Mozambique: "pro-Savana" Will Not Deprive Farmers of Land

26 DECEMBER 2012

Maputo — The Mozambican government has insisted that no farmer will lose land as a result of the "Pro-Savana" project.

Pro-Savana's full title is "Triangular Cooperation Programme for the Agricultural Development of Tropical Savannas in Mozambique, Brazil and Japan," and the area of implementation is the Nacala Corridor, which covers much of northern Mozambique.

Speaking on a joint programme of Radio Mozambique and Mozambican Televisions, Agriculture Minister Jose Pacheco particularly those who claim that it will deprive peasant farmers of arable land.

"In our country there is no place for the return of crown companies", said Pacheco. "The small farmers will keep their land areas".

Pacheco's reference was to the practice of the Portuguese colonial state, in the late 19th century, of granting concessions to foreign companies, under which they were given 50-year leases on enormous tracts of Mozambican territory. These companies (including the Nacala Company) operated as states within a state. They could raise their own taxes and even take land from the Portuguese state.

Pacheco explained that the major purpose of Pro-Savana is to develop agricultural technologies to induce an increase in crop yields. "Hence the project envisages setting up a network of agricultural research laboratories in the Nacala Corridor, where farmers can test new techniques and products."

He pointed out that small peasant farmers are currently responsible for 90 per cent of Mozambican agricultural production. "So to develop agriculture, we are betting heavily on the small farmers", Pacheco said. "We want these small farmers to be encouraged to grow crops on a larger scale in future as part of the development plan."

Pacheco added that Pro-Savana is a replica of a development project that occurred 30 years ago in Brazil, in the Amazon Corridor. He insisted that implementation of the project will obey Mozambican legislation, particularly the Inves tment Code.

The whole strategy of negotiating private investments in the Nacala Corridor, said Pacheco, hinged on the socio-economic and infrastructural developments that would be put in place by the public sector to stimulate private investment in agriculture.

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