

Since the last few years, economically rich countries of the Middle East and Asia, driven by the need to feed their increasing population and to challenge the intermittent problems posed by global food price rise, began to engage themselves in buying and leasing vast agricultural lands of poor countries so that they would invest on it millions of dollars the ultimate goal of which is ensuring domestic food security. When the idea of securing provision of food through 'land grab' first originated, the lands that met the eyes of these rich countries are those of Sub-Saharan Africa, a region known for its fertile lands and abundance of water resources. As a result, beginning from the past few years, many fertile lands of Sub-Saharan Africa are being sold and leased to those countries of Asia which are actively working on such an investment. However, as this investment is undertaken by denying the indigenous farmers of their precious land, it started to become a global concern and hence the whole endeavor took no time to be termed as 'Land Grab'.

Many governments of Sub-Saharan Africa, putting trust on the blind deals they made with foreign governments, snatched lands that has been titled to many native farmers and sold or leased them to foreign corporations. So, many indigenous farmers are forced to serve as cheap laborers for the foreign corporations that grabbed their land. And finally the crops that are produced through their toil and sweat are shipped to the investor country. As the farmers are left with no crops at hand, they depend on food aid for their daily consumption. That's why some experts describe them as "farmers who produce what they don't eat, and who eat what they don't produce". It's been a long time since an image of poverty and backwardness has become an identifying mark of Sub-Saharan Africa. Drought and famine have not yet become history in this region. And to add insult to injury, it is now being affected by a new version of colonialism whose prime objective is to grab land for agricultural purpose at the expense of the hungry indigenous. It is to be recalled that during the colonial times, European colonizers used to justify the reason for their presence in Africa by saying 'to civilize the natives'.

And today's land grabbers are also trying to justify their act by saying that their investment would create job opportunities for the natives, increase agricultural productivity, encourage the construction of agro infrastructure and so forth. Even if one wants to recognize these so called "advantages", they can't be a substitute for the denial of land use rights. So the fact is contrary to the justification. That is, the land grabbers run their business by violating the following basic rights: they don't respect land rights of native farmers, shy away from making convincing understanding with the farmland communities, don't work to secure enough provision of food in local markets, and their high-tech agricultural practices adversely affect environmental health. Thus, such an "investment" and land grab that compromises all these can't be justifiable. Moreover, the act of grabbing land is breeding conflicts and deepening the roots of corruption in the countries which have become the prime targets of the land grabbers. Countries mainly from the Middle East have bought and leased lands in Sub-Saharan Africa aimed at producing various crops for local consumption. On the other side, China and India have taken similar measures in the same region but for a different purpose, that is, to secure their bio fuel demands. Besides, investors looking for higher returns are also being attracted to this region. All in all, around 20 rich countries have bought or leased millions of hectares in many Sub Saharan countries like Sudan, Ethiopia, D. R. Congo, Nigeria, Ghana, Madagascar, Zambia,

Uganda, Mali, Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania, and others. The rich countries are not only ensuring their food security by grabbing vast lands of these countries but are also getting high returns from the sold of surplus food they produce. One of the reasons that initiated the drive towards the sell and lease of agricultural lands is the information released by the experts of population statistics revealing that world population would reach 9 billion by 2050.

It is natural to think that population rise would affect the provision of food. This is true because population rise necessarily indicates a decrease in the size of land, and hence a decrease in agricultural output. Apart from this, the global food price rise that affected the whole world in 2008 has hinted about the magnitude of the same problem that would happen 40 years later. Therefore, rich countries of Asia, especially those that are not blessed with an environment conducive for agriculture, began to work ahead of time to avoid the same pitfall in the future. Anyway, the fierce competition of land among land grabbers that we observe today has something to say: it is impossible to build strong economy without ensuring food security. That's why the issue of food security is said to be a priority of priorities in the list of development programs of many developing countries. Investing on agricultural lands of Africa has become a new food sector strategy of many powerful countries of Asia. These countries have financial and technological capacity to run a multi-million agro-investment. And in countries where they find governments which are ready to sell or lease their precious land they are pouring millions of dollars and are shipping tons of food to the people back in their countries. Africa, though it has a vast and fertile agricultural land, is a place where land is so cheaper than anywhere else in the world. And this is what makes investing in Africa very profitable. Apart from this, degradation of water resources, climate change, population rise, popular uprising induced by food shortage and many other reasons have made agricultural land of Africa a highly demanded natural resource. The food sector of many poor countries, like all other economic sectors of theirs, is coming under the influence of huge corporations in the name of globalization. The rich countries are competing among each other to make better deals with the poor countries to obtain vast land that yields a bumper harvest up on receiving huge financial and technological investment. Similarly, the poor countries on their part also compete among themselves to attract investors with a better investing power.

According to a recent study, in the past few years around 50 million hectare of land (twice as big as Britain) is leased and bought by governments of rich countries and government subsidized foreign corporations or is under discussion to be sold or leased. What is most appalling here is not about why rich countries have introduced new food security strategy based on land grab, but rather it is about why the poor countries are selling and leasing their land while their people are suffering from intermittent drought and famine. One of such countries that gamble over the worst condition of their people is Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, a country where annually millions of drought affected people hungrily anticipate food aid, 3 million hectare of fertile land is sold and leased to foreign investors. As a result, Ethiopia has become one of the 20 African countries that are now the breadbasket of foreigners. Hence, thousands of Ethiopian farmers have remained landless as the TPLF regime has allowed the grabbing of their land. So, their only choice is to become a laborer with low payment. Over 50% of the world's work force is engaged in agriculture. But it doesn't mean that the percentage is the same everywhere. For instance, the work force engaged in the agriculture sector in Africa is over 60%, in Asia 61%, in USA and Canada below 3%, in South America 20% and in Europe 9%. Taking in to account the food

self-sufficiency of these places of the world, all these figures reveal one fact: those that assign only few of their human capital on agriculture are self-sufficient in food and those that do otherwise suffer from scarcity of food and therefore look for aid. In Sub-Saharan Africa, those who depend on farming for their livelihood can produce crops enough to feed them and their families. But they can't produce surplus crops to be sold in local markets. Therefore, Sub-Saharan Africa is known for importing huge amount of food that consumes 60% of its GDP. Even with such an expenditure on food imports, it is not self-sufficient. The whole region depends on food aid. And as everybody knows food aid is crippling its economy and its people's can-do mentality. The aid mentality rules the mind of the people and governments in the region to the extent that aid is seen not as a temporary solution but as the main pillar of economy. But above all, Sub Saharan countries, as if their failure to avoid the vicious cycle of poverty and food scarcity is not enough, they are further maintaining hunger and aid by selling their fertile lands to foreigners. And because such countries that are bent on hurting themselves would have an environment conducive to exploitation, the so called international NGOs have found a suitable ground to discharge their crippling mission in these Sub-Saharan countries which are working against the welfare of their people. Ensuring food security is the best preventive remedy that immunizes countries from external political and economic pressures, and help them become a master of their destiny. As this is a universal fact, many African countries have put the issue of food security at the top of their development agenda. However, to the dismay of all concerned Africans, almost all African countries have failed to boost their food sector and therefore took refuge in the culture of dependency to the extent that they calculate their national budgets based on aid money, and execute political and economic decisions passed from foreign lands. This is the harsh and undeniable realities of post colonial Africa. Therefore, the young nation of Eritrea has a lot to learn from this grim experience which is still haunting Africa. Hence, ever since the dawn of its independence, the focus of Eritrea's development program has been and still is revitalizing and boosting the agriculture sector with a special emphasis on ensuring food security. The livelihood of most of the Eritrean people directly or indirectly depends on agriculture. This is the given reality. Thus, until the country's economy develops in all sectors to accommodate wider alternatives, it is a must to focus on the food sector. But the kind of food sector that this country needs to develop is a one that is run by the nation's internal capacity thereby avoiding marginalization in the distribution of the over all product.