



Jatropha as biofuel causes more carbon emissions - Report

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A new study says biofuels from the non-food plant, Jatropha are dangerous to the environment. These fuels seen as an alternative energy source, according to the study by three groups, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, ActionAid and Nature Kenya, could cause up to six times more carbon emissions than fossil fuels.

The study analyzed whether biofuels made from Jatropha grown at a proposed plantation in the Dakatcha Woodlands in Kenya would save emissions when compared to fossil fuels.

“It is scandalous that EU nations are passing biofuels off as a green solution to climate change. Like most other biofuels, Jatropha could actually end up increasing carbon emissions,” David Barissa of ActionAid Kenya said in the report.

The study took into account the emissions produced throughout the production and consumption process, and found that Jatropha would emit between 2.5 and 6 times more greenhouse gases.

However in Ghana, several foreign companies are investing in large tracts of land to cultivate Jatropha for the production of biofuel for export. Jatropha has oil-rich seeds that can be used to produce biodiesel.

One of the companies, Agroils of Italy is currently cultivating jatropha on 10,000 hectares of land in Yeji in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana for biofuels.

Israeli company, Galten has acquired 100,000 hectares of land and an Indian company is requesting for 50,000 hectares of land from the Ghana Investment Promotion Council (GIPC), to cultivate jatropha.

A company from the Netherlands has started a pilot project on 10 acres in the northern region and the Chinese are also doing a pilot project.

Gold Star Farms Ltd., claims it is cultivating five million acres of land to plant Jatropha for the production of biofuels for export.

A Norwegian company ScanFuel Ltd., has started operations in the Asante Akim South the Ashanti region to produce biofuel. The company aims to start initial cultivation of jatropha seeds on 10,000 hectares of land.

The company which has a Ghanaian subsidiary, ScanFuel Ghana Ltd., says its Ghanaian unit has contracted about 400,000 hectares of land, with up to 60 percent reserved for biofuel production, "not less" than 30 percent for food production and the remainder for biodiversity buffer zones.

Another Norwegian company, Biofuels Africa Ltd's CEO, Co-founder and director, Steinar Kolnes, has told ghanabusinessnews.com by email that the company is operating in two locations in Ghana. The company has a 300 hectare test farm in Sogakope in the Volta region and a 10,696.32 hectares in Yendi in the Northern region.

According to him, the company has planted a total of 660 hectares of Jatropha on its projects.

One of the complexities that might confront the growing biofuels industry in Ghana is the challenge of land acquisitions. There is a plurality of land tenure and management prevailing in Ghana.

There is the state/public system and the customary system. These systems have been poorly articulated over the years leading to increasing conflicts associated with land.

Public lands in Ghana fall into two main categories: land which has been compulsorily for a public purpose or in the public interest under the state lands Act 1962 (Act 125) or other relevant statute; and land which has been vested in the President, in trust for a landholding community under the Administration of Stool Lands Act, 1962 (Act 123.)

While government is working to streamline the land tenure system in the country, there are some advocating for a land bank system to make land acquisition smoother and beneficial to all.

Ghana is attractive for investments, especially in the biofuels sector. But the question some observers of the biofuel sector are asking is why is the country so enthusiastic about biofuels when it has found oil in commercial quantities?

Others are also asking why an agriculture country where only 16 per cent of arable land is used for food production would not rather concentrate on developing the food crop sector, but is diverting resources and labour in agric for the cultivation of non-food crops for biofuels.

And in the light of this study, would Ghana continue to encourage the cultivation of Jatropha merely to produce biofuels for export at possible expense of the environment?

By Emmanuel K. Dogbevi