

Southern Adventist University
School of Social Work and Family Studies

Why Poverty Video Reaction Paper

By

Mike Hoback

Advanced Integrated Specialization Foundation (SOCW 650-B)

Tricia Lewis, MSW

January 17, 2013

Introduction

The video I chose this week is *Land Rush*. The video looked at how monoculture and globalized food production are causing the landscape of Africa to shift and threatening its ability to feed itself. The video was produced by Eli Cane, an accomplished producer whose works spans documentary film and music production. Eli produced *The Market Maker* about agricultural development in Ethiopia, for PBS/WNET in 2009, as well as numerous short films for nonprofits and recording companies. Eli's connection to African arts and culture runs deep; he has produced recordings and live events for numerous African artists, including Youssou N'Dour, King Sunny Ade, Toumani Diabate, Rokia Traore, Orchestra Baobab, Oumou Sangare, Ali Farka Toure, and Cheikh Lo. Eli lives in New York (Itvs, 2010).

In Mali, an American plan for a vast sugar cane operation on the banks of the Niger River threatens small-scale native rice farmers who have fed their communities for generations. The project is headed by an American named Mima Nedelcovych who is a Partner of the Schaffer Global Group (SGG) a Baton Rouge, Louisiana based project development, finance and Implementation firm focused on agro-industrial projects in the emerging markets of Africa and the Americas, and maintains an independent consulting practice focused on project development, project finance, and public-private partnerships in Africa (Africa Global, 2007).

The video explained how the sugar cane operation in Mali has caused conflict between local farmers and members of the government. While the government says they are bringing development to a region that is in dire need of new infrastructure such as hospitals and schools however, the local farmers believe that their land is being stolen and sold to the highest bidder.

They explained that their families have been farming these lands for hundreds of years and have never wanted for anything. Now these local farmers feel as if they are being pushed out of their homes and forced to change their livelihood because investors from other countries want their land.

Response

The video was an eye opening experience. I went from supporting the project to not supporting it and then back again. The idea of developing countries makes one think that we are changing it for the better, to help provide jobs, hospitals, schools, and housing. There was one statement made by a local farmer that stayed with me throughout the video “If you take a farmers land, he has nothing”. The individual behind the project Mima Nedelcovych provided a great argument in that he would hire the local farmers to work in the new sugar project which would also give them new skills and transform them from local farmers into commercial farmers. He explained that any trees cut down would be replanted and said he wanted to work with the community. On the other side were the farmers who felt as if they were betrayed by their government. During a meeting one farmer tells the others the “The white man wants to give us a lot of money for our land so we know our land is worth more than their money” (Cane, 2010). I had to agree with this and began to see the situation from their perspective. This project is a prime example of damaging the environment in the name of progress. Although the individuals living in Mali have been living in poverty for years, they have never needed for anything. They may have made less than a dollar a day but they grew their own food and took care of themselves off the land they farmed. This video has made me realize that just because we say someone lives in poverty does not mean they are not happy with their lives. The farmers in this video are completely comfortable with their lifestyle and their heritage. It made me stop and think about

other projects I have heard about and how the government said these projects were for the best and how they would help citizens. Was this truly the case or were the citizens left without a voice? Without this video and ones like it, this land grabbing will continue to go on without little notice from the outside world (Cane, 2010).

Application

Based on what I have learned from this presentation, I believe that social workers working in Mali need to be sensitive to the needs and wishes of the local farmers that have been living and farming these lands for years. I believe that we should work with the farmers because without the participation of the locals the project is doomed to fail. Instead of forcing the local farmers into farming something like sugar we may be able to learn from them about how they have continued to build agriculture in their environment. These farmers have self-reliance and maximize their available resources, something seldom seen in the western world. The main area of work I would recommend social workers practicing in this area of the world study and that is advocating. The farmers in this video advised they could not get on radio and have no voice besides the small community meetings they held. Being able to advocate and help these farmers keep living the life they want and deserve is a huge task. As stated in the video, there are laws that prevent the government from selling or leasing the land to investors from other countries but nobody is following or enforcing this law. Being able to advocate for these people would give them some hope that their voice would be heard on a larger scale.

References:

Africa global. (2007). Retrieved from <http://schafferglobalgroup.com/AfrGlobal.htm>

Cane, E. (Producer) (2010). Land rush. *Why Poverty*. [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <http://video.pbs.org/video/2296680847>

Itvs. (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.itvs.org/films/land-rush/filmmaker>