Kenya biofuel project opposed

March 23 2011

An employee shows Jatropha seeds. Environmental goups have protested an expansive project to grow jatropha in Kenya for biofuels, arguing that such production would emit more carbon than fossil fuels.

Environmental goups Wednesday protested an expansive project to grow jatropha in Kenya for biofuels, arguing that such production would emit more carbon than fossil fuels.

The Kenyan franchise of Italy's Nuove Iniziative Industriali is planning to farm 50,000 hectares of jatropha near Malindi, a seaside tourist resort in southern Kenya.

"Taking into account the emissions produced throughout the production and consumption process... jatropha would emit between 2.5 and six times more greenhouse gases," said ActionAid, Nature Kenya and the

British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The groups said the project is driven by commercial interests in Europe where the European Union has set a target to produce 10 percent of transport energy from biofuels by 2020.

"It is scandalous that EU nations are passing biofuels off as a green solution to climate change. Like most other biofuels, jatropha could actually end up increasing carbon emissions," they argued.

Nuove Iniziative Industriali has rejected the pollution concerns saying the project would create hundreds of jobs.

Jatropha is a shrub originally from South America. It is drought resistant and produces oil-containing seeds.

The United Nations Environment Programme said in 2009 that jatropha can mitigate greenhouse gas emissions if grown on degraded land, but can also be carbon intensive if its farming entails land use changes.

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Citation: Kenya biofuel project opposed (2011, March 23) retrieved 19 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2011-03-kenya-biofuel-opposed.html