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Climate Change, Land Grabbing and the Consolidation of Rural Poverty: Evidence from Central Nigeria

Patrick I. Ukase
Department of History & Int'l Studies
Prince Abubakar Audu
University Anyigba,Kogi State
Nigeria

Kennie Enojo
Department of Political Science,
Prince Abubakar Audu University
Anyigba, Kogi State
Nigeria

Danladi Abah
Department of History & Int'l Studies,
Prince Abubakar Audu
University Anyigba, Kogi State
Nigeria

Abstract

Climate change is a major threat to sustainable growth and development in Africa and the achievement of sustainable rural development initiatives. Although Africa is the least continent responsible for climate change, it is particularly vulnerable and bears disproportionately the effects of climate change. Scholars have identified the effects of climate change in Africa to include reduction in Agricultural production, worsening food security, the increased incidences of flooding, drought and poverty among others. Other effects of climate change in Africa also include proliferation and spread of diseases and increased risk of conflict over scare land and water resources. Thus, this study examines the dialectical nexus between climate Change and the Political Economy of Land Grabbing in contemporary Central Nigeria, and demonstrates how climate change mitigation in this region engenders rural poverty and economic injustice. The study further argues that the drivers of land grabbing in North Central Nigeria are multinational organizations from the Global North, developed countries, the Nigerian ruling elite and state agencies. The study also argues that climate change innervates land grabbing which in turn intensifies rural economic poverty, powerlessness and injustice in different communities in this region. The study amongst others, recommends appropriate legislative and institutional frameworks to curtail the massive sale of community lands by Nigerian state to foreign multinational companies. Political economy approach is adopted while primary and secondary sources of data are utilized.

Keywords: land grabbing, Climate Change, Rural Poverty, Nigeria

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Introduction

Since the dawn of the new millennium, there has beena global rush for arable land in many African countries by transnational agri-business giants mainly from the developed countries like the United States of America, China, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Japan and others. This practice involves the acquisition of vast tracts of cultivable African land by foreign governments and investors on the *false* pretense to modernize agriculture, boast food security and generate employment[1]. This phenomenon has often commonly been referred to as "landgrabbing." Cotula argues that land grabbing in Africa is ancient and induced by three forces which are undermining the means of livelihood of many rural economies.These include biofuel production aimed at reducing Green House Emission, which is a harbinger of global warming, food security and finance (global capitalism).[2]Cotula and Verschuuren observe that there have been intense debates on why many hungry African countries are signing away peoples ancestral land in the bid to pursue biofuels production intended to meet the energy needs of advanced economies. It is also argued that many African countries have not judiciously utilized revenues from abundant fossil fuels (crude oil) sales.[3]

Biofuel development, which is acknowledged as a "sustainable" climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies have been driven by motives that do not favour or factor in the needs of rural African societies[4] Countries that foresee reduced domestic availability of suitable land for food production due to climate change and rapid population growth try to avoid future food shortage and high prices by producing food overseas (China being an example here). In addition, most developed countries have set targets in their energy policies in attempts to cap greenhouse emissions. To meet these targets, they are searching outside their own jurisdiction for suitable and affordable land to grow crops for biofuels and forestation[5].

There is, however, another link between land grabbing and climate change: intensified land use for the African host countries not only impairs immediate food and water availability at the local level, but also reduces local Communities' resilience to engage with future climate change (hence, reducing their adaptive capacities). This, in turn, leads to serious and often irreversible socio-economic impact, such as the displacement of local communities. Climate-induced transnational agro-investment has been on the rise in several countries

[1]Amin, S.E.Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism? Cape Town: Pambazuka Press. 2011, P.9
[2]Cotula, L., et'al Land Grab or Development Opportunity? : Agricultural Investment and International Land Deals in Africa. London: IIED. 2009, P.3
[3]Cotula, L., N. Dyer and S. Vermeulen, Fuelling Exclusion? The Agro-fuel boom and the Poor People's Access to Land. London: IIED/FAO., 2008. P26
[4]Attah Nigerian Agro-fuels Policy and Land Grab: "Monkey see Monkey Do" Paper Presented
at CODESRIA General Assembly Meeting, June, 2015, 08-12 accessed online at www.codesria.og.
[5]Attah, N.E. Agro-fuels in Africa: Tiptoeing in the Minefield of Hunger, Pape Presented at the 4th European Conference on African Studies, Nordic Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, 13th-17th June. 2011. P.7

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in Africa, such as Nigeria, Ethiopia and Uganda, where large areas of fertile farmland have already been earmarked for long-term transfer to foreign investors. Companies from China, Germany, India, Israel, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK, Netherlands, Norway and the USA, have concluded land lease agreements for biofuel projects with various African governments. Tensions and conflicts are looming as a result of discontent created by the marginalization and loss of property rights of the local communities, as well as lack of their participation and a benefit-sharing scheme for the use of these resources[6] (Cotula 2009: 17; Von Brau and Menzeinick-Drick 2013:216).

There are already numerous instances of displacements of the local population as well as clearing of forests and related resources on which the livelihood of the local population depend. Odoemene argued that the activities of these investors have caused widespread fear and threats to the livelihood of the local communities and have already led to conflicts in some localities.[7]. For instance, in contemporary Nigeria, the phenomenon of land grabbing has been on the increase. Successive governments had harped on the Land Use Act of 1978 to dispossess many rural communities of their ancestral land in order to satisfy the land needs of foreign transnational agri-business giants. Atta corroborated Odoemene position when he noted that in most cases, land grabbing in Nigeria have been perpetrated through lease of land to foreign agri-business giants for up to 99 years.[8]

It is against this background that this study interrogates climate change and the political economy of land grabbing in central Nigeria. The study seeks to unpack how high-level national and transnational politics coalesce with capitalist interest to dispossess local communities of their ancestral land in the guise of promoting foreign direct investment, agricultural modernization and rural development. It is in the light of the above that this paperexamines the nexus between climate change and land grabbing, and to demonstrate how the rural poor communities in North central Nigeria are disproportionately suffering from the menace of climate change politics. In this perspective, this study will address the following specific research questions; what are the links or intersections between climate change and land grabbing in Central Nigeria? How does land grabbing and climate change intensify rural economic poverty, powerlessness and injustice and how is this masked with the global North-South power dichotomy? What adaptive, sustainable coping strategies and policies should rural communities affected by climate change and land grabbing in central Nigeria adopt to mitigate the negative effects of this phenomenon? These and other critical questions are addressed in this study.

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[6]Von Braun, J. and R. Meinzeink-Dick, Land Grabbing by Foreign Investors in Developing Countries: Risk and Opportunities,2013. IFPRI, 13, Washington: IFPRI

[7]Odoemene, Akachi. Socio-political economy and dynamics of government driven land grabbing in Nigeria since 2000. Working paper 2015/103, Global Economic Governance, University of Oxford. 2015. Pp. 3-8

[8]Attah, N.E. Agro-fuels in Africa: Tiptoeing in the Minefield of Hunger, Pape Presented at the 4th European Conference on African Studies, Nordic Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, 2011. 13th-17th June. P14

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Methodologically, primary and secondary data were used for this study. The primary data comprised oral and key informant interviews with experts and community members with lived knowledge of land grabbing or large-scale agricultural land deals in selected central Nigerian villages. Interviews were conducted in Kwara, Nasarawa, Benue and Kogi States. Those interviewed were farmers, traditional rulers, women associations and leaders, youth and civil society organizations. For secondary data, published books, journal articles, commissioned works, newspapers and internet materials relevant to this study were consulted. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively and thematically. This paper is divided into three sections. The first section, which is the introduction illuminates the debates in the literature while section two examines conceptual issues. The third section interrogates from the central Nigerian experience, the nexus between climate change, land grabbing and rural poverty.

Conceptual Clarifications

Climate change can be described as the persistent change in the weather pattern engendered by anthropogenic activities.[9] It is also known as global warming. Put differently, global warming and climate change refer to an increase in average global temperature[10]Climate change has also been defined as a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activities that alter the composition of the global atmosphere and which are in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods[11] Globally, the basic features of climate change are; inconsistency in rainfall patters, abnormal increase in temperature, lower humidity and wind patterns.

Land Grabbing is the new concept used to describe the mad- rush for the acquisition of arable land mostly in developing countries by advanced capitalist countries and their companies for agricultural, investment and energy needs.Odoemene succinctly defines a land grab as "the forced acquisition of land without valid consent and reasonable commitment to the future survival of the dispossessed."[12] While drawing a clear analytical distinction between legitimate agricultural land deals and land grabs, Odoemene argues that land grabs emerges under three occasions, namely, when there are: 1) absence of the primacy of local or indigenous people, 2) absence of valid consent and 3) coercion.[13] In other words, land grabbing in Africa, is characterised by the externally driven acquisition of community land without recourse to the needs of local or indigenous people by the state. In fact, Odoemene was correct when

[9]Agnew, R. Dire forecast: A theoretical model of the impact of climate change on crime. Theoretical Criminology, 16(1), 2012, 21-42.
[10]Evans, A.Resource Scarcity, Climate Change and the Risk of Violent Conflict. Washington, DC: World Bank. 2011
[11] Evans, A. Resources Scarcity…p. 26
[12]Odoemene, Akachi. Socio-political economy and dynamics of government driven land grabbing in Nigeria since 2000. Working paper 2015/103, Global Economic Governance, University of Oxford. 2015. P.4
[13] Ibid p.15

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he argued forcefully, that a "land grab" is defined in the process and the procedure through which the land acquisition is made' [14]

Land grabbing is also essentially a rush from large agricultural companies, investment funds and nation-states to exert some form of power (not only purchase) over large plots of land and their resources in developing countries, where arable lands are cheap and abundant.[15]To Borras Jr. and Franco land grabbing is a concept used to denote "the explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions and land speculation in recent years mainly, but not solely, around the large-scale production and export of food and biofuels" [16]Land grabbing is a catch-phrase used to describe the astronomical surge in transnational land deals involving western countries, China and some middle east countries and transnational corporations aimed at dubiously acquiring large-tracts of arable land for food, biofuel production and finance to meet their domestic needs and profit maximization.

The features of land grabs as identified by Borras and Franco include: 1) forceful land change usually from peasant land use to agro-industrial land transformation; 2) Transanationalization. That is to say, land grabs are usually perpetuated across national boundaries involving diverse actors. 3) Land grabs are financial in character. In other words, finance is one of the major drivers of global land grabs. 4) Land grab deals are usually shrouded in secrecy, often lacking in transparency and 5), the land deals usually culminate to population displacement or possession by dispossession.[17]

Climate Change, Land Grabbing and the Consolidation of Rural Poverty and Injustice: Evidence from Central the Nigeria

Central Nigeria has become a hotbed of intense land grabbing by multinational agribusiness giants angling for arable land for export food production and for biofuel (energy). There are copious evidence of massive lease and sale of ancestral land by government to foreign companies under the guise of engendering agricultural development and economic transformation.[18]This section briefly examines some of the few cases of such land deals within this region that mask land grab. The Shonga farm land grab in Kawara state is another typical example of how national and transnational actors and interests collude to expropriate the resources of the poor. The story of the Shonga farm

[14]Ibid p. 8
[15]GRAIN. 2012b. "Slideshow: Who's behind the land grabs?," a GRAIN Publication (16 October); www.grain.org/article/entries/4576-slideshow-who-s-behind-the-land-grabs
[16]Borras Jr. S.M., and Fanco., J.C. Global Land Grabbing and Trajectories of Agrarian Change: A Preliminary Analysis. Journal of Agrarian Change, 12 (1), 2012. Pp 34–59
[17]Borras Jr. S.M., and Fanco., J.C. Global Land Grabbing and Trajectories of Agrarian Change: A Preliminary Analysis. Journal of Agrarian Change, 12 (1), 2012. P.38
[18]Attah N.E.Possession by Dispossession: Interrogating Land Grabbing and Protest in Africa" Paper presented at the 5th European Conference on African Studies on AfricanDynamicsin a Multipolar World organized by the Centro de Estudos Africanos – Instituto Universitáriode Lisboa (Center of African Studies of the University Institute of Lisbon) on behalf of, the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS), 27th-29th June, 2013.

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dates back to year 2005 when white Zimbabwean farmers who were displaced following former president Robert Mugabe land redistribution policy found their way to Nigeria. Following Robert Mugabe' takeover of land from white farmers, the farmers were rendered landless. Their precarious placement propelled the government of Nigeria and Kwara state to invite them to Nigeria to setup Shonga farms.

Prior to the arrival of the white Zimbabwean farmers, the Kwara State's agricultural space was mainly dominated by peasant farmers, whose total output was barely enough to feed the people of the state, let alone, selling to the neigbouring states[19]. The then governor of Kwara State, Bukola Saraki saw the white farmers as messiahs who will help modernize the hitherto, unsustainable subsistence agricultural practice that had dominated the economy and society of Kwara since the precolonial era.

In order to achieve this, the state government working in sync with federal government mobilized facilitative, institutional and legislative measures to activate the Shonga land grab. First, the government leased out 13,000 hectares of land to 13 white farmers representing 1000 hectare per farmer in 2005. Before this, the white farmers formed an international consortium known as Shonga Farms Holdings Limited (SFH Ltd). Through SFH, they secured a 25 years, renewable land lease to operate on the 13000 hectares of community land. Apart from this, the state government went extra mile to support the SFH through 'clearing of lands, opening up of the roads, provision of electricity, portable water and other infrastructural facilities to making farming easy for the visitors'[20]

It is bizarre and shocking how a government that had over the years paid lip services to the local farmers could suddenly provide all these facilities for white farmers. In order to raise the needed fund to support the white farmers, the government helped them to secure1.7 billion Naira loan from the commercial banks in Nigeria with the Kwara State government as the gurantor. This was the equivalent of USD 250, 0000 for each farmer. The banks were: Gurannteed Trust Bank, Acces Bank, First City Monument Bank, Keystone Bank and Unity Bank.[21].

Shonga Farms Holdings Limited was designed to operate in three syndicated structures, viz; 1) Mixed Crop Syndicate, 2) Poultry Syndicate and 3) Diary Syndicate. The poultry syndicate has the capacity to raise 160,000 birds weekly or 12 million broiler chicken yearly while the automated abattoir dresses 5,000 birds daily. The mixed crop syndicate was designed to produce in commercial quantity crops like maize, ginger, rice, cassava, soya bean while the rest two were expected to produce milk and poultry meat in commercial quantity for the local and international market. In fact, the government argued that Shonga farm will easily help to address the unemployment crisis in Nigeria and Kwara

[19]Gbenga Akinfenwa and Mansur Aramide, Kwara Shonga Farms where imprints of White Zimbawean Farmers rarely exist. Guardian Newspaper, 07 January, 2024
[20]Gbenga Akinfenwa and Mansur Aramide, Kwara Shonga Farms where imprints of White Zimbawean Farmers rarely exist. Guardian Newspaper, 07 January, 2024
[21]Guardian Newspaper Nigeria. P.3

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through the provision of hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect job opportunities to the people. They also argued that it was a great way of transferring modern agricultural techno-scientific ideas to the Nigeria farmers. It was to be a model demonstration farms which could be replicated in other parts of Nigeria.[22]

The Shonga land grab in Kwara state represents a classic case of how land grabbing undermines rural development and intensify poverty. For instance, the displacement over 30000 farmers and close to 2000 households denied community members and rural farmers' access to their ancestral farming. According to a Mr. Ajoke, who was displaced following the land lease, the government eviction of his people led to the death of many family and community members. He noted that government compensation did not reach his family because of their inability to produce titles. He lamented that:

> The white farmers and government of Bukola Saraki were irresponsible to the plight of his villagers and farmers. We were not compensated. Only a fraction of the people got a miserable meagre compensation of less than $30 per individual. To people who have lived all their life in the farm with farming as their mainstay, the land deal was a rape and near-genocide against his people. [23]

The claim that Shonga farms holdings will provide employment and lead to rapid agricultural transformation to Mrs Busayo[24] was a farce intended to hoodwink the uninformed. The grains and products of the SFH were mainly not meant for the local Kwarans. Rather they were exported to other African countries, Asia, Europe and the United States. Even the broiler Chicken and banana were made for the foreign multinational entities such as the Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and West African Milk Company (WAMCO) and not necessarily for the locals. She observed that:

> Shonga farms holding was a corruption lander project aimed to launder money through dubious transnational land deals between Nigerian politicians and white farmers. The plan was never for the poor farmers nor their interest really aimed at improving the fortunes of the local kwaran economy. They things they produced from the farms were majorly exported to other countries and not aimed at meeting the food needs of Nigerians. If the government truly cared for the poor farmers, they would have supported them the same way they supported the white farmers…my husband died due to the eviction of the government for the SFH. [25]

[22]Gbenga Akinfenwa and Mansur Aramide, Kwara Shonga Farms where imprints of White Zimbawean Farmers rarely exist. Guardian Newspaper, 07 January, 2024

[23]Oral Interview, Ajoke Daramola, Faigi, Kwara State 65+, farmer, 06/08/2023.
[24]Oral interview, Busayo Omolade, Ilorin, 70+, rtd civil servant, 09/2/ 2024
[25]Oral interview, Busayo Omolade, Ilorin, 70+, rtd civil servant, 09/2/ 2024

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Also, Mr Jegede in Edu council area of Kwara State where SFH is located lamented that life has never remained the same since their displacement from their ancestral land. To Jegede, the whole process was a scam and sham aimed at destroying and decimating the poor.[26] They just wanted to take our land by force and to ensure we did not exist anymore in our land. They government compensation was ridiculous and shameful. The so called compensation did not reach upto one-third of the people who were affected. Jegede in an oral interview observed that:

> Economic trees such as palm trees, kolanuts trees and arable land where we farmed were suddenly taken away from us with sufficient support or alternative means of livelihood. The aged, women and children were the most affected because they could migrate to other cities like the youth. I know of many household members who died in the process due to the shock of displacement. My family had many palm trees in the land that was surrendered to the white farmers. The cost of losing the economic trees were huge and the compensations were too meagre. [27]

Although the government and SFH often lay claims to the economic empowerment programmes and benefits that accrued to the people through employment, the fact was that not all those whose land were expropriated found gainful employment at Shonga farms. Most of the employment were casual staff without formalized employment benefits. Although the white farmers made massive profits through daily supplies of 2500 litres of raw milk to the West Africa Milk Company (WAMCO) and over 5000 birds to Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in Lagos, the local workers were not often, properly remunerated[28]. The ugly, poor treatment and neglect of the displaced locals were rife during the administration of Bukola Saraki whom the villagers accused of giving away their land to foreigners with little or nothing to as compensation. In fact, there are reports within the area that crops and animal products from the SFH were outrageously expensive and out of reach of the locals. This scenario cast doubt on the promise of the government that SFH was the panacea to rural food insecurity and agricultural modernization.

Titi, a rural petty trader and erstwhile farmer observed that what were produced at SFH were exclusively for the rich.[29] The prices were cheaper at local markets compared to what SFH were offering. The local poor farmers could not afford their products. They were producing for the international market and big supermarkets in Nigeria such as Chicken Republic, KFC and others. Akinfenwa and Aramide noted that:

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[26]Oral interview, Jegede Ekundayo, Edu, Kwara, 60+, farmer, 08/06/2023
[27] Oral interview, Jegede Ekundayo, Edu, Kwara, 60+, farmer, 08/06/2023

[28]Gbenga Akinfenwa and Mansur Aramide, Kwara Shonga Farms where imprints of White Zimbawean Farmers rarely exist. Guardian Newspaper, 07 January, 2024

[29] Oral interview, Titi Amode, Faigi, Kwara, 68yrs, farmer and petty trader. 4/08/2023

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> 'it was generally expected that on takeoff, the agricultural produce would be sold at lower prices and would ease the economic burden and consequently ensure food on the table, but contrary to their expectations, the produce including diaries, crops and livestock were sold at competitive prices…it was a surprise that most produce were taken out of the state to as far as neigbouring countries like Cameroon and chad where ready buyers were eager to grab them'[30]

According to Adejumo, what happened in Kwara State was a carefully planned land grab that annihilated and alienated the locals from their ancestral land and roots.[31]The over 4000 households that were affected when the project started in the early 2000s were forced out Edu and Faigi communities in order to pave way for the white farmers. The government did not consider the social, cultural and economic values of land to the communities rather efforts were geared toward meeting the interests of the foreigners. Adejumo affirmed the views of Titi who noted that people died as a result of displacement and sheered neglect from the state which should have ordinarily protected the interests of the locals. The local chiefs and the village head of the affected communities, variously described how the Shonga land deal intensified powerlessness and poverty in this region of central Nigeria. The most critical issue was landlessness and economic alienation arising from displacement. This scenario negatively affected the livelihood of the locals. One of the Chiefs specifically observed that:

> Our people have for ages been used to farming in this land. It was from the resources, farm produce and land itself that the people depended on for survival. Before our land was taken over and given to these white farmers, our people use to farm rice, yam, beans, maize, millets, engaged in hunting, and buried their loved ones on this land. But with the forceful lease, the land ceased to be ours. Using the Land use Act of 1978, all lands in Nigeria belonged to government and that was how we became landless and poor humans. Families and households withdraw their children from schools because of lack of money. [32]

Odoemene argues that the Shonga land grab did not factor in the welfare and economic livelihood security of the people who had for several centuries lived and utilized the resources of Shonga and Faigi communities.[33] He surmised that the meagre compensation offered was not sufficient for the survival of those displaced. Odemene (2015:26) concluded that only a paltry:$58,000 USD was paid as compensation to 1,990 out of the 2,771 local people who were affected

[30]Gbenga Akinfenwa and Mansur Aramide, Kwara Shonga Farms where imprints of White Zimbawean Farmers rarely exist. Guardian Newspaper, 07 January, 2024. P.4
[31]Oral interview, Adejumowo Dare, Kawara, famer, Faigi, 18/02/2024
[32]Oral interview with village head in affected community in Kwara.
[33]Odoemene, Akachi. Socio-political economy and dynamics of government driven land grabbing in Nigeria since 2000. Working paper 2015/103, Global Economic Governance, University of Oxford. 2015 p14

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by the land appropriation. The remainder of about 781 affected people did not receive compensation because, according to officials in the State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, "their claims were questionable'.[34] From this kind of unfair compensations, those displaced and those that were denied for 'questionable reasons' were plunged in social, economic and environmental poverty occasioned by lack of access to their hitherto ancestral land.

Generally, land grabbing as an aspect of transnational land deals in central Nigeria has failed to deliver the real tangential benefits of rural transformation and economic empowerment. This is because of the lack of transparency and environmental and economic impact assessment of such deals on livelihood security of host communities. From the experience of most land grabs in Nigeria including central villages, there have been massive intensification and consolidation of rural poverty with dire consequences for women and children and farming population. In fact, the pattern and incidence of rural poverty orchestrated by the pursuit of biofuel production as a climate change mitigation strategy has had cataclysmic consequences on the household economic and family livelihood security because as farming families are been driven out of their fertile arable land to often unknown destinations, their purchasing power parity and economic capacity are weaken if not decimated.

Similarly, in Kogi State, there are two obvious cases of land grabbing in Odogwu and Itobe areas of Igala land in the eastern senatorial district. The dubious land deals here involved two leading American Multinationals Global Green Group (GGP) and Trans oil Corporation. They acquired a total of 310450 hectares of arable land in Dekina and Ibaji Local Government Areas of Kogi State. While the Global Green Group got 450 hectares at Itobe community for biofuel production, the Trans Oil Corporation got a staggering 310000 hectares in Odogwu area of Ibaji for the same purpose. [35]. Despite the high preponderance of hunger and poverty in these two villages, the central focus of both companies were specifically for ethanol production. It is instructive to note that the process of land acquisition were shrouded in secrecy and lack of effective consultations with the villagers. The government did not seek the express consent of all the locals rather, the state government in collaboration with their external agents relied on the land use Act of 1979 to expropriate and acquire the vast arable land from the communities.[36]

Immediately then Kogi State government announced this agrofuel investment deal, large tractors and security personnel were mobilized to these communities. This was important in order to guarantee the transnational investors of adequate security and government support and protection of their

[34]Odoemene, Akachi. Socio-political economy and dynamics of government driven land grabbing in Nigeria since 2000. Working paper 2015/103, Global Economic Governance, University of Oxford. 2015, P.15

[35]Oral interview, Monday Omogu, Ibaji, 65. Rtd primary sch teacher and farmer, 18/02/2023

[36]Shima, M.A. State, Peasants and land in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis of the Socio-Political Implications of the Land Use Act (1978) Benue Valley Journal of Humanities, 6(2), 2005

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investment[37]. This land deal emasculated the locals whose social economic and cultural and spiritual wellbeing resonates sharply with land. For instance, a rural farmer in Odogu area, Mr. Monday observed that immediately 'government signed the deal, farmers were asked to stop moving into the marked zone because the new investors had takeover the land'. The number of people (farmers) who were evicted from their ancestral land and major source of livelihood are estimated to be in the region of about 3000.

The effects of this on the socio-economic status of the rural dwellers are negatively enormous. First, this culminated to the dispossession and displacements of farming communities whose major means of livelihood depend on land. It is imperative to note that Ibaji people are the major producers of yam and rice in the entire Igala land. Furthermore, the promise made by government agents and representatives of the grabbers (Multination) that adequate compensations and employment opportunities will be provided particularly to the host communities remain largely a mirage. This land deal had immense repercussions on rural farmers including. Monday observed that:

> The land that were allocated for the project in Ibaji was were the villagers and migrant Igbo farmers usually farmed. The government did not have any resettlement plan nor was compensation…their focus to meet the needs of the foreign investors without considering the daily livelihood of the men and women farmers who had no any other means of survival apart from farming and fishing.[38]

Apart from the impact of land grabs on the economy of the locals, land in Igala society as common with most central Nigerian communities also serves socio-cultural roles. Land provides a site for the preservation of family and community shrines and deities. In this region, there are sacred forests venerated by the locals. However, excessive land grabs in this region have led to the destruction of many sacred grooves. In Itobe and Gassol areas of Kogi and Taraba state, this kind of scenario played out following the acquisition of large tracts of land by American biofuel giants known as Trans Global Corporation. The destruction of such sacred grooves denies the worshippers Traditional African Religion rights to freedom of worship. In other words, such attempt orchestrated by land grabs is tantamount to desecration of their place of worship, an act of injustice and disregard for democratic space. As Humphery noted, the land that the government signed away housed many village shrines which the people venerated.[39] But this was not considered. When you take away community sacred grooves, where else will the people have to venerate?

This unsavory scenario in central Nigeria has equally engendered starvation and hunger in rural communities. Odoemene poignantly observes that: "The most palpable consequences of land grabbing in rural agrarian societies is

[37]Oral interview, Omale Sule, Dekina, 68, farmer, 17/06/2023

[38]Oral interview, Monday Omogu, Ibaji, 65. Rtd primary sch teacher and farmer, 20/03/2024

[39] Oral interview, Humphry Odogwu, Ayah, Ibaji, 51yrs, PhD student and farmer, 28/03/2024.

starvation. By possession of vast plots of territories, investors deprive millions of African people of terrains on which they rely for their very survival…Deceived by defective contracts, poorly compensated or physical removed from their original grounds, African peasant migrate towards more arid and marginal areas where livelihood is at best tougher if not impossible'[40]
Apart from these aforementioned issues, the Nigerian state through the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has been involved in massive land grabbing exercise in central Nigeria since the dawn of the new millennium. Large tracts of community lands have been confiscated and turn into biofuel farms. The most devastating aspect of this is that the rural poor who are often displaced are rarely compensated. Apart from this, the Federal Government of Nigeria has been promoting ethanol production through the use of staple foods like Maize, Cassava, Sugar cane and Palm oil. This is happening at a time that the Nigerian state is unable to provide food for her citizens. In fact, it is mind boggling that a country like Nigeria, lamentably food insecure and without requisite biofuel technology skills is advancing the course of biofuel production at the expense of staple food production. More paradoxical is the fact the fact that Nigeria has not been able to utilize, judiciously revenues accruable from oil exploration over the years.

In many central Nigerian communities like Buruku and Agasha in Guma and Buruku Local Government of Benue State, several thousands of hectares of Land had been acquired by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) for ethanol production. Although Benue State is the acclaimed Food Basket of Nigeria, empirical research studies have shown that there is immense rural poverty and hunger in Benue State. In fact, some scholars have argued that the shrinking of rural land space orchestrated by land grabs by both the state and private actors is responsible for the proliferation of hunger and conflicts in central Nigeria in recent times. Tsokwa in an oral interview observed that:

> The political elite do not care about the food needs of the real rural dwellers. They are more interested in making profits and more money through dubious large scale land acquisition that favours the production of sugarcane for biofuel and crops for animal feeds and exports. The politicians do not feel hungry because they have more than enough and through land grabs they acquire and corner community lands to themselves and foreign cronies. This is happening because of the absence of strong governance institutions or weak laws.[41]

Similarly, Adelaja corroborated Tsokwa's position when he recounted how the experiences of villages in Edu area of Kwara threw him and others into near-abject poverty and psychological trauma arising from forceful eviction.

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[40]Odoemene, A., White Zimbabwe Farmers in Nigeria: Issues in "New Nigeria" Land Deals and the Implications for Food and Human Security, African Identities, 10(1), 2012. P.8

[41]Oral interview with Tsokwa Maggai, Lecturer, Makurdi, 50yrs, 15/02/2024

> people suddenly became confused as they could not understand how and why their ancestral land that had for generations been the source of livelihood of the people were grabbed…initially, people resisted through spontaneous protests and demonstrations but the government deployed police and other security agents to the zone. This situation economically incapacitated many household who were suddenly thrown into confusion and lack.[42]

In fact, there exist copious evidence in extant literature on how land grab and other associated large scale agricultural land investment are worsening rural food insecurity, powerlessness and poverty. This phenomenon suffused with climate change and farmer-herder conflict are the triple forces animating ecological aggression and conflict in central Nigeria. The table 1 shows the proportion of land grabs across central Nigeria states and communities.

Table 1: The Hectares and Locations of Land Grabbed by NNPC in Some Parts of Central Nigeria:

Project	**Cost (in million)**	**Hectares**	**Location**	**Estimated Number of People Displaced**
Automotive Biofuel Project	US $306	20,000	Agasha, Guma, LGA, Benue State	11,000
Automotive Biofuel Project	US$ 306	20,000	Buruku, LGA, Benue State	13,000
Kwali Ethanol Project	US$80-100	26374	Kwali, FCT	10-11000
CSECC Ethanol Project	US$12	450	Itobe, Kogi State	5000
ITOC	US$150	31000	Ibaji LGA	11800

Source: Adapted from Attah (2015:7) and Modified by the Authors

Also, in Kwara state of North central Nigeria, climate change mitigation strategy pursued through biofuel or greener energy had led to land grabbing and consolidation of rural poverty and injustice in different communities. Apart from the White Zimbabwean farmers who in collusion with few elites acquired massive tracts of land, agro-fuel development is silently on the increase in Kwara[43]. For instance, available report in 2011 show that in Fallah, Sha and Duru/Laslwa communities of Moro Local Government Area, a total of 20369

[42]Oral interview, Adelaja Makinde, Kwara, Civil servant, 52yrs, 08/02/2023
[43]Ariyo, Joseph A. and Mortimore, Michael. 2011. "Land Deals and Commercial Agriculture in Nigeria: The New Nigerian Farms in Shonga District, Kwara State," paper presented at the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing; Future Agricultures Consortium, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 6–8 April.

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hectares of arable land were acquired by three biotech giants, namely; Coga, Future Energy and Enviro-friendly Energy companies. These biotech companies are to engage in the establishment of Jatropha and Sugar Cane plantations and also maize and cassava farms on a large scale for biofuels.[44] Similarly, in Okuta area of Buruten Local Government Area of Kwara State, a biotech company-Casplex Limited acquired 15000 hectares of arable land for cassava cultivation primarily for ethanol production. Although the project was intended for rural development through employment creation and social transformation, majority of the villagers were not employed as they lacked the requisite skills and educational qualifications for most of the well-paid jobs in Casplex.[45] As a result of the dispossession of Okuta farming populace, many migrated to the cities and others to more arid and tougher places where lives were very difficult. Women farmers and the aged suffered the most[46].

Conclusion

It has been acknowledged in many policy briefs and academic papers that African countries stand short-changed in the entire gamut of climate change financing, mitigation and adaptation strategies.In fact, it has also been established that "the extent to which the climate change agreement will be implemented at both global and local levels in a manner that respects ´the principles of justice, fairness and equity remains unclear and problematic. This paper has argued, from the political economy perspectives that the advancement of agro-fuels as a panacea to climate change mitigation is a threat to rural development as it has led to land grabbing in central Nigeria. Multinational biotech companies from the global North with support from their home governments have been angling and dispossessing rural communities in central Nigeria of their major source of livelihood. Due to the crisis of governance and the failure of the state to perform its basic social provisioning role, most state governors unable to initiate or develop agriculture have colluded with multinational agri-business and biotech companies to exploit the poor rural dwellers. The driving force behind land grabbing in central Nigeria this study surmises is profit and mainly to satisfy the interest of the global western countries. This is a continuation of the 19th century North-South unequal and exploitative relations, and efforts must be intensified to curtail this phenomenon. Furthermore, the intersections of climate change and land grabbing have engendered poverty, injustice, inequalities, corruption, among others.

[44]Attah, N.E. Nigerian Agro-fuels Policy and Land Grab: "Monkey see Monkey Do" Paper Presented
at CODESRIA General Assembly Meeting, June, 08-12, 2015. accessed online at www.codesria.og,

[45]Ariyo, Joseph A. and Mortimore, Michael. 2011. "Land Deals and Commercial Agriculture in Nigeria: The New Nigerian Farms in Shonga District, Kwara State," paper presented at the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing; Future Agricultures Consortium, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 6–8 April.
[46]Oral interview, Jegede Ekundayo, Edu, Kwara, 60+, farmer, 2023

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