

Statement Opposing Promotion of Jatropha cultivation

An Open Letter By Anthra, Adivasi Aikya Vedika and Yakshi

Jatropha cultivation spells disaster for farmers in Andhra Pradesh

We (Anthra, Adivasi Aikya Vedika and Yakshi) express deep concern over the policies being adopted by the UK government, which promotes the use and import of biofuels as an alternative to fossil fuels. Their disproportionate use is one of the new driving forces of large-scale and monoculture jatropha plantations expansion that contributes to erosion of food sovereignty rights and land and livelihood rights in producing countries, particularly India.

Companies like Blue NG and W4B (planning for Bristol Biofuel Power Station) are right at the forefront of opening up a whole new market to biofuels in the UK. They are unscrupulous in attempting to benefit from misguided UK government credits, while developing nations like India pay the price in ecological destruction and food scarcity.

Here are some of W4B's claims about jatropha

"The main source will be jatropha which is mildly toxic so it cannot be used in the food chain or as an animal feed. It will grow in relatively poor soil but needs non-drinking water to cultivate."

"They were planning to use jatropha grown on eroded land in Madagascar, Mozambique and India which has not been used to grow crops for many years. I am talking about millions of acres used for growing jatropha and which will provide work and income for local people. Mr. Slack said jatropha would be available from 2012." (both quotes from www.thisisbristol.co.uk/homepage/green-Bristol-s-biofuel-plant-plans/article-1578375-detail/article.html#StartComments)

The above claims are completely false.

While the Government of India had announced in 2005 that biofuel crops such as Jatropha and Pongamia pinnata would be cultivated on wastelands without compromising food production, the truth is very different. Since 2005¹, flagship welfare programs of the Government of India, namely the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGS), that legally provides 100 days of work to poor citizens of India, has been used widely across India to coerce farmers to cultivate Jatropha on their farmlands, which were traditionally used by them to cultivate food crops. Under intense pressure and fear that they would lose access to their wage guaranteed to them under the NREGS, the poorest farmers in India- namely Dalits and Adivasis (Indigenous People) have begun to cultivate Jatropha on their fertile rainfed lands, which were earlier cultivated with multiple rain-fed food crops such as millets, sorghum, pulses and oilseeds. Private companies and agencies are also playing a major role in promoting the Jatropha on farmer's lands, which once supported food crops.

British biofuel companies are misleading the public when they state that these biofuels are being cultivated on lands that are eroded and unfit for anything else.

We also would like to draw attention to the deceptive logic of the companies that irrigating Jatropha with non-drinking water is somehow "fair", because it will not compromise drinking water for the people. The reality is that all water – drinking or non-drinking, is accessed from scarce surface and ground water, and its diversion to irrigate jatropha exhausts the existing total water resources, which is criminal in a context of chronic scarce rainfall, drought and eroding water resources.

¹ The Indian government plans to assist states to promote Jatropha cultivation for increasing bio-diesel production in the country under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the Rajya Sabha was informed on 7 Dec 2005.

In states like Andhra Pradesh, India, the promotion of biofuels is happening under a special *Rain Shadow Development Department*, created in 2007 under the aegis of the Rural Development Department, to focus exclusively on problems afflicting chronically rain deficient areas of the state. *One of the main functions entrusted to this new department was promoting and supervising the use of biofuels.* (<http://rsad.ap.gov.in/>).

All these only serve to highlight the falsehoods surrounding the statements that Jatropha are drought tolerant crops that can survive under rain stressed conditions.

Official admission of the failure of Jatropha

Under the aegis of the National Biodiesel Mission launched in 2003, a demonstration project of biodiesel plantations was launched across India in 2 phases. Phase one of the project executed from 2003 to 2007 involved plantations of 4 lakh hectares of land on forest and non-forest lands. In Andhra Pradesh, 12 districts were proposed for Jatropha plantations under the demonstration phase of the project. Plantations covering a block of 15000 *has* in each district, would be undertaken by "below poverty line" farmers. Under phase 1, the Government of Andhra Pradesh initially proposed to encourage **Jatropha plantation in 2 lakh acres** under drip irrigation under which 1.40 lakhs acres would cater to Jatropha and the remaining under Pongamia. The target of 2 lakhs acres in 2004-05 was later, revised to 40,000 acres in 2004. Rs 5000 crores under various programs such as NREGS, micro-irrigation, CLDP, watershed was allocated for the plantation program with a 90% subsidy. The National Agriculture Bank for Rural Development (NABARD) had set aside Rs 300 crores for promotion of Jatropha in the state. The department identified private entrepreneurs who would be interesting in buying bio-diesel feedstock from farmers and who are supposed to extend technical support to farmers.

In Bhongir division of Nalgonda district, Andhra Pradesh, India, in 2005-06 under the Rain Shadow Area Development Programme, the government through the District Water Management Agency and District Rural Development Agency, distributed 336500 Jatropha plants to 127 beneficiaries, in 31 villages, across 8 Mandals targeting 350 acres of land.

In September 2008 a resurvey of those plantations indicated that there was a mere 50% survival of plants, which were 2-year-old crop. 40% of the beneficiaries were provided drip irrigation. Government officials had promised farmers a return of Rs 10000/ acre, after 3 years and the plants would achieve half of the total potential production. They assured them of "zero" investment and irrigation. They were told that 1 plant would yield 25 kg and they would be paid Rs 10/ kg. All this turned out to be a big lie. With a poor 50% survival, the actual weight of the seeds is much lower than projected. Disease and pest have attacked the plants. A meager 5 kg per plant was being harvested at pittance of Rs 5/ kg of jatropha seeds.

According to the Rain Shadow Area Development Program website, the program shifted focus to pongamia plantations after the failure of Jatropha in the first phase of plantations (<http://rsad.ap.gov.in/>). NREGS funds are being utilized to meet targets of biodiesel plantations. The cost of plantation and maintenance is covered through NREGS funds, and the entrepreneur enters into a buy back agreement with the farmers.

The above case amply illustrates that the official shift to pongamia, is precisely because Jatropha failed to provide poor farmers with work or an income!

Since then, Jatropha plantations have been promoted on farmer's fields primarily through private companies/institutions, and in certain cases with a tie up with the local government. Since 2005, private companies such as Pradhan Green Fuels Private Ltd., Neodine Bio fuels Limited, Roshini Biotech Private Ltd., and many others, lured farmers to cultivate jatropha and pongamia, promising them huge subsidies and quick attractive returns from the sale of jatropha and pongamia seeds.

The tragedy is, the unwillingness to learn from recent history.

In East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh, India the aggressive promotion of jatropha is being done by TERI (The Energy Resource Institute) in partnership with British Petroleum, UK (B P Technology Centre (BPTC).

BPTC has financed the program to the tune of USD 9.4 million². The plantations began in 2008 on the homelands and territories of Indigenous people.

Most saplings have died. Those that have survived are stunted in their growth with no signs of flowering or fruiting due to severe drought and heat conditions. Farmers have been forced to make huge investments in terms of irrigation, ploughing and manuring to get a good yield from *Jatropha* at the cost of their food.

***Jatropha* undermines farmers' livelihoods and food sovereignty in India**

Jatropha cultivation is completely unsustainable and hazardous for the poor farmers as it replaces their food production and makes them dependent on wage labour and forces them to purchase food at high costs. Above all it undermines the food sovereignty and rights of farmer for autonomy over food production and its related land and water. It is therefore unavoidable that, as a consequence of the promotion of biofuels policy, the land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities will be relinquished further, and that food security will be undermined and lands for agricultural purposes and subsistence livelihoods will diminish.

It is time to take corrective and effective measures. Companies that fuel the biofuel markets must stop doing so. It is time to make markets, governments, and companies accountable.

We strongly uphold the opinion that Biofuels policy will aggravate the global food crisis and the only way to end starvation and to alleviate poverty is restoring the right of farmers to produce their own food. In speaking of food we reiterate the rights of farming communities to water, where it embodies the protection and definition of peoples relationship to water. It also implies talking about the right of people's to their territories and resources.

Food sovereignty is being undermined by biofuels such as *Jatropha* and *Pongamia*. This becomes even more critical in light of the Global Hunger Index Report 2009³, which ranks India 65th out of 84 countries, where 21% of the population is under-nourished, 43.5% children under 5 years of age are underweight due to hunger and mal-nutrition and 7.4% of children die before crossing five. The revised official poverty estimates for India, recently announced in November 2009⁴ confirms this: 41.8 per cent of the population in rural India, and 37.2 per cent of both rural and urban population, or some 400 million citizens of India lie below the poverty line.

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India, December 2009

² British Petroleum on Feb. 2, 2006, declared that it will fund a \$9.4 million project in India to see if biodiesel can be produced from a non-edible oil bearing crop. The project by The Energy and Resources Institute in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh will study the feasibility of producing biodiesel from the crop *Jatropha Curcas*. The 10-year project will cultivate around 8,000 hectares of wasteland with the crop and install equipment needed for seed crushing, oil extraction and processing, to produce 9 million liters of biodiesel per year. The project will also include an environmental and social impact assessment. TERI will run the project's daily operations. <http://www.bp.com/home>.
http://www.teriin.org/index.php?option=com_ongoing&task=details&sid=680&theme=23

³ International Food Policy Research Institute, Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide

⁴ Report Of The Expert Group To Review The Methodology For Estimation Of Poverty, Government of India Planning Commission November, 2009

Glossary:

1 lakh – 100,000

1 crore – 10 million