Land grab in Africa: Emerging land system drivers in a teleconnected world

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Freshly harvested seeds from Jatropha Curcas. Cabo Delgado, Mozambique (Photo: Laura Vang Rasmussen).

Land Grab in Africa: Emerging land system drivers in a teleconnected world

by Cecilie Friis & Anette Reenberg

GLP Report No. 1

(Report includes detailed table of investments according to country)
Introduction

The land change science community has for decades focused on the accelerating pressure on the Earth’s limited land resources (e.g., Lambin & Geist 2006) caused by human-environmental interaction, and large research efforts have been put into identifying and differentiating the proximate and underlying driving forces of land use and land cover changes at local to global scales. Turner et al. (2007) summarize the current state of insight by noting that virtually all land has been affected in some way by human action and that much of this change is a direct consequence of land use: 40% of the Earth’s land surface is used for agriculture (including improved pasture and coadapted grassland).

Table 1. Land deals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipient country</th>
<th>Number of deals</th>
<th>Magnitude (1,000ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Min</td>
<td>Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (all 27 countries)</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>51,415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hence, human land use decisions play a crucial role in driving changes in the land system and the dynamic interaction between socioeconomic and biophysical drivers of change (GLP 2005). The complexity of the coupled human-environmental system is widely acknowledged and the portfolio of drivers of change is continuously developing as a result of evolution or radical shifts in economic, social, cultural or environmental conditions. As an example, the recent global crises in food, energy, finance and the environment has driven a change in perspectives of land use. In some parts of the world transnational and national economic actors acquire large tracts of land outside their own national borders in order to provide food and energy security at home. The terms ‘teleconnection’ and ‘land grab’ has been used to describe the disconnection of demand and production spaces and the explosion of global commercial land transactions revolving, for example, around the production and sale of food and biofuels. On this background, land grabbing is certainly to be considered an emerging, prominent factor on the list of significant drivers of land system change in certain parts of the globe.

Especially the lands of the Global South are increasingly perceived as a potential factor of production for the increasing global demand for alternative energy (primarily biofuels), food crops, mineral deposits and reservoirs of environmental services. Notably Africa has become an attractive destination for land investments (Mbow 2010) because of its relatively low population density. Millions of hectares are bought or leased by nations or private companies based outside Africa, as well as by more wealthy countries on the continent such as Libya and Egypt.

Table 2. Land resources and land deals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipient country</th>
<th>FAO land resource data (1,000ha)</th>
<th>Land deals as percentage of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Land area</td>
<td>Agricultural area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>190,000</td>
<td>36,077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>58,154</td>
<td>40,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>237,600</td>
<td>136,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>88,580</td>
<td>34,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>122,019</td>
<td>39,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>78,638</td>
<td>48,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>19,710</td>
<td>12,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>226,705</td>
<td>22,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>91,077</td>
<td>78,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>74,339</td>
<td>29,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>22,754</td>
<td>14,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>9,408</td>
<td>4,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>19,253</td>
<td>8,657</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although foreign nationalities have been engaged in agriculture in Africa for many years, the scale of the business has increased dramatically in recent years. Some see this as a major threat to the livelihoods of the local rural poor. Others see economic opportunity for local communities that could benefit from the income generated from the
leasing or selling of the land. The debate on informal websites (i.e. GRAIN 2010; ILC Bloc 2010) and in more rigorous reports (Cotula et al. 2009; Görgen et al. 2009; Smaller & Mann 2009; von Braun & Meinzen-Dick 2009) has been considerable in the last couple of years. However, precise information on the magnitude of the challenge, in terms of the amount and location of land concerned, is very limited. The ambition of this GLP report is to scrutinize and triangulate the scattered quantitative information that is currently available from various informal sources on land grabs in Africa in order to provide an answer to the question of ‘where, how much and for what’ investors have been acquiring land on the African continent. By this, we aim to provide reasonably GLP Report No. 1 – Land Grab in Africa accurate insight into the magnitude of this emerging pressure on land as of April 2010, when the information search was concluded.

Conclusion

This report has examined the international investments in agricultural lands in Africa. A quantitative estimate for the magnitude of the land deals has been given, based on the available media information in the International Land Coalitions’ blog Commercial pressures on land. Despite some reservations concerning accuracy of the data, the results of the analysis indicate that the magnitude of the land deals is significant and that land deals currently are negotiated throughout Africa. The results presented here indicate that the amount of land concerned could be as large as 51 to 63 mio ha – an area equivalent to France.

A cluster of deals are identified in the eastern part of the African continent in countries like Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda and Madagascar, while other large recipient countries are Sudan, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In ten of the identified recipient countries the deals represent more than 5% of the current agricultural area – in Uganda more than 14%, in Mozambique more than 21% and in DR Congo more than 48% of the agricultural land! Thus, the consequences of the land deals can be expected to be very large for the local population and environment, with impacts such as agricultural intensification, forest degradation, displacement of local populations, increasing local food insecurity and increasing poverty. All in all, the international land investments have emerged as a new significant driver of land system change in an increasing teleconnected world.

Source: Global Land Project
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- Bahasa Indonesia
- Català
- Catalan
- Dansk
- Deutsch
- English
- Español
- français
- Italiano
- Kurdish
- Malagasy
- Nederlands
- Português
- Suomi
- Svenska
- Türkçe
- العربية

Special content

- audio
- contracts
- off-topic
- video
- water
- wikileaks
- women

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  06 Jun 2018

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  06 Jun 2018

* Bollore’s Belgian friend in court
  06 Jun 2018

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  06 Jun 2018

* Failed farmland deals: a growing legacy of disaster and pain
  06 Jun 2018
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05 Jun 2018

Kerry

Very interesting work/list. So what is the pathway forward? What are the policy options? Social movement?
25 May 2018

John

Of all the agricultural land in Australia suitable for growing food what percentage is now owned by foreign investors? 5, 10, 15% or more and when do y...
25 May 2018

boucard

Comment se procurer ce film pour des débats publics. Peuples solidaires, association à laquelle j'appartiens, a organisé la semaine dernière une r...
11 May 2017

Elijah

Was pleased to read your article. I am however surprised that the story of the frustration that DFL is going through with the investor being harassed b...
10 Feb 2017

sebastian

Excelente trabajo de investigación. Se los agradezco mucho. Consultaré todas las fuentes que ustedes proporcionan para tener un informe más acabado c...
09 Dec 2016

Anonymous

La critique est facile mais l'art difficile; j'ai rarement vu des ONG créer des emplois et contribuer au développement socio-économique autant que d...
29 Nov 2016

Christopher Ajua

The same political and economic problems that existed in Cameroon during these crises persist and continue to plague the lives of Cameroonians, especia...
26 Nov 2016