



TRAINING MANUAL FOR

# Community Organizing Against Land Grabbing

# table of content

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Acknowledgement</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Introduction</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Session one</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| 1.0 What is land grabbing   |           |
| 2.0 Why are the cases of land grabbing growing in developing countries? |           |
| 3.0 Impacts of Land grabbing on indigenous people                       |           |
| <b>Session Two</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| Tactics of Palm Oil companies use to grab community land                |           |
| <b>Session Three</b>  | <b>12</b> |
| Advocacy as a tool against land grabbing                                |           |
| <b>Session Four</b>   |           |
| Human rights tools for advocacy against land grabbing                   | 15        |
| <b>About CODAF</b>  | <b>17</b> |

# Acknowledgement

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This training manual can be used by nationwide organizations, individual human rights defenders, other campaigners, students, or anybody interested in human rights, advocacy, or communication.

# Introduction

This training manual is designed to enhance the understanding of local communities on the tricks Industrial Palm Oil Companies use to grab land in local communities.

It also provides a set of advocacy strategies and tools for advocates in developing countries as well as rural communities in the Niger Delta whose lands have been captured for palm oil plantations or for agro-commodities.

Advocates can be individuals, communities, civil society organizations, or any other institution advocating for the protection of human rights anywhere in the world. The training manual is **aimed to serve** above all local, national and regional civil society organizations working with local communities. Many of these groups have already been involved in advocacy activities, particularly in grass-roots level in their communities.

This training manual shall serve as a tool to strengthen local organizing and support them in their future endeavors to organize human rights and nature defense.

In order to identify the advocacy needs of the Akwu-kwu Igbo people, it necessitated the development and design of this manual, we collected information from approximately Ten women and youth led groups in the community and other communities in Nigeria and Africa, suffering the same fate of Land grabbing.

This training manual is divided into four main sections:

**Section I:** explains what land grabbing is all about. Learners would understand the meaning of land grabbing, why Africa and rural communities are usually the target of land grabbers and the Impacts of Land grabbing on indigenous people.

**Section II:** Critically examines the tactics Palm Oil Companies use to Grab community Lands. It would give account of the lessons from other impacts in the Niger Delta, though these stories are not documented in the training manual but they are part of the trainer's guide specifically designed for the training.

**Section III:** provides background information on the use of advocacy as a tool against land grabbing, it gives a broad definition of advocacy, its purpose, strategies and tools. Advocacy questions community can ask to know more about the company in their communities were also documented.

**Section IV:** gives account of selected human rights tools in advocating against land grabbing. The selected tools are Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Health Impact Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, Community Needs Assessment.

# SESSION ONE

## 1.0 What is Land grabbing

Imagine waking up one early morning, you went to your farm and **noticed that** your farmland has **been taken** over by bulldozers, what does that tell you?

**Communities in Edo, Cross River, River and Taraba States in Nigeria** and in other countries in the world have all had this experience of losing their farms or ancestral lands to either government or big companies without permission or prior information. This action is known as "Land Grabbing".

Land grabbing is a controversy arising from large-scale land acquisitions i.e, the buying or leasing of large pieces of land by domestic and transnational companies, governments, and individuals. Land grabbing is a serious issue that affects the environment, economy, social welfare and human rights. Research has shown that lands are grabbed primarily for large-scale industrial agriculture, monoculture plantations, large infrastructures such as private estates, schools, churches etc.

## 2.0 Why are the cases of land grabbing growing in developing countries?

Research has it that land grabbing is currently a big challenge for African countries because of increased interest

by foreign agricultural investors to acquire massive pieces of land in rural Africa. Apart from the availability of land for grabbing, there are lack of pro-poor land policies, high level of corruption in public places and among community leadership. The Nigeria's land use Act of 1978 is a major reason why land grabbing is made very easy in Nigeria because it does not recognize communal land ownership and also Africa provides cheaper land than elsewhere in the world.

## 3.0 Impacts of Land grabbing on indigenous people

Many land grabs deprive communities' access to land and resources (trees, lakes, rivers and forest), create environmental problems through intensive agriculture and increased water demand. In the **poorest countries**, local smallholders forced to abandon their ancestral lands have to relocate, either to cities or clear forests or peat land to continue farming. Land grabbing threatens the human right to food security and food sovereignty (starvation) as it makes it increasingly hard for local communities and countries to feed themselves because of the diversion of the food produced at industrial level to foreign countries, increased cases of social and physical violence which instigates crimes, rapes and other sorts of physical violence.



# SESSION TWO

## Tactics of Palm Oil Companies use to grab community land

### 4.1 Secure approval and support from powerful government officials

Under the guise of bringing development to the people, governments at different levels try very hard to attract foreign investors who would always tell the government prospects of palm oil plantations.

Because of this, the government tends to promise the investors better lands at cheaper rates with less regulations that can be gotten anywhere else in the world. The companies are also very political because the moment they arrive in a country, it starts investigating where the best land for growing oil palms is located and the key government people who can reject or approve the company's request for land.

### 4.2 Divide & Rule

Securing the support of powerful individuals in the community

The company before meeting with the local elites would have met with politicians, government officials or influential business people at the local level. To gain the support of the local elites, the company would induce some powerful leaders of the community financially, take them to big hotels, hold meetings with them and make mouthwatering promises to them and also give them contracts. At

this stage the company would have all the information on how to penetrate the community at the back of their hands and all the approval they need. Moving forward, the company would set up committees which are usually made up of politicians and corrupt chiefs that would never represent the interest of the people. Always, these members of the committees are paid honorarium for attending all the meetings of the company which is 100% in control of such meetings.

### 4.3 Pressure community chiefs through financial inducement into making communal lands available for grabbing

After gaining the popular support of the government, the company will arrange meetings with leaders of the community and they would mention that the project is supported by the government and even present documents issued to them by the government to the community. These meetings are usually in big hotels outside the village without the knowledge of the wider community people. At such meetings the company will present their plans to include the number of indigenes their project would employ and the number of community development projects they would implement throughout the life span of the project.



Even an agreement with the community leaders is signed alongside the promises, they are usually not followed. In the long run, if the local chiefs realize their mistakes and try to resist the company, the company would use their influence and connection with government officials to dethrone or remove them from office.

In order to violate their own promises, most industrial oil palm companies make unwritten promises to members of host communities. Most of such promises include the building or upgrading of health centers, dispensaries and class rooms. The strongest promise they use to capture the people is that of employment and year in year out the people wait in vain without adequate results. There are documented cases where these promises turn into disappointment, anger and **conflict**.

#### **4.4 Organize community meetings to fake community consent**

For the plantation companies to convince the Banks providing the money for their investment and to gain international reputations, they come up with ways to create the impression that the host communities are in full support of such projects. Holding meetings with sectional members of the communities, especially the influencers play an important role in a company's efforts to present itself as a responsible company.

These meetings can be organized by the company or by a private consultant hired by the company. In some cases when there is conflict in the community already as a result of

the company's activities, they usually arrive at the venue of the meeting with security personnel or government officials to demonstrate its authority over the community.

#### **4.5 Silence local opponents to their projects through arrest and intimidation**

In projects of this nature, enlightened people (community-based organizations or individuals) in the community usually build resistance against them. This is so because they understand the implication of the impacts of oil palm plantations on communities' livelihoods, environment and the peaceful coexistence of the people.

These enlightened people are very outspoken and have high organizing skills that help the people to make compelling demands. The companies try as much as possible to silence these classes of people in the community by finding more about them and by sowing seeds of discords among the people with the weapons of lies.

The companies would further write petitions against the individual or groups and use security apparatus (Police and Military) against them as well as use local authorities to create administrative hurdles for community groups that oppose its plantations. In some cases, the companies often try to co-opt some local NGOs or secretly form new local NGOs who would always work to give the companies a good public image. In all, the companies never rest until they buy off the opposing groups in the communities.

#### **4.6 Falsify documents and compel community members to sign them to enable them to take control of community land**

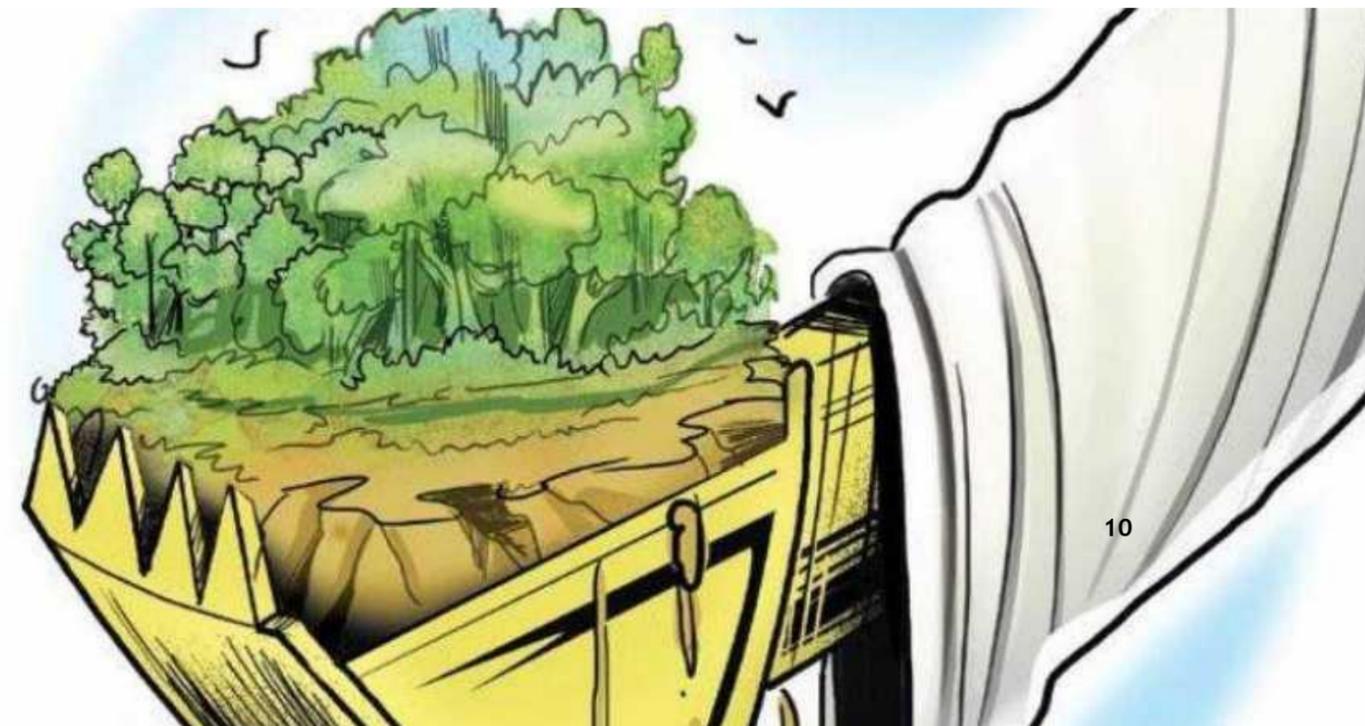
Most times, it is difficult for palm oil companies to secure the consent of the communities and because the financiers do not bother to verify the authenticity of the documents being presented by the companies they tend to forge some of them including signatures of the chiefs and members of the communities.

Another example is that a company can falsely claim that a certain parcel of land is part of its lease agreement and start destroying food crops or forest to prepare the land for planting oil palms, even though the area is really not part of the agreement. Companies also try to manipulate land survey processes that demarcate the boundaries of community, public and company land, or to use fraudulent and often hastily issued land certificates and other land documents. These companies often refuse to disclose or provide copies of such

important documents to the communities.

#### **4.7 Promise food security but end up dispossessing the people of access to food**

Community people often fail to reconcile the link between food security and palm oil development on time, hence they learn it the hard way. Oil palm plantations often produce food for raw materials and not for local consumption and a vast land is needed to produce adequate materials needed to feed the global market. This practice shrinks community farm lands meant for the production of local food systems. Many communities that are playing hosts to this kind of development are already having insufficient farmland and therefore the issues of land disputes between farmers to farmers and farmers and companies erupts. It has been reported in most communities in Edo and Cross River States, where these kinds of projects are cited, and farmers of the host communities to the palm oil plantation companies.



struggle to get land to grow local food. In some cases, the villagers are forced by the companies to abandon the cultivation of local food crops to plant oil palm trees for the plantation companies at low wages.

Women have been known to be walking longer distances to access farmlands to be able to cultivate food crops to feed their families

#### 4.8 Exclusion and marginalization of women

Women are very resilient when it comes to issues that affect their lives, peaceful coexistence and their livelihoods. For this reason, they are usually marginalized and excluded from decision making. The company often capitalizes on this weakness to exclude women from the process of securing communal lands and therefore increase their marginalization.

One way women can ensure that their voices are heard in the community discussions is for them to organize and come together **to discuss their** concerns and then present these

together in community meetings.

#### 4.9 Use partnership and sponsorship of conservation NGOs and RSPO to create green image

Many international NGOs that feel palm plantations have conservation values tend to work to create a good picture about the companies' strategies in the way they carry out their operations. Sometimes some sections in the plantation estates are earmarked for conservation which the companies feel would help to compensate for the forest that their projects have been destroyed. The Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is another green washing concept that tends to hide all the environmental crises that oil palm plantation projects have created as well as the conflicts between the companies and members of the host communities. Being RSPO certified, it means the company has clean records as set out in the principles of RSPO.



## SESSION THREE



## 5.0 ADVOCACY AS A TOOL AGAINST LAND GRABBING

### 5.1 What is Advocacy?

Imagine that you are compelled to take action because you woke up one morning and noticed that your farmlands have all been grabbed by oil palm plantation merchants. What would be your reaction? Who do you think you can meet concerning the matter? What if you meet the people your mind asked you to meet and you did not get results, what else can **you do** to get justice? All the lawful actions you may have taken to get justice in order to recover your land is called "ADVOCACY". Advocacy **is about** helping you to speak up for your community; to make sure that the views, needs and opinions of your

community are heard and understood. Advocacy is one of the tools that can change the impossible to being possible. Ideas that were once considered impossible can be made possible with advocacy

### 5.2 Purpose of Advocacy

1. Promote people's rights and help maintain control over their own lives and livelihoods,
2. Promote social inclusion and raises awareness of the obstacles faced by excluded and isolated individuals,
3. Support and empower people to speak for themselves, speaking on behalf of people who are unable to speak for themselves,

4. Help people to explore the range of options open to them and clarifying a particular course of action,
5. It is used to fight poverty and contribute to the social and economic development of people suffering from poverty,
6. To promote peace and reconciliation in places that have suffered from armed conflict.

### 5.3 Advocacy Strategies



### 5.4 Advocacy Tools



### 6.0 Advocacy questions community can ask to know more about the company in their community

Communities can organize more effectively to resist a palm oil company if they **have some** basic information within their disposal about the company. Though, such information might be difficult to find but it is essential they seek answers to the following questions:

1. Is it a big company that has been in the oil palm plantation business for a long time, with plantations in other countries,
2. Is it some obscure new company with no history in the palm oil business that wants to get access to land for other purposes and only pretends to want to run an oil palm plantation?
3. Who is providing the money that the company needs to set up the plantation?
4. Who does the company plan to sell its palm oil to?
5. What is the experience of communities affected by the same company's oil palm plantations elsewhere?
6. How can you get in touch with them to find out about their experience with these companies?
7. Is there already a network of communities affected by the particular company that your community could get in touch with for exchange of information and support?

## SESSION FOUR

### 7.0 Human Rights Tools for Advocacy against land grabbing

#### 7.1 Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right that pertains to indigenous peoples. It allows them to give or withhold consent to a project that may affect them or their territories.

The aim of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is to establish bottom-up participation and consultation of an indigenous population prior to the beginning of development on ancestral land or using resources within the indigenous population's territory.

#### 7.2 Environmental Impact Assessment

UNEP defines Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as a tool used to identify the environmental, social and economic impacts of a project prior to decision-making. It aims to predict environmental impacts at an early stage in project planning and design, find ways and means to reduce adverse impacts, shape projects to suit the local environment and present the predictions and options to decision-makers.

15

By using EIA both environmental and economic benefits can be achieved, such as reduced cost and time of project implementation and design, avoided treatment/clean-up costs and impacts of laws and regulations.

#### 7.3 Health Impact Assessment

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a means of assessing the health impacts of policies, plans and projects in diverse economic sectors using quantitative, qualitative and participatory techniques. HIA helps decision-makers make choices about alternatives and improvements to prevent disease/injury and to actively promote health.

#### 7.4 Community Needs Assessment

A community needs assessment is a combination of information gathering, community engagement and focused action with the goal of community improvement. Community needs assessment identifies the strengths and weaknesses (needs) within a community.

A community needs assessment identifies the strengths and resources available in the community to meet the needs of children, youth, and families. The assessment focuses on the capabilities of the community, including its citizens, agencies, and organizations. It provides a framework for developing and identifying services and solutions and building communities that support and nurture children and families.

#### 7.5 Social Impact Assessment

Social Impact Assessment includes the process of analyzing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences both positive and negative of planned interventions, (policies, programs, plans, and projects) and any social change processes invoked by these interventions.

The goal of this impact assessment is to bring about a more ecologically, socio-culturally and economically

sustainable and equitable environment. Impact assessment, therefore, promotes community development and empowerment, builds capacity, and develops social capital (social networks and trust).



16

# About codaf

Community Development Advocacy Foundation (CODAF), AKA- Rural Community Empowerment Initiative (RUCEi) is a non- governmental organization that registered in Nigeria with focus on environmental advocacy work to bridge the communication gap between policy makers and the grassroots.

CODAF is working towards the attainment of sustainable rural development with rural community people to defend their rights to development and the thriving environment. CODAF's commitment in promoting local struggles for environmental justice won its recognition as the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) of the year award by Jewel Affairs, a movie industry at the Isoko Award Night in December 2018.

CODAF is well known for criticizing the government constructively on issues of environmental governance while providing recommendations to aid the government in environmental decision making.

## Mission

To engage in intervention projects that builds the capacity and empowers rural community people to defend their collective rights to participating in natural resource governance through a right-based approach,

## Vision

We envision a self-sufficient community in the management of their environment and resources without any form of marginalization.

## Our focus

- A. Environment
- B. Community action and Governance
- C. Agriculture
- D. Gender and youth action

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# NOTES