

A pocket guide

act:onaid

The truth about biofuels

Rosa Xol Pá lives in Northern Guatemala where she has a small plot of land. Much of her community's land has already been bought up to make way for palm plantations and she fears for their future.

PHOTO: GREG FUNNELL/ACTIONAID





Campaigners in the heart of Brussels calling for the EU to stop supporting biofuels.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID



Introduction

A few years ago, reports began to emerge from communities we work with in poor countries about a new threat to their way of life and livelihoods: **biofuels**.

Already reeling from food price rises and the global economic crisis, families and communities were increasingly having their land grabbed by companies growing crops to export to rich countries as fuel.

Since then, corporate demand for biofuels has gained momentum and so has the global land grab, **leaving many communities landless and hungry**. The pace and scale is shocking – already more than 180,000km² of land have been grabbed for biofuels in Africa alone.

This biofuel boom is driven by the policies of rich governments. Largely motivated by the desire to fight climate change, many governments (including our own) have set massive biofuel targets. But evidence now shows that biofuels release more greenhouse gases than the fossil fuels they were designed to replace.

This means that biofuel targets are actually making climate change worse.



ActionAid campaigners, handing in thousands of messages from supporters calling on the UK government to end its support for biofuels.

PHOTO: AMY SCAIFE/ACTIONAID

We're campaigning with people around the world to make sure we stop the rush for this destructive fuel, and support real solutions to tackling climate change.

Join the campaign at actionaid.org.uk/biofuels

What are biofuels?

Biofuels are made from crops (such as wheat, maize, palm oil and sugar cane) or waste – for example used cooking oil. In the UK they are mixed with petrol and diesel to fuel our cars. More than 3% of UK petrol and diesel already comes from biofuel.

So what's the problem?

Industrial biofuels, grown in massive plantations and produced on a large scale, are pushing up global food prices and causing land grabbing in poor countries.

Land grabbing

Governments are setting huge targets for the amount of biofuel that has to be in our petrol and

diesel. These targets guarantee a market for biofuels, which gives companies the incentive to find land on which to grow their biofuel crops. As a result 370,000km² of land has already been grabbed around the world.

In developing countries land rights of communities are often not legally protected. Local people can farm a piece of land for generations but have no

Demand for industrial biofuels was a key cause of the spike in food prices in 2008, which pushed an estimated 100 million more people into poverty.



PHOTO: TOM PIETRASIK/ACTIONAID

title deeds to prove it belongs to them. This means it is all too easy for farmers to be ousted from their land. This land grab is leaving farmers in the developing world stranded, unable to grow their own food or afford food in their local market.

Food price rises

The rising demand for crops for fuel has put them in direct competition with food crops over land and water. **With food staples increasingly burned in our cars instead of used to feed hungry people, the price of food is being pushed up.**

EU biofuel demand will push up world agricultural commodity prices by as much as 36% by 2020, according to a study commissioned by ActionAid in

2012. For poor families in the developing world who have to spend up to 80% of their income on food, even a small rise in the price of staple foods is catastrophic.

If global biofuel targets (including the UK's) are met then hundreds of millions more people could be forced into hunger by 2020.

Climate change

Industrial biofuels are promoted as an innovative, environmentally cleaner alternative to the 'dirty' fossil fuels we're dependent on. But far from tackling climate change the greenhouse gases created by growing, processing, and transporting biofuels can exceed emissions from fossil fuels. This means that this

supposedly 'green fuel' is doing far more environmental harm than good.

This is largely due to the 'land use change' needed to make way for the vast biofuel plantations popping up all over the developing world. When carbon-rich habitats such as forests or peat lands are cleared to make way for biofuels, huge amounts of greenhouse gases are released.

It is the world's poorest people who bear the brunt of these policies as the impact of climate change hits developing countries first, and hardest.

What are the alternatives for dealing with climate change?

Industrial biofuels are diverting much-needed political attention and financial support away from genuine ways of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

As well as the obvious investment in public transport and reducing transport demand, there are many options available to the government that would not require dramatic changes to people's lifestyles.

These include:

- doubling the fuel efficiency of new cars – the biggest single action the EU could take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport. This could save 95 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year by 2020 across the EU.
- supporting the use of electric or hybrid cars if the electricity comes from renewable sources.

Land grab in Kisarawe, Tanzania

Halima Ali (pictured right) and her community in Kisarawe, Tanzania, lost their land to a UK company, Sun Biofuels. **The company came to Kisarawe**



Halima Ali with her son Hamsa, and daughter Mariam.

PHOTO: TOM PIETRASIK/ACTIONAID

in 2006 and established an 8,000 hectare plantation – the equivalent of almost 11,000 full-sized football pitches – growing a biofuel crop called jatropha.

In return for the land, Sun Biofuels promised full and fair compensation and a whole range of social services including wells, schools and clinics. However, at the time of going to print, none of these promises have been kept. The impact of the land grab

on the community has been devastating. Many parents can no longer afford to feed their children three meals per day or pay school fees. The plantation has taken over land where community wells are, so women and girls now have to walk for up to four hours a day to collect water.

Halima's community is campaigning to reclaim their rights. They have created a local taskforce which meets regularly with government officials and Sun Biofuel representatives in Kisarawe. In the UK, we've been lobbying the London-based owner of the company to find a solution to the situation.

Unfortunately what has happened to Halima and her community is far from unique –

370,000km² of land has already been grabbed for biofuels globally. ActionAid is working in countries all around the world from Brazil to Tanzania to stop the global land grab. But this shocking figure is set to grow, unless the campaign against biofuels succeeds.

“**There is no clean water, there are no roads, there is no clinic, so all the promises were fake, the promises are air.**”

Halima Ali,
Mhaga village, Tanzania.

A photograph of a man, Athumani Mkambala, sitting next to a campaign poster. The poster is made of white fabric with green borders and blue text. The man is wearing a yellow patterned shirt and a red cloth around his waist. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a simple wooden structure.

WHO CAN CRY
WITH US?
FALSE PROMISES LIKE
CLEAN WATER, DISPENSAR
ETC. SINCE 2006.

Athumani Mkambala, beside a campaign poster at a meeting to discuss action against Sun Biofuels' land grab in Kisarawe, Tanzania.

PHOTO: TOM PIETRASIK/ACTIONAID

Biofuel myth buster

Biofuels have been called many things, including an alternative to fossil fuels. It's time we busted some of the biggest biofuel myths.

Don't biofuels have great potential to generate jobs and income?

In theory biofuels can bring development to poor countries by providing jobs.

In reality plantations generally offer little in terms of job creation, compared to the situation before the plantation arrived. For example, **one biofuel project in Madagascar created just 0.006 jobs per hectare, compared to before the**

plantation was established when a hectare supported 1.25 farm households.

I thought algae was a biofuel?

There are a few different biofuels, commonly referred to as first, second and third generation.

First generation industrial biofuels use conventional technology and compete for land with food crops. They also include used cooking oil, but this is impossible to generate on a large scale.

Second generation biofuels are made using new technological processes and often non-food crops. These include biofuels from forestry and agricultural by-products, such as stalks from wheat and maize, or wood waste.

Third generation biofuels include those made from algae. However, they are still being researched and are nowhere near commercially ready to be produced, let alone to meet our huge energy needs.



Land rights campaigners

taking action in Kenya.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Currently all biofuels in commercial use around the world are first generation. This is unlikely to change in the near future, as second generation biofuels are not expected to be commercially viable until 2020, and third generation are unlikely to be viable for many years to come.

What's the solution?

What do we want politicians to do?

Plain and simple, we are urging politicians to end their support for biofuels – that means getting rid of national government targets that are driving the expansion of the biofuel industry.

In the UK, we are calling on the Department for Transport to

More than 3% of UK petrol and diesel already comes from biofuel. There is a real danger this could increase to as much as 10% by 2020.

scrap the target that dictates how much biofuel must be in all UK petrol and diesel.

But UK targets are driven by targets set at the European Union. In 2009, the European Union passed a law which stated that, by 2020, 10% of all transport fuel in member states must come from renewable sources. Unfortunately, this has become a *de facto* biofuel target as we have seen in the UK.

The UK government and European Union must not ignore the evidence and force us into using another unsustainable fuel source that is wreaking havoc in developing countries.



Rosa Xol Pá, has taken a stand by refusing to sell her land.

PHOTO: GREG FUNNELL/ACTIONAID

“

This land is ours, not just for our children but for all the children of the people here.

Rosa Xol Pá,
Limon, Guatemala.

”

Rosa Xol Pá, stands overlooking her land in Limon, Guatemala, which is surrounded by palm plantations, a crop used for biofuel.

PHOTO: GREG FUNNELL/ACTIONAID

What should companies do?

Biofuel companies must operate in a socially ethical and environmentally sustainable manner. This means that companies must:

- stop grabbing land
- keep all promises made to communities
- ensure they do not displace food production in order to grow biofuels.



“
My family has lived in the area for about 200 years. My father, grandfather and ancestors are all buried here.
”

Henzanani Merakini,
Kenya.

Henzanani Merakini,
who campaigned against a biofuels
plantation taking her land – and won.

PHOTO: CHRIS COXON/ACTIONAID

What action are communities taking globally?

Communities around the world have been taking action to reclaim their land.

The Dakatcha woodlands area of Kenya, which spans 50,000 hectares and is home to 20,000 people, was under threat of being taken by a European biofuels company.

At the time community member Henzanani Merakini told us, “My family has lived in the area for about 200 years. My father, grandfather and ancestors are all buried here. We are so poor that we cannot fight a big company like this, so it is my wish that people assist us so we can be left in peace.”

A huge campaign in both Kenya and Europe resulted in the Kenyan government withdrawing its promise to grant the biofuel company a license for the land. **This massive success only happened because people around the world took action together.**

What can we do?

Campaigning together we’ve already made huge strides. But to stop the threat of more land being taken we must tackle the targets set by the European Union and our government.

Ten influential international organisations (including the UN and World Bank) have called for governments to scrap their national targets. And at home ActionAid campaigners succeeded

in persuading the Department for Transport to temporarily freeze its biofuel target.

But the biofuel industry continues to lobby hard. That’s why our campaigning is so important. We must speak out against biofuels alongside communities in poor countries and on behalf of the environment.

We have to keep the pressure up to stop the rush for this destructive fuel.

Take action today at www.actionaid.org.uk/biofuels.

Find out the latest news and take action today!

Visit **www.actionaid.org.uk/biofuels**

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