

Chapter 2

Implications of Foreign Land Acquisitions in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Grey Literatures

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ABSTRACT

The acquisition of vast tracts of land by private investors now referred to as land grabbing became a widespread phenomenon after 2007. The nature and magnitude of these acquisitions have led to widespread debate about its positive and negative impacts on local communities. This chapter provides recent empirical thinking on the implications of foreign land acquisitions in Africa. The chapter, among others, reveals that foreign land acquisitions have both positive and negative consequences for Africa. For instance, while it was widely demonstrated that it improves access to capital and technology for increased agricultural production, it was also noted by several scholars that the practice is denying peasants access to strategic resources in many local communities in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Land is one of the most fundamental gifts of nature. It plays significant roles in the sustainability of households, communities, nations and the world. The lack of adequate and secure access to land and natural resources by the rural and urban poor has been identified as the prime cause of hunger and poverty in the world (HTF, 2005). Land is a prerequisite for agricultural production. Thus, in Africa where a mammoth proportion of the population engages in agriculture, the importance

of land is inestimable. To the vast majority of societies in Africa, land is regarded not simply as an economic or environmental asset, but as a social, cultural and ontological resource. Land remains an important factor in the construction of social identity, the organisation of religious life and the production and reproduction of culture. The link across generations is ultimately defined by the complement of land resources which families, lineages and communities share and control. Indeed land is fully embodied in the very spirituality of society (AU/ECA, 2009).

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The acquisition of vast tracts of land from Africa by wealthier nations and private investors now referred to as land grabbing became a widespread phenomenon after 2007. The nature and magnitude of these acquisitions has led to widespread debate about its positive and negative impacts on local communities (Zoomers, 2010; De Schutter, 2011).

Over the past two years, the phenomenon of land grabbing has been increasingly described by the media as a growing trend across the world, most notably in Africa. Although it is difficult to precisely quantify the phenomenon, land grabbing incidences have been recorded in more than 60 countries around the world. Recent estimates indicate that between 80 to 227 million hectares having been grabbed in different parts of the world (Borras et al, 2011). The Global Land Project identified 62 million hectares in just 27 African countries in 2009 (GRAIN, 2011). A 2009 study titled “Land grab or development opportunity?” jointly produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), analyzed land acquisitions of 1000 hectares or more between 2004 and 2009 from four African countries of Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar and Mali. According to the study, about two million hectares of land across the four countries have been signed over to foreign interests, including a 10,000-hectare project in Mali and a 450,000-hectare plantation for agrofuels in Madagascar (Cotula et al., 2009).

Other countries such as Nigeria which previously have few incidences of land grabbing are beginning to take centre stage in land grabbing deals. The first land deals in recent time in Nigeria was completed in Kwara State in 2004 when the Kwara State Government invoked the provisions of the Land Use Act to appropriate 13,000 hectares of land from local farmers in Shonga region, and allocated 1,000 hectares each to 13 commercial farmers from Zimbabwe on a 25-year lease, in the

first instance, and renewable thereafter, at no cost whatsoever to the farmers (Ariyo and Mortimore, 2011). In January 2012, GRAIN reported seven completed lands deals in Edo, Abia, Anambra and Taraba States of Nigeria estimated at 392, 292 million hectares. Land grabbing as a phenomenal has elicited great debates about its implications for development among scholars, government and the civil society. Despite the spate of media reports and some published research, international land deals and their impacts remain still little understood. This chapter is a step towards filling this gap (Cotula et al., 2009). Thus, the goal of this chapter is to examine the socio-economic implications of land grabbing in Africa. It also analyses the scale, pace, actors as well as drivers in Africa. The above is achieved using historical and desk-based research design. The desk-based research comprised the examination of existing literature to help situate this current study within the context of existing evidence. It involved an analysis of published reports, databases and research papers.

CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Land is all the area of the earth’s surface, including the physical environment. Thus, it include not only soil but also landforms, climate and hydrology, plant and animal population, and the physical results of human activity like terraces and drainage works (FAO, 1992). It also encompasses such features as underlying superficial deposits, climate and water resources, and also the plant and animal communities which have developed as a result of the interaction of these physical conditions. The results of human activities, reflected by changes in vegetative cover or by structures, are also regarded as features of the land. Similarly, UNEP (1999) defines land as a delineable area of the earth’s terrestrial surface, encompassing all attributes of the biosphere immediately above

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