

Report: Land projects promise much, leave locals hungry

By [Nellie Peyton](#)

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Big foreign companies growing crops in Africa often promise jobs and development to local communities then leave them in even greater poverty when their projects falter, a campaign group said on Wednesday.



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Overseas firms often lease vast plots of land in Africa for industrial agriculture or biofuel production, promising work, among other benefits, to those they uproot, said Swedwatch. But the firms often run into money trouble, change hands or abandon ship, leaving locals to deal with the loss of livelihood and environmental damages, said the group, which monitors the environmental and human rights impacts of Swedish companies.

"The negative human rights impacts tend to increase when land projects fail or stall," Swedwatch researcher Malena Wahlin told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "It's a general trend."

Farming communities left without jobs, land, food

Thousands of people were left without jobs or food in one case examined by Swedwatch, when the biggest agricultural project in Sierra Leone stalled for a year and a half.

About 50 farming communities in the poor West African nation were dependent on jobs and food aid from Addax

Bioenergy, a renewable energy company, after it transformed their land into sugarcane plantations for ethanol, Swedwatch said in a report. But the project floundered in 2015 and its Swedish and Dutch investors, Swedfund and FMO, exited, leaving the locals without jobs, land or food aid, Swedwatch said.

Local people said food insecurity worsened and they were forced to pull their children out of school, said Wahlin. "Our human rights efforts could have been stronger in some areas, and we are addressing that in our strategy going forward," Swedfund's chief executive officer, Gerth Svensson, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an email.

FMO could not immediately be reached for comment. Operations resumed under a new owner in 2016, Swedwatch said. Swedwatch has called for Swedfund and FMO to go back to Sierra Leone to assess and repair the damage, it said.

Wahlin said that a number of other large-scale projects stalled around the same time in Sierra Leone and Liberia, partly due to the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak in the region.

There have been similar cases in East Africa, she added.

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