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Indian companies' investments in Ethiopia displace people: Activists

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Indian companies that have invested in agriculture in Ethiopia are under fire from civil society groups. The companies have been accused of large-scale land grabbing, which has led to displacement of the tribal population there.

About 8,000 people have been displaced in the Gambella region, where Indian firms have bought land in deals with the Ethiopian government, according to Nyikaw Ochalla, director of Anywaa Survival Organisation (ASO). Speaking on the sidelines of a conference organised by the Oakland Institute, a California-based think tank, along with ASO and Indian NGOs such as Kalpavriksh, Ochalla warned the conflict between the natives and investors, as seen in India, could become widespread in Ethiopia, too.

He alleged the Indian companies had been offered land at almost no cost by the Ethiopian government. “Our backwardness is the only guarantee for the future of the government. But should the Indian government or industry close its eyes to this reality and join the Ethiopian government in exploitation of the people there?” he asked.

He urged the Indian government and industry associations to review the trade policy with a country, which was “ruled by an undemocratic government”.

Indian, Chinese and Saudi Arabian companies are the leading investors in Ethiopia’s farm lands. These companies produced crops such as roses and maize, which were of little food value to the local

population, said Ochalla.

Anuradha Mittal, a researcher with the Oakland Institute, alleged these land deals could not be traced on government records, as there was no transparency on these. "These are dealings that the government would not talk about openly," she said.

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