhancing the interface between the affected farmers of land grabbing and the regional house of chiefs. It was viewed that this would provide the atmosphere for issues affecting the food security and livelihoods of the communities to be presented to the traditional rulers. This meeting was the outcome of arrangement made during the visit to the House of Chiefs in the morning of Tuesday, 7th June 2011.

Upon invitation to take their seat in the meeting, the Chairman of Standing Committee, the “Mampong-Hene” contended the representation and presence of the farmers at the meeting. He subsequently he called for a brief break in procedure to enable them take a decision on whether the meeting should discuss the issues contained in the letter and documents presented to them before the meeting.

The standing committee displayed their discomfort of the presence of the 14 land grab affected community members/farmers, and in their own words described them as a “crowd”. Claiming they were “misinformed” of this agenda on the meeting, the chief failed the grant FoodsSPAN and the affected farmers a hearing of their issues and concerns. The standing committee indicated that a cursory glance at the issues contained in the documents showed that they were beyond their mandate as a section of the House of Chiefs, and suggested that the matter be referred to the “Asanteman Council” for redress.

Concluding, after they resumed from the short break, the chiefs said that the issues contained in the documents, which were mainly a formal letter from FoodSPAN and compilations of copies of petitions written by the affected groups and individuals and communities to the House of Chiefs, Traditional Council and Lands Commission, would be studied and consequently an appropriate response would be communicated to FoodSPAN and the affected farmers.

8.0 Emerging Issues and the Way Forward

From the foregoing the following key issues ought to inform the way forward on the campaign on land grabs, biofuel and food security in the Ashanti Region FoodSPAN advocacy work:

- Need for sustained continuous and strengthened dialogue among the farmers, the land grabbing biofuel companies and the traditional council; this is how amicably solution to the concerns and issues as well as the human rights can be addressed to avoid any stakeholder acting wrongly.
- Agreements or consensus reached at the 25th January 2011 meeting involving all the stakeholders must be implemented.
- There is the need for District Coordinating Council to ensure that the committee to look into the issues of the affected farmers and the forensic investigation of the company to be put in place
- More activities on sensitization and awareness creation on the issue of “Fulani Herdsmen” must embarked upon, in order to advocate for radical action to forestall the adverse effects on the livelihood, food and human securities in the Agogo and Afram Basin area.
- The need to expedite action on the determination of the ground rent by the Lands Commission or the consultant.
- An independent agent to carry out the determination of the share values of the proposed partnership with the land owners, should be ensured – the need to empower the affected communities to make demands.
- The response of the Standing Committee of the House of Chiefs is crucial in streamlining the point of entry in the Chieftaincy hierarchy of the Ashanti Region, especially in dealing with the issue of land grabs and its effects on small scale farmers in the area.

- There is the need for the farmers to build and strengthen their relations with the chiefs and the land grabbing companies in order to ensure that their concerns are addressed – free flow of information among key stakeholders must be instituted.
- The new acquisition of the large track of land in the Afram Basin offer another interesting development for food security advocates such as FoodSPAN to ensure that human rights, including the right to food and their dignities are not compromised.
- Capacities have to be built in order to ensure that evidences of abuses or violations of human rights of small scale farmers and the poor in this food-producing area is gathered, in order to wage on a more compelling advocacy/accountability campaign among the affected communities, the chiefs and new land owners.

ATTACHMENTS

1. List of specific activities, dates, place and time
2. The attendance list of the meetings held.