



FIAN Position Paper

Food First!

FIAN Position and Strategy Paper on Agrofuels

October 2008



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FIAN International
Willy-Brandt-Platz 5
69115 Heidelberg
Germany

Published by FIAN International, Germany

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The solutions to global warming and the current energy crisis cannot be reached at the cost of the hungry and poorest people of the world. And strategies to find alternative energy sources must fully comply with international human rights standards. Otherwise the cure risks being worse than the disease. For many years, over 850 million human beings have been suffering from hunger. For them the food crisis is nothing new. The current aggressive expansion of agrofuel production threatens the right to adequate food of the most oppressed groups worldwide, whose number has increased dramatically in recent times. FIAN expresses its grave concerns about the expansion of agrofuel production for a multitude of reasons:

I. Violations of the Right to Food through Industrial Agrofuel Production

1. Loss of food autonomy

A core element of the right to adequate food is the direct availability of food from productive land or other natural resources, relating to the capacity of people to feed themselves by having secure control over land, water and other resources necessary for food production. Forced evictions and lack of access to land and productive resources already constitute major patterns of violations of the Right to Food worldwide today. According to the Hunger Task Force of the Millennium Project about half of the people suffering from hunger in the world live in smallholder farming households, while roughly two-tenths are landless. A smaller group, perhaps one-tenth, are pastoralists, fisherfolk, and forest users. The remainder, around two-tenths, live in urban areas. Increased pressure on land and water triggered off by the promotion and aggressive expansion of energy crop monocultures is leading to further dispossession of natural resources controlled by marginalized rural groups affecting particularly indigenous peoples rights to land and territory. Several appeals from threatened or affected groups have reached FIAN during the last months. Furthermore the renewed interest in land by powerful economic actors has led to increasing land prices and contradicts the implementation of agrarian reform policies urgently needed to comply with States' obligations to realize the right to food, further compromising social groups', such as landless peoples', access to the means for their subsistence. These factors fuel the already existing erosion of food autonomy of rural people.

2. Increase in exploitation of natural resources

There is a wealth of documentation showing that deforestation due to energy plant monocultures (e.g. oil palm plantations and soya monocultures) is exacerbating climate change. Deforestation accounts for no less than one fifth of the total global CO₂ emissions. Furthermore, monocultures depend on intensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides resulting in the contamination of soils, rivers, subterranean and spring waters. Monocultures are also thirsty depleting reserves of fresh water -- an already scarce resource. Increased competition for fresh water increases unsustainable use, more often than not at the expense of marginalized people. In order to secure long-term and stable food security as part of state obligations under the right to food, the sustainability of food supply and access has to be guaranteed. This implies the sustainable use of natural resources including biodiversity, water and land, necessary for food production. Monocultures are neither the solution to the climate crisis nor to the food crisis. Rather, they aggravate the two.

3. Higher burden for rural women

Whenever there is strong pressure to shift from food crop to cash crop cultivation there is a high risk that men will seize women's access to land, water and other food producing resources. Agrofuel production can thus exacerbate inequality in access to land between men and women. This risk is particularly high in so called marginal and/or communal lands in Asia, Africa and Latin America where jatropha, in particular, is being strongly promoted. The loss of biodiversity due to industrial agrofuel production affects poor rural women disproportionately, undermining their traditional knowledge and skills related to the use of wild plants for food, fodder and medicine. The depletion of natural resources, particularly water, can lead to violations of women's right to food because their task of providing water is made harder due to the production of agrofuels.

4. Precarious working conditions

Serious violations related to workers' rights on sugar-cane and oil palm plantations have been documented in several countries, ranging from over-exploitation to the prohibition of trade unions, forced labour and child labour. Working conditions – particularly in the sugarcane sector – are often degrading and dehumanizing and are thus not compatible with international human rights law. In countries like Brazil or Colombia, sugar-cane cutters are submitted to extremely bad conditions of lodging and food. Moreover, the current sugar-cane cutting conditions compromise the physical integrity of the workers, causing serious occupational diseases, malnutrition, and in some cases even lead to the death of workers.

II: Indirect Impacts on the Right to Food through Industrial Agrofuel Production

1. Agrofuel and the “Global Food Crisis”

There are further threats to the right to adequate food arising from agrofuel production. Economic access to food is deteriorating. The recent diversion of food crops for agrofuel production, has played an important role in the recent price increase for some staple food crops like wheat, maize, rice and vegetable oils. People living in poverty spend up to 50-80% of their household budget on food. The sudden rise in food prices registered recently put in peril the access to food of the poorest groups of the population. According to the most recent estimate by the FAO the number of malnourished people worldwide has risen from 848 to 923 million. The FAO expects a further strong increase in 2008 as a result of the explosion in prices. On the other hand, international food aid has faced difficulties in delivering food, whether purchased locally or from food surpluses of exporting countries. Both possibilities are becoming harder to access.

2. Industrial Agrofuel Production is a Risk for Small Scale Farmers

Farmers in the North and the South, including small-scale farmers, are already engaged in cultivating crops for agrofuel production. Some of them regard the current policies of agrofuel promotion and the high agricultural prices as a promising development that could revitalize rural areas and improve the deteriorated income of farmers. In fact, during the last decades, small producers have been demanding better prices for their products. Despite this, policies and programmes aimed at integrating small-scale farmers into agrofuel production are extremely limited and ambivalent. Most of these programmes are designed in a way that make small producers highly dependent on the large agricultural companies which control the prices, the processing and the distribution of the production. Small farmers are generally unable to benefit from high agricultural prices as these gains are monopolized by those who control the commercialization processes. In many cases, small producers risk losing their lands if they are not competitive enough to remain in business.

III. No Violation of the Right to Food in the Name of Development

In general, FIAN welcomes the efforts to decrease dependency on fossil fuels, to find alternative and environmentally friendly energy sources and to re-think current consumption patterns.. This is particularly important for countries in the South in order to strengthen self-determined development. Moreover, unmitigated climate change will have drastic consequences for the global food supply. Nevertheless, we must remember that our societies have often in the past, justified dispossession, over-exploitation and suffering of the most marginalized in the name of "development. The expansion of agrofuel is currently following a similar pattern but this time in the name of developing alternative energy sources and finding answers to the climate crisis. FIAN demands that changes in current energy consumption patterns and the development of alternative energy policies be carried out in full compliance with human rights. This change must also start where the main responsibilities for global warming lies: in the unsustainable economic system of the so-called developed countries.

IV. The Real Fight against Hunger and Climate Change

Agrofuels will not solve the problem of hunger in the world. On the contrary, they threaten to make a situation that is already very critical even worse. States and the international community have committed themselves and given high priority to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals including goal number one, to halve the share of people suffering from hunger worldwide. Unluckily, the concrete steps that have been taken to achieving this goal are glaringly insufficient.

To achieve these goals, the states and the international community must dedicate the maximum of their available resources to policies and programs that fight hunger, before embarking upon a policy of the promotion of agrofuel, which has all the potential to worsen the food crisis. Within strategies aimed at eradicating hunger the provisions of human rights instruments, such as the right to food, and policy proposals, such as food sovereignty must be emphasized.

- The international trade system must be adjusted to the needs of the poorest and to social and environmental sustainability standards, not to the needs of the "fittest".
- Full human rights accountability must be accepted by all international organisations including the WB, IMF and the WTO, as well by private transnational corporations.
- The promotion of food production by small-scale producers for local and national consumption must be made a priority.
- Agrarian reform policies must be strengthened , with particular consideration for rural marginalized groups. These groups should also be guaranteed access to and control over land and other productive resources.
- Another priority are policies of agro-ecological production which assure sustainable use of the natural resources for food production and which revalue traditional and indigenous knowledge of production and nutritional culture. Policies and programs that encourage the use of biomass in a decentralizing way and local production of energy could be compatible with human rights and the vision of food sovereignty.
- Effective steps against global warming are necessary, but they must be designed and implemented with the interest of the poorest states and human beings, those who will be the most affected by the climate crisis, in focus.

V. How FIAN will engage

The former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Mr Jean Ziegler, justified a five-year moratorium on agrofuel production using current methods for two reasons: to put in place

regulatory structures to protect against negative impacts on environmental, social and human rights; and to allow time for new technologies to be devised.

FIAN supports such a moratorium since it is an urgent and strong appeal to take seriously a precautionary principle for safeguarding human rights. There is sufficient evidence that the sudden, ill-conceived, rush to convert food — such as maize, wheat, sugar and oil palm — into fuels represents a serious threat to the lives and livelihoods of the poorest and most marginalized sectors of our societies. This, in turn, is exacerbating hunger and poverty in the world. Agrofuels are certainly not the only factor responsible for the current development but it is indisputable that they are an important one. Moreover, the impacts of agrofuel production and expansion have not been properly assessed and there are either no, or extremely weak, regulatory structures in place to protect vulnerable social groups from negative effects. On the other hand, decision-making processes related to agrofuel have not included the social groups that will be most affected by them: the rural and the urban poor.

FIAN will go on documenting cases of violations of the human right to food and connected rights due to agrofuel production, focusing particularly on violations related to loss of access to food and water, loss of food autonomy, gender discrimination, depletion of natural resources, and precarious working conditions. Based on concrete cases, FIAN will engage in advocacy work and public protest for overcoming these violations.

FIAN will cooperate closely with small farmers and workers organisations as well as development agencies and human rights organisations, which are effected by agrofuel production and/or do monitoring on the issue. Our aim is to foster broad networks to develop effective strategies against violations of the right to food and other human rights by agrofuel projects.

FIAN will contribute to developing and strengthening state regulatory mechanisms addressing the agroenergy sector taking into account international human rights law. The State Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Community of States have legally binding obligations to realize the right to adequate food and other human rights. The enforceability of the right to food vis-à-vis the interests of powerful economic actors (agribusiness, oil TNC and car manufacturing companies), who are investing in agrofuel production, is a major challenge to be tackled.

FIAN will not engage in promoting private certification schemes of sustainable agrofuel production. FIAN considers that there is no reason to demand sustainable production from liquid agrofuel for transport only. Human rights standards have to apply to all agricultural production no matter their final use. Human rights monitoring and implementation has to be an obligatory public affair, not based on private voluntary schemes. Given the huge size of the sector, it is not possible for these kinds of narrowly focused initiatives to be able to set up a meaningful and coherent framework for monitoring and enforcement of human rights in the whole sector. Only the regulatory and enforcing power of states has real chances to fulfil this task.

Heidelberg, October 2008