



MONITORING REPORT

On the operations of Addax/Sunbird Bioenergy Mabilafu Project,
Sierra Leone (Period July 2016 – August 2017)



By Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food (SiLNoRF) and Bread for all (Bfa)

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Executive Summary

Take-over by Sunbird: In June 2015, Addax Bioenergy Sierra Leone Ltd (ABSL) scaled down its operations in Makeni¹. After more than a year of hardship and uncertainty, Sunbird Bioenergy Africa Ltd (Sunbird) became the new majority owner of ABSL. Sunbird presents itself as an intransparent company, registered in Mauritius with close connection to China New Energy Limited, which has itself a questionable reputation. Little is known about the financial background of Sunbird.

Stakeholder engagement: Sunbird, being the new tenant, has never been officially introduced to the landowners as customs and traditions dictate. The monthly meetings with the landowners are yet to be held on a constant basis. The Multistakeholder Forum (MSF) that used to be held quarterly took place only in December 2016 and November 2017. People report that the space for expressing their issues is shrinking tremendously.

Contracts and fees: The land lease fee to landowners was paid late. The land lease fee to the local authorities and central government was not paid yet at the time of writing. The leasing contracts were due for renegotiation in 2016. Sunbird in the emergency MSF meeting held in November 2017 disclosed the leasing contracts are now with the District and Chiefdom Councils, and that this process has begun. They councils should therefore initiate the discussions for renegotiation of the lease agreement.

New crops and schemes: Sunbird experiments with new crops for biofuel and power production apart from sugarcane: cassava and elephant grass. Cassava is of particular concern because it is a staple food, regarded by most Sierra Leoneans as the second most important food item after rice. Sunbird has plans to grow cassava in the outgrower schemes expected to commence next year. Elephant grass grows wildly in the region and the company hires workers to cut it in their operational areas and also outside their operational areas. This sometimes creates conflicts with the owners of the land where the grass grows, as they expect to be compensated. The social schemes, the Farmer Development Services (FDS) are still being promised by the company to the community but the schemes are not working well.

Ban on fire: To protect the elephant grass, the company with the help of other authorities has established a ban on burning farm lands and putting out fires. On the one hand, the people need fire in order to do farming and ensure their food security. On the other hand, they do not want to burn the elephant grass and put out fires because they rely on the jobs as grass cutters. This creates a difficult situation for people.

Water: Many villages complain about contaminated water and lacking boreholes. Some villages did get boreholes. A particular case is Tonka community, where the company used to provide tanks for safe water. After they stopped providing, the people protested. The case is ongoing.

Employment: As a general tendency, ABSL employs more people than before, mostly because of the labor-intensive grass cutting. Most of the jobs are temporary. According to the people, salaries are acceptable, but are paid too late. Further, quota given to people for one day are not-manageable for many. Last but not least, women are often discriminated against and do not get jobs with the company.

¹ Monitoring report 2014 – 2016, see <https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2016/03/MonRep-Addax-2016.pdf>

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Introduction

History and aim: Addax Bioenergy, a Swiss based subsidiary of the Addax and Oryx group, initiated the Addax Bioenergy Sierra Leone Project in 2008. The Project was commissioned in 2014, and had an originally leased land project area of 54,000 ha to produce ethanol for export and provide electricity to the national grid. The project development and designs eventually ended up with a land use of 23,500 ha.²

In June 2015, Addax Bioenergy Sierra Leone Ltd (ABSL) scaled down its operations in Makeni, citing several challenges, including the Ebola outbreak, a fall in the ethanol prices, and the low yield of sugarcane used in the production of ethanol etc³. This came as a shock to the affected people had severe consequences on their livelihoods and food security. These conditions were analyzed in the last monitoring report⁴.

After more than a year of hardship and uncertainty, ABSL has found a new majority owner. AOG, the mother company of Addax Bioenergy SA⁵ (both based in Geneva), sold the majority of the ABSL shares (75.1%) to Sunbird Bioenergy Africa Ltd (Sunbird). In the last months of 2016, ABSL started its operations again. This monitoring report gives an update after roughly one year of ABSLs operations under new ownership of Sunbird. Sunbird now calls it the Mabilafu Project (earlier: Makeni Project).

Methodology: In terms of methodology, this update is first based on the regular monitoring visits of SiLNoRF staff to affected communities over the years. Information retrieved were then collaborated and confirmed by a joint field visit by SiLNoRF and Bfa (8.-10. August 2017). This included the villages Romaro, Rothun, Makama Bana, Tiama, Laminaya, Man-man, Worreh-wanda, Mabereh, Rugboya, Malenka, Makaie and Tonka in Bombali district. In the villages, the people who were around were interviewed in a community meeting with particular concern that women and youth were also represented. Additionally, the acting Paramount Chief of the Makari Chiefdom and the Paramount Chief and the Chiefdom speaker of Mara Chiefdom, the Development Planning Officer of the Bombali district council and the Convener of the Multistakeholder Forum at the University of Makeni were interviewed. Last but not least, this report uses information retrieved from the Multistakeholder Forum (MSF) held in December 2016 and the emergency MSF held in November 2017.

Position of Sunbird: During the field visit in August 2017, SiLNoRF and Bfa attempted to meet Sunbird officials. These meetings could not take place because the latter did not find time. Later, we invited Sunbird to comment on this report and provide their view⁶. In his reply on 13th December 2017, Richard Bennett informed us that they reviewed the report and found it very inaccurate, but that they do not intend to comment on it. Because we do not have any information about where the view of Sunbird differs from the information in this report, we are not able to include their views.

² <http://www.sunbirdbioenergy.com/projects/sierra-leone-makeni/>, accessed 21.11.2017.

³ For a closer analysis see "The Weakest should not Bear the Risk", <https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2016/06/The-Weakest-Should-not-Bear-the-Risk.pdf>

⁴ Monitoring report 2014 – 2016, see <https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2016/03/MonRep-Addax-2016.pdf>

⁵ Bioenergy AG was running the Mabilafu Projekt through ABSL. Addax Bioenergy AG still exists (<https://www.moneyhouse.ch/de/search?q=addax%20bioenergy&status=1&tab=companies>, accessed 10.10.2017), but its website does not work anymore and the company seems to have disappeared.

⁶ In two emails, dated on 27th November 2017 and 5th December 2017.

The company: Sunbird Bioenergy Africa Ltd



Picture 1: ABSL signboard near pivots at main road

The new owner: With the acquisition of shares in the ABSL by Sunbird Bioenergy Africa Ltd (here: Sunbird), the operative management of the Mabilafu project lies in the hands of a new player. Sunbird announced to work towards fair lease contracts, sustainable methods of production and for an increase in the living standards of the local population as well as for the development of the community in general⁷. The company claims to have the Roundtable on Sustainable

Biomaterial (RSB) certificate⁸, but the company is not listed on the RSB homepage⁹. Against the backdrop of the situation in the Sunbird project area as we describe it in this report, the company's commitments remain questionable.

Sunbird and China New Energy Limited: Despite intensive internet research there is no clarity about the shareholders of Sunbird, the financiers or the financial situation of the company. Sunbird communicates neither annual reports nor any financial statements to the public. It can be assumed that Sunbird has close relations to *China New Energy Limited* (CNEL) in terms of staff members and financial resources. CNEL, operating as Sunbird's "technology and development partner", is registered at the alternative investment market (AIM) of the London Stock Exchange, quoted as engineering and technology solutions provider to the bioenergy sector¹⁰. Richard Bennett, CEO of Sunbird, works simultaneously as independent non-executive director of CNEL, while Andrew Gee, the Transition Director Sunbird Sierra Leone, worked as non-executive director of Global Lock China¹¹. Both, CNEL and Global Lock China are listed on ShareProphet's „China AIM Casino Filthy 40“ list¹². CNEL repeatedly announced upcoming cooperation with an investment partner in different African countries, but the investment partner's name (known now as Sunbird) kept changing in different sources¹³.

Nontransparent in tax haven: Sunbird is now registered in Mauritius¹⁴. Upon a request of ShareProphet's journalists, Bennett mentioned they followed the demand of their project partners who "requested a new company be set up in Mauritius which has tax treaties with the countries we now

⁷ See <https://www.kfw.de/KfW-Konzern/Newsroom/Pressematerial/Themen-kompakt/Agrarfinanzierung/> and <http://www.sunbirdbioenergy.com/about/sustainability/>, accessed 20.09.2017.

⁸ <http://www.sunbirdbioenergy.com/projects/sierra-leone-makeni/>, accessed 21.11.2017.

⁹ <http://rsb.org/membership/membership-list/>, accessed 21.11.2017.

¹⁰ See <http://www.londonstockexchange.com/exchange/prices-and-markets/stocks/summary/company-summary/JE00B3RWLF12JEGBXASQ1.html> and <http://www.chinawenergy.co.uk/>, accessed 20.09.2017.

¹¹ See <http://www.sunbirdbioenergy.com/about/team/>, accessed 20.09.2017.

¹² See <https://www.shareprophets.com/views/14293/the-china-aim-casino-filthy-forty-is-launched-be-shocked>, accessed 20.09.2017.

¹³ See <https://www.shareprophets.com/views/17033/f40-china-new-energy-mous-with-sunbird-but-who-what-is-it-and-is-it-placing-ahoy>, accessed 20.09.2017.

¹⁴ <https://opencorporates.com/companies/mu/C122311>, accessed 20.09.2017; company number: C122311

operate in”¹⁵. Thus, they decided not to run business through the UK based company *Sunbird Bioenergy Limited*¹⁶ but instead through *Sunbird Bioenergy Africa Limited* (here: Sunbird). While some transparency was given for the UK based *Sunbird Bioenergy Ltd.* (see monitoring report 2014-2016), there are only guesses about Sunbird’s shareholders now. According to ShareProphets, CNEL might have liquidity problems and be highly indebted¹⁷. Sunbird and CNEL perform as project partners not only in Sierra Leone but in other African countries as well. The financial situation of the company therefore concerns not only people in Sierra Leone, but also in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

¹⁵ See <https://www.shareprophets.com/views/17062/china-new-energy-some-answers-but-questions-remain>, accessed 20.09.2017.

¹⁶ <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/08039990>, accessed 20.09.2017.

¹⁷ See <https://www.shareprophets.com/views/30203/china-new-energy-agm-confirms-placing-fears> and <https://www.shareprophets.com/views/30054/f40-china-new-fy16-numbers-headlines-good-details-are-another-matter>, both accessed 20.09.2017.

Stakeholder engagement

Formal introduction to land owners in communities: Sunbird, being de facto the new tenant of the lands in Makeni, has not been introduced to the landowners in the communities. ABSL did inform people at the last Village Liaison Committee meeting in May 2016 that, as a farmer in Romaro put it, *“they had no financial power anymore and another company will buy shares”*. But this does not change the fact that Sunbird was not officially introduced neither to the interviewed Paramount Chiefs and the Development Planning officer nor to the landowners. A woman in Makaie said that *“Addax has never introduced these strangers to us as tenants, because of this we also do not know where to complain.”*

Monthly meetings: The monthly meetings of the Village Liaison Committee (VLC) ceased to take place since Sunbird took over the majority of shares. In the emergency MSF in November 2017, the Social Affairs Manager of Sunbird con-firmed that, but claimed to have started such meetings again. These VLC meetings used to serve as an avenue where community people could interact with the company and ex-press their concerns and com-plaints. At the time of the field visit conducted by SiLNoRF and Bfa, people in all villages complained that they had not received information from the company and there was no engagement with them beyond employment and payment of the land lease fees. A farmer from Romaro said that these VLC meetings *“were important because we could bring forward our grievances”*. This was an issue stressed by many people. Just to name a few examples, in Makama Bana people said that they had no way of complaining about their



Picture 2: Meeting of SiLNoRF with community people

salaries not being paid in time. In Laminaya, people tried to engage the company many times and company staff advised them to write to the company. People did so, but without any result. The Paramount Chief of Mara confirmed the absence of the monthly meetings. But he said that since 2017, Sunbird General Manager newly meets all Paramount Chiefs every month for an exchange.

Irregular Multistakeholder Forums: The quarterly Multistakeholder Forums (MSF) stopped to happen on regular basis. The MSF must be a platform for all stakeholders to discuss issues connected to ABSL, where all interests need to be secured. However, it is Sunbird who pays for MSF (transport, food, allowances), so they can decide not only on the timing of the meeting but also on its agenda. In the last MSF emergency meeting held in November 2017, it was not clear whether the meeting will continue to be held on a quarterly basis.

Who speaks: A man in Makama Bana said that *“there is a problem with the MSF. Only one or two people can speak in the name of all land owners. These people do not ask any critical questions, I hear only praise. For us, there is no time to speak.”* And then an old man from the same village goes on saying that *“in the meetings, people are more and more like an audience now, they are only listening. If we want to say something, they say that this is not in the agreement.”*

Land Lease Fees and Contract Renegotiation

Late payment of leasing fees: ABSL and its new majority owner Sunbird continue to be bound to ABSL's legal agreements. This means first, that they have to honor the lease agreements with the chiefdom councils. Second, they need to take responsibility to continue with the liabilities and the existing social programs. Sunbird paid the 50% part of the land lease fees to land owners. The amount paid in Leones has increased compared to last year because of the exchange rate of USD giving advantage to recipients of the land lease fees. The payment in June 2017 came later than in earlier years (beginning of April). This poses a problem for the land owners, because they have eventually come to rely on the land lease fees for their livelihood and to cater for other pressing needs. Particularly people said if they plan to invest in their agricultural operations with this money, they need to receive it in time, otherwise they cannot seek for essential services like hiring of tractors, paying laborers to develop the plantations.

Non-payment to institutions: At the time of the writing, the company has not paid the part of the leasing fee to the Chiefdom Council, the District Council and the Government (representing 50% of the land lease fees). This has been confirmed by the general manager of Sunbird in the emergency MSF held in November 2017. The two interviewed Paramount Chiefs, the Development Planning Officer all reported the same argument from the side of ABSL and ABSL also confirmed that in the MSF: Sunbird exported around 15,000 mega hours electricity to the national grid (according to their own information), but Sunbird did not receive payment as expected from the Electricity Distribution and Supply Authority (EDSA). EDSA has paid most part of the money but at the time of writing Sunbird is still expecting EDSA to pay the rest of the money remaining. The General Manager announced that as soon as all payment is received, Sunbird will pay the land lease fees to the government and local councils. This arrangement, however, is not agreed upon in any contract between the company and the Chiefdom Councils, District Councils or the Government.

No review of contract: The land lease contract (between the company and the Chiefdom Council) can be reviewed after seven years according to the contract itself. This would have been due in 2016. People are aware of this and expect such a renegotiation to happen soon. Both Paramount Chiefs would welcome such a renegotiation, but they expect the company to start the discussions about it. Among other issues, the landowners and Paramount Chiefs claim that the lease fee should be higher. On the MSF in November 2017, the Sunbird Social Affairs Manager announced that already during the first quarter of this year the social affairs department had informed the Chiefdom and District Councils of the review, as they are the principal signatories to the agreements. A copy of the land lease agreements was sent to them. The Social Affairs Manager expects the district councils to initiate the process.



Picture 3: Rice farming on residual land

The company pays the law firm Africanus to represent the Chiefdom Council. But, as both interviewed Paramount Chiefs agreed, these lawyers would do nothing on their behalf. The Paramount Chief of Mara clearly said that “we do not have lawyers. Why should Addax [ABSL] go and hire lawyers for us? Since 2014 [when he became Paramount Chief] no one made a courtesy visit to me in the name of representing us. They get paid big salaries. I

want to disagree that we have lawyers. We want money to find and pay our own lawyers.” The Transition Manager said in the MSF that they agree if the landowners want to get their own lawyers and Sunbird will be willing to pay for the cost of hiring.

Temporary permissions for unused land: All visited communities had between one and nine pivots leased out to ABSL. Some residual land has been relinquished to the people. Concerning the other pivots, many are not used by the company at the moment. People can ask the company for permission to use these unused lands. This permission is a written document that allows people to use that exact pivot for a clearly defined period of time. If they use it longer or for long-term crops, the company would not pay any compensation for the crops if it decided to use the land. This means that the people can use the land, but only for short-term crops.

New Crops: Cassava and Elephant Grass

New crops: Under the ownership of Sunbird, ABSL has started using new crops (besides sugarcane) for the production of bioethanol and power. First this is cassava, that ABSL is planning to grow themselves as well as in outgrower schemes. Second, already under the ownership of AOG during the scale down, the company started experiments with elephant grass to produce electricity. Now under the management of Sunbird, these plans became operational and elephant grass becomes an increasingly important crop for the production of electricity. Elephant grass is a plant that grows everywhere in the region, though not cultivated by people. Additionally, the company grows it on the pivots too. Third, ABSL is experimenting on a small scale with Sorghum.

Burning food crops: Using cassava and sorghum for bioethanol or power production poses a serious concern because these are food crops. Cassava is a staple food in the region (second after rice). Often people were rather happy about the company's plans of growing cassava, their staple food. In Laminaya, a village close to the factory, people reported that on one occasion, the company had transported cassava grown in other areas to the factory and then the processing was not operational. So, the company had called on the near-by villages to come and collect cassava. The hope is that this might happen regularly.

Cassava and outgrower scheme: The company already piloted on its own cassava planting. In the MSFs in December 2016 and November 2017, Sunbird announced to outsource most of the cassava cultivation to communities in the form of outgrower schemes starting 2018. Sunbird has been experimenting with varieties of cassava and now, according to their own information, those tests were successful. The company plans to provide a particular cassava variety to the communities, who in turn can sell cassava back to the company. The company sees these plans to be part of the planned community development. We have no knowledge whether and how the company is planning to tackle the issue that cassava risks depleting tropical soils within few years when grown intensely and as a single crop.

Farmer Based Organizations:

In some villages (e.g. Tiama, Romaro or Malenka) people have been casually informed by the company or had heard rumors that the company plans an outgrower scheme for cassava. In Romaro, an older man explained that *"the company approached us and told us that they will provide us with tractors and cassava sticks and then buy the cassava in the end, but leave some for the people."* Another farmer from Romaro clarified that *"we have reserved land and want to grow cassava there on 2, 3 acres, but not on a huge area"*. Generally, it seems people welcome the cassava outgrower scheme without actually being informed about the terms and conditions of contracts yet. Sunbird claims to encourage the formation of Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs), especially now the outgrower schemes are going to be introduced. This has been confirmed by people in Malenka, where the company told farmers to organize in groups to be prepared for that scheme.



Picture 4: Cassava seems to grow well in the project area

Elephant grass on whose land? The laborers cut the elephant grass not only on the pivots, but wherever it grows. The Paramount Chief of Mara reported that this was agreed upon with the company: the company would hire the *“sons of the land owners”* and in return the laborers could cut elephant grass everywhere. According to affected people these consultations or information did not trickle down well to them. They could not comprehend the harvest of elephant grasses on their own land without their consent. An old man in Man-man raised this issue and asked if it was *“right they go in to our land, cut grass without any arrangement”*. In Mabereh, people reported that they were afraid to stop the laborers from cutting the grass because the company had let them know that consequently, they would not hire people from their community again should they prevent workers from cutting.

Ban on Fires Obstructs Farming

Ban on fire: The company does not want the elephant grass to be burnt down. Further, they are afraid that the fire would take over to the pivots and cause destruction. Corresponding to these needs, the local councils and other stakeholders formulated bye-laws that have banned fire in all villages and all the fields. Presumably, the ban on fire started to be communicated to people after the devastating fire in Romaro and other places¹⁸. That time, ABSL has put the blame for the fire on the communities and did nothing to support them. Therefore, people themselves started to weed the elephant grass first around the village to create a fire belt around the village. Later and under the ownership of Sunbird, ABSL started to send their staff to villages telling people that fires were not allowed anymore and introduced a firefighting unit¹⁹.

Food security issue: It is well understood by the communities that burning fire is generally outlawed throughout Sierra Leone because of the devastating consequences on the environment. However, under the present circumstances, people report that they can hardly succeed to cultivate large portions of land without fires very limited and controlled in time and space. If they are not allowed to light fires on the fertile bolilands, they remain unfit for planting. One man in Man-man made it clear that the ash is necessary for the plants as fertilizer. Additionally, in Tiama people explained that if they wanted to grow rice in the swamp land, they need to make fire because of the rodents. Before the company came, many emphasized, there used to be enough local rice, but now with the temporary employment and the ban on fire, the situation has deteriorated. Therefore, the ban on fire is in itself a threat to food security. The focus is only on the security of the company and not of the people. In Rothun, an old man said that *“Sunbird is against food security. They don’t allow us to make fire and without fire, we cannot make agriculture. The coming of Sunbird means more hunger to the communities.”* People, however, noted they can cope without burning fires if other alternatives are forth coming, like consistent provision of the Farmer Development Services and other support for their farming operations.

Burning their jobs: Additionally, people made it clear that they would also not want to burn the elephant grass because to cut elephant grass is their job. In Worreh-wanda, people expressed that their sons, and brothers, who get employed as grass cutters, are their only hope to be able to buy enough food. In Rugboya people assured that the elephant grass was their employment and if they would see a fire at night, they would run to stop it. In Malenka, people explained that if somebody burned all the grass, the whole village would be without employment. This is a very difficult, contradictory situation for the people. In Makama Bana, an elderly man said *“if you burn the elephant grass, you burn your job. But without burning – how shall we make agriculture?”*.

Firefighting unit: The company provided people with the phone number of the firefighting unit that they can call if they plan to burn their fields for farming or if they see a fire. Apparently though, there is only one firefighting unit to fight the fires in the whole company area. Therefore, it is no surprise, that several people reported having called the firefighter number but the latter came too late or did not appear at all (e.g. in Man-man or Worreh-wanda). People in Worreh-wanda explained that in March and April this year they called the firefighting units many times when they wanted to burn their bolilands, but they came too late in the day. Apparently, after 7pm it is too late for fires because the dew changed the conditions for making fire. In Mabereh, people reported that they called the firefighters several times but they did not come at all. In other villages like Malenka or Makaie people said that they did call the firefighters and they came on time. The question remains – and many people mentioned that too – how fires in such a large area with so many people depending on fires for farming can be controlled with only one firefighting unit.

¹⁸ See Monitoring Report 2014-2016

¹⁹ People were also informed about this at a meeting in Yainkasa in May 2016.

Criminalization: Two farmers in Man-man explained that before the company came, people had constructed huge fire belts of cleared areas to control the fire and they could do that according to their own rules. But now, these fire belts were not possible anymore and they were scared that the fire will go to elephant grass or the sugarcane and the police will come and interrogate them. In fact, people in Makama Bana recall that when the company staff informed them about the ban on fire, the staff threaten the people that if they catch them burning grass, they would call the police.

Dependency and Social Schemes

Dependency on company: Food security is a severe issue in all villages. People report that the price of rice per cup had risen in the past years due to poor economy of the country. They also report that they had to cut down on rice consumption and many could only afford one meal per day. In Laminaya, people said that now also the traders from Makeni would increase the price of rice because they would know that *“money has been introduced in this community”*, as one woman has put it. Before the company came, people relied more on local rice, which was easily affordable. Therefore, they remember, there was abundant rice for consumption and for sale. The problem now, as people in all communities mentioned, was that people highly depend on the company for their food security because of the loss of land and the many disruptions in their farming that the company has caused. Because of the employment being only for a few and then only temporary, food security is a permanent and severe concern. One woman in Malenka said that *“there is a crisis because the employment is gone now [temporary workers laid-off] and all depends on employment. Before Addax [ABSL], there was enough rice from the fields, but now it is not enough.”*

Farmer Development Scheme not working at the moment: In every community we visited, people reported that the Farmer Development Scheme (FDS) was not working at the moment. People expressed their frustration about the lack of access to FDS tractors in particular and assured that they were willing to pay for the service if reliable and timely. In Worreh-wanda for example, the headman of the village went to Sunbird to apply for FDS but the company had told him that they would not have any machines and people should find somebody else to rent them machines. At the emergency MSF, the Social Affairs Manager also confirmed the ineffectiveness of the FDS. She claimed that this is due Sunbird facing challenges in terms of resources. She further told that the tractors are not enough, and most are down and that this led to this year’s disruption.

Other services: The Farmer Development Program still runs for those communities that are still enrolled. According to the Social Affairs Manager in the emergency MSF meeting, in December 2017 they should be harvesting at the last village Mabere after which the FDP program is folding up. Some women report, that they still profit from the earlier Village Vegetable Garden program, which they now organize for themselves. However, they did not receive any support since Sunbird took over.

Contaminated Water, Boreholes and Tanks

Contaminated water: Water is a huge issue in most of the villages. In Rothun, the women told that they would therefore depend on river water that is contaminated from the water from the factory or run-off from the fields. Unverified claims from people suggest that sometimes, the water would look red and often people would get diarrhea and vomiting upon drinking from it. Also, people in Makama Bana reported that the company had destroyed their two earlier water wells when building canals, but had never built a new well for them so that now they depend on contaminated river water. In Man-man and also other villages with similar problems, people switched to drinking rain water instead, but in the dry season, the rain water ceases and they are forced to drink from the river. Only in Rugboya, people said that the quality of the river water was acceptable.



Picture 5: Factory in the background with contaminated water and dead trees in front

Boreholes: Many villages reported that there was no borehole (namely Rothun, Makama Bana, Man-man, Worre-wanda, Mabereh, Laminaya and Rugboya). People in these villages were very frustrated and disappointed. In Laminaya, a woman reported that *“we have engaged Addax [ABSL] so many times [on the issue of the water], we followed all the protocols. But nobody responded, also Sunbird did not respond.”* An old man in Man-man said that *“Addax [ABSL] made so many promises, also to care for our drinking water, but did nothing. But we do not even know Sunbird officially, so how can we make claims?”* In some villages though, ABSL did construct boreholes. In Makaie, people are satisfied with that well. Tiama also benefited from a borehole from ABSL, but people complained the water recently became rusty and unsafe to drink. In Malenka, the well became muddy and the company advised them not to use it any longer – and additionally, one well was not enough for this big village. In Romaro, the pump stopped working in May. The villages are beneficiaries of the Addax borehole project that previously constructed 20 boreholes in communities. There are no known maintenance plans for these boreholes.



Picture 6: SILNoRF assessing a borehole

The tanks of Tonka: Tonka is a village very close to the factory site. The company has told the people earlier, that they should refrain from drinking the river water because it was contaminated. The company further informed people, that it was also not possible to construct a borehole, because the groundwater was contaminated too. That resulted in the arrangement that the company brought four 5000-liter tanks in the village and refilled them twice a week. There were many conflicts about this arrangement, mostly about the water not being enough for the whole village. To their

dismay however, the company stopped delivering water to the community without further notice, since April 2017. This means that for about 4-5 months, there has been no water delivery. Only in the end of July, the company came once and filled a tank. Without the tanks, people were forced to drink river water. In April, the women went to the factory doors with their empty buckets to protest and to tell the

company that they would “*take their water*” instead. The women went to the gate and talked to a white person who said the company had no fuel and therefore they could not bring the tanks to Tonka. This issue was formally taken up by SiLNoRF in September 2017. SiLNoRF wrote a complaint letter on behalf of the community to the country’s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A joint SiLNoRF/EPA team was dispatched to the community to further verify the claims. It is reported, that the company upon receiving the complaint has met with the community and has decided to constantly supply them with the amount of water they need. SiLNoRF will further visit the community for an update on this.

Employment and Salaries

Number of jobs and type of work: There is no official and public company statistics about the people Sunbird employs. In emergency meeting held in November 2017, Sunbird gave a rough figure of a total 2500 employees at the moment. Sunbird further said that throughout the project area, 1,904 people were recruited from the communities for grass cutting, weeding and other related jobs. According to the information gathered from the local communities and local authorities, the company hires more people under the new ownership. This is mainly because the cutting of elephant grass is very labor-intensive. Other people were employed for weeding, spraying or planting cassava. All laborers from the communities are only temporarily employed with all the well-known adverse consequences on their employment security and social services. In some villages, people reported that under the previous ownership of AOG, there were at least some people permanently employed.

Higher salaries: The general take of people is that under the ownership of Sunbird, the company paid higher salaries. The base salary for the temporary workers in the fields are 614'000 SLL per month, which leaves 520'000 SLL to workers after deductions. This number is just above the national minimum wage. Workers reported that if they work over-hours, the salary could go up to 800'000 SLL or even 1'200'000 SLL.

Too high quota: In many of the villages, people said that they were allotted a plot per day to work and that we would be marked upon completion of the said plot (e.g. weeding or spraying) per day. Workers in Makama Bana or Makaie for example reported that if they would not finish the entire area allotted by the supervisor, the supervisor would not mark their names for the day – meaning that the whole day of work was in vain. The Paramount Chief of Mara explained that some more physically fit workers would work very hard and then finish their demarcated portion early – causing the company to increase the daily work area again. People, he went on, would be afraid to complain this unfair treatment in fear of losing their job. Connected to this, in Romaro and Makama Bana, people were unhappy and claimed that their overtime was not counted correctly.



Picture 7: contract of an elephant grass cutter

Late payment of salaries: A severe issue is that the company under the new ownership does not pay salaries in time. People in all villages reported this issue. On the time of the research (8th to 11th August 2017) the company has not yet paid the salaries for July. We held discussions with workers in Mabereh as well as the Paramount Chief of Mara to ascertain the reason behind the delay in salary pay. They informed us they had confronted the company officials about the unfortunate situation, only to hear from them that the company had no money and would pay after the government had paid for the electricity sold to the national grid. The salaries are now being paid, as Sunbird announced during the MSF emergency meeting held in November 2017.

Discrimination of women: None or only very few women were among the temporary workers in the villages. Particularly the job of grass cutting was considered men's job. Only in one village, people reported women being engaged in the work with elephant grass, but they were not cutting but tying and packing the bundles. A young woman from Makama Bana explained that the reason was that the village heads would be responsible to give a list with names to the company. And, as she said, *"the men always come first and the women are only considered if all men can be employed first."* In Rogboya, people added that the reason was also that the company came and said they wanted strong men –

already implying that they want men, and that men are more fit to use cutlasses. Fact remains, women are discriminated against when it comes to employment.

Demands from people

Farmer Development Schemes (FDS) or similar support for farming: All communities expressed the urgent need for FDS or a similar scheme to support their farming. This implies support for mechanized farming, i.e. access to tractors, support for seeds and other agricultural inputs. Some people assured that they were willing to pay for these services too. A young woman from Makama Bana explained that *“we want permanent crops like we had before Addax [ABSL] came. They give an income and we can support to pay school fees of our children. Addax gave a one-off payment for them and also the relatives from Makeni and Freetown came to take their share. Now we have no money for school fees, particularly for girls.”*



Picture 8: Women in a village gather for a visit of SILNoRF

Women’s businesses: The other major issue was support for women in particular to start their own small businesses. Women demanded trainings and access to capital to start with small businesses, but also to grow and sell vegetables and other crops. A young woman from Makama Bana said in *“we want support for farming and small business, so we can forget about Sunbird and just support our families.”*

Employment: Then, people want employment. After the loss of their land and the disruption of their farming practices, permanent employment to rely

on is crucial. This should be combined with job training, particularly for women to enable an independent income. Connected to this is the demand that the company must pay the workers timely.

Other needs: Last but not least, people raised a number of crucial issues: starting with food, safe drinking water, medical facilities, schools and sanitation. The Paramount Chief of Makari-Gbanti also raised these claims and said that these were *“all promises that were never kept. People lost so much land and their permanent crops. It is pathetic what they got for that.”*

Recommendations to Sunbird and the Government of Sierra Leone

This report provides an update on the situation in the area of the Mabilafu Project. The recommendations are therefore directed at the company and the Sierra Leonean Government. For recommendations directed at the international actors such as development finance institutions, earlier reports and reports of other organizations provide better background²⁰.

Engagement with affected people

- Sunbird/Addax must continue with the meetings with the Village Liaison Committee on a regular basis.
- The company must support the University of Makeni (Unimak) to organize the Multistakeholder fora on a quarterly basis.
- In the meetings and fora, everybody must have the possibility to set agenda items and get time to speak and be heard.
- Towards the affected people, Sunbird must be more transparent. It is relevant for these people to know about the financial situation of the company and its ownership. The company is raising the expectations of the communities by promising additional investments in the Mabilafu Project, without a clear information on where the money will come from, and what risks are involved.

Renewal of contract and land lease fee

- The company should engage in the process of renegotiating the land lease contracts. The company must engage not only the chiefdom and district councils who signed the land lease contract, but also the land owners who signed the acknowledgement agreement.
- Sunbird must pay the land lease fees timely and fully. Obligations of third parties towards the company cannot be mixed up with this obligation.
- The Government of Sierra Leone should play an active role in supporting the land lease process through provisions of resources to the local authorities and land owners for mobilization.

Outgrowing scheme and elephant grass

- The company must inform people well in advance and completely about the planned outgrower scheme, and the risks involved for the communities.
- The effects that cassava mono-cropping has on the soil is a risk for the farmers as well as the environment. The company must examine these risks and present a strategy to all stakeholders.
- Land owners need to be asked for their consent before the company can cut grass on their lands.
- The dilemma caused by the fire ban must be given more attention. The company must engage with people to work out a way to ensure the people's food security.
- The Government must ensure that the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS) should follow outgrower process carefully in order to ensure that food security is not impacted along the way.

²⁰ SiLNoRF and Bfa (2016), "Monitoring report 2014 – 2016"

<https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2016/03/MonRep-Addax-2016.pdf>

Bread for all and Bread for the World (2016), "The Weakest should not Bear the Risk",

<https://brotfueralle.ch/content/uploads/2016/06/The-Weakest-Should-not-Bear-the-Risk.pdf>

Fern (2017), "European Development Finance Institutions and land grabs", <https://brotfueralle.ch/land-grabbing-in-afrika-finanziert-durch-europaeische-steuerzahler/>

Swedwatch (2017), "No Business, No Rights", <http://www.swedwatch.org/en/regions/afrika-south-of-the-sahara/swedfund-fmo-lacked-responsibility-leaving-project-without-exit-strategy/>

Secure working conditions

- The company must employ people on a permanent basis in order to ensure their job security.
- The quota that people have to fulfill in one day's work must be adjusted.
- Sunbird must pay the salaries in time. Obligations of third parties towards the company cannot be mixed up with this obligation.
- The company must ensure that women get equal chances to be employed.

Safe drinking water and farming support

- The company must stop contaminating the surface and ground water in the region. In cases where this is not possible (anymore), the company must provide safe water for drinking and other purposes. In particular, Sunbird must immediately find a solution for the issues regarding water in Tonka.
- Many communities that do not have access to safe drinking water and need immediate assistance such as bore holes. The company should support the communities to repair the broken boreholes.
- Government should provide water resources for affected communities.
- The company must engage with the people to discuss options to support the farming operations of people. This can be a form of the farmer development program. The company must start such a support for the next farming season.