

Chapter 56

Implications of Land Grabbing on Sustainable Food Systems

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ABSTRACT

Land is one of the most valuable assets required for agricultural production. In Africa, smallholder agricultural producers are faced with a lot of challenges that have highly impacted on productivity and sustainable food systems. The global demand for agricultural land for food and bio-fuel production has increasingly led to the emergence of land grabbing after the 2007-08 food price crisis. The rural poor are the victim of land grabbing as they are faced with declining farmlands, low income generation, and loss of livelihood activities. These have affected the food security status of the rural poor as farmlands are taken from them. The proponents of land grabbing revealed that developing countries are expected to benefit from investments inflow on grabbed land, development of infrastructure, increased income generation, and job creation. They argue that investment in agriculture is necessary to stimulate agricultural production; however, this situation has brought negative effects as most investors failed to keep their end of the transaction on land acquisition deals.

INTRODUCTION

Land is one of the most valuable assets required for agricultural production. In Africa, smallholder agricultural producers are faced with a lot of challenges which highly impact their productivity and ultimately their ability to achieve food security. Among the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations, Goal 2 is targeted at “Ending hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”. Achieving this goal involves the production and distribution/disposal (through sales) of food crops.

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Smallholder farmers grow more than 70% of world's food (Elver, 2015) and have access to small farmland holdings of at most 2 hectares which could be through land acquisition (purchase, lease or inherited). Land acquisition refers to the process of securing a piece of land for public or private use. It could be legally or illegally through willful or forceful acquisition of other peoples' land (Yusuf et al., 2014).

Any purchase of large-scale land larger than 200 hectares or twice the median which is equivalent to ten times the size of an average small farm is referred to as land grabbing (Oxfam international, 2012). A land acquisition is considered as a land grab when at least one of these happens: there is a violation of human rights (right to local population food production, right to own land, or there is violation of the equal rights of women land ownership) (Lee, 2015); when contracts are unclear and transparent with binding commitments on employment and benefit-sharing; when informed consent are disregarded; or meaningful participation of local communities are ignored.

The World Bank estimated (World Bank, 2010) that in 2009, forty-five million hectares of farmland in developing countries have been subject of transactions or negotiations. These large-scale land purchase or acquisition as it is sometimes called accentuates the rapid increase in yield that they can produce and the additional employment they can provide. However, the benefits of this additional agricultural production are not often felt locally (Anseeuw et al., 2012a; D'Odorico & Rulli, 2013). This is because the loss of access to land can ultimately spell significant dietary, social, cultural and economic consequences for rural communities in the targeted areas (Borras et al., 2011; De Schutter, 2011). Loss of farm land to large scale acquisition can lead to partial or total loss of investment due to insufficient compensations by the individuals or organisations purchasing the land. It may ultimately lead to outmigration.

The world's poorest countries experience most land grab as these countries do not have formal land right and also do not have governments who are willing and able to advocate for the local populations at the expense of losing contract from these land grabbing actors. With land grabbing, local populations are excluded from the use of large parcels of land for production purposes from which household income is obtained through sales of produce from the land (Graham, 2010).

In most cases, local people are usually the first victims of the impacts of land grabbing as they are faced with at least one of the following consequences: smallholder farming decline (negative influence on agricultural jobs); affects women in particular (their ability to acquire land as a production resource); difficulties accessing land by domestic farmers as a result of rising land prices; deterioration of local population communities' or grabbed country's food security; contempt for ownership of and usage rights to land, which can lead to conflict and/or endanger vulnerable populations.

On this premise, this chapter seeks to determine the implication of land grabbing on sustainable food systems. It will specifically seek to determine if land grabbing is occurring, identify the drivers of land grabbing, the extent of land grabbing and the impact of land grabbing on food systems.

CONCEPT OF LAND GRABBING

Several terms are used interchangeably to define demand for large scale land acquisition globally. Terms such as large-scale agriculture investment, global land grabbing and international agriculture investment have often been used to define land grabbing. "Land grabbing is the control (whether through ownership, lease, concession, contracts, quotas, or general power) of larger than locally-typical amounts of land by any persons or entities (public or private, foreign or domestic) via any means (legal or illegal) for purposes of speculation, extraction, resource control or commodification at the expense of peasant

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