The Politics of "Win-Win" Narratives: Land Grabs as Development Opportunity?

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DRAFT paper

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Introduction

In the Makeni area of central Sierra Leone, a land dispute has flared up after Addax Bioenergy, a division of the Swiss-based energy corporation Addax & Oryx Group, won a 50-years lease for around 40,000 hectares (98,842 acres) to produce ethanol for export to the EU market. When they signed away their land with thumb prints in villages of mud huts without electricity or running water, local farmers were told that the Addax project wouldn't affect the seasonally waterlogged "bolilands" where most subsistence rice production takes place, because the sugarcane was to be planted in drier areas (Akam 2010). From the outset, the firm committed to create 2,000 jobs, train and support farmers with inputs and agricultural equipment, bring infrastructural development, and generate further employment opportunities for local businesses and outgrowers.[1] Since 2008, however, Addax has employed only fifty local men to work in its sugarcane nursery, paying them the equivalent of a mere USD $2.50 a day on a casual basis (Daniel and Mittal 2010). In the meantime, irrigation channels dug up by the company have drained some of the bolilands, thus damaging the rice fields, while other food crops such as cassava and wild palm trees used for cooking oil were razed when the land was leased (Akam 2010). Local pastoralists and land tenants are being displaced to make way to the sugar plantation, and the large-scale use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers for agrofuel production is threatening the groundwater and food harvests in surrounding lands (Baxter 2010).[2]

By the same token, as a result of legislative reforms recommended by the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC), Addax benefits from a broad set of incentives,

[1] See Addax Bioenergy website, available at: http://www.addax-oryx.com/AddaxBioenergy/Addax-Bioenergy Questions&Answers.pdf.

[2] Given that the Addax project is supported by European Development Finance Institutions and the African Development Bank, it has been geared to meet "Performance Standards" on local consultation and social sustainability laid down by the World Bank. Accordingly, the company claims to have established a "formal grievance mechanism" based on working committees as well as letter boxes installed throughout the project area, in order to inform local communities about the project. The efficacy of suggestion boxes as a means to obtain informed consent is nonetheless highly questionable in a context where the majority of local inhabitants cannot read or write (cf. Addax Bioenergy website, Baxter 2010, MADAM press conference 8/6/2010, available at: http://www.madam-sl.org/?Projects:Right_to_Food.)

exemptions, and protections afforded to foreign agribusiness investors in Sierra Leone.[3] These include: attractive tax rates, with complete exemption from corporate income tax up to 2020; complete exemption from import duty on farm machinery, agro-processing equipment, agro-chemicals and other key inputs; 3 year exemption from import duty on any other plant and equipment; 125% tax deduction for expenses on research and development, training and export promotion; and full repatriation of profits, dividends and royalties (SLIEPA 2010). Furthermore, the Addax project is protected under MIGA (World Bank's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency) and ATI (African Trade Insurance Agency) accords, and benefits from the technical assistance and advisory services provided by the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) in partnership with the World Bank's IFC, and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).[4] Within this framework, the "development" and growth of corporate-based markets, export revenues, and land rights is prioritized at the social, environmental, and economic expense of local communities.

Far from representing an isolated or singular case, this plantation project in Sierra Leone is part of a much wider, global process. Characterized by a severe lack of transparency, high levels of speculative activity, and extremely limited public consultation, the rush to purchase or lease vast tracts of arable land across the global South has indeed reached enormous proportions in the midst of the deepening food, fuel, finance, and climate crises of the past few years. In this respect, the World Bank estimates that about 45 million hectares of farmland have been subject to negotiations or transactions since 2008, compared to an average annual expansion of agricultural land of less than 4 million hectares before 2008 (World Bank 2010:vi). Specifically, the World Bank (2010:35) reports that a quarter of all projects involve more than 200,000 ha,

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[3] The International Finance Corporation (IFC) is part of the World Bank's private sector arm. Its primary activity is private sector financing, as well as the provision of investment lending and advisory services to both investors and state governments. It also carries out technical cooperation projects in many countries to make their "legislative environment" more attractive to foreign investors. These activities are often aimed at promoting investment climate reforms such as cutting down on administrative and institutional barriers, developing investment promotion agencies (e.g. SLIEPA in Sierra Leone), and advising governments on changes to tax, customs, and land laws. See Daniel and Mittal (2010).

[4] As a member of the World Bank Group, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) was established to promote foreign direct investment (FDI) in developing countries by insuring investors against political risk, advising governments on attracting investment, sharing information through on-line investment information services, and mediating disputes between investors and governments. See http://www.miga.org/about/index_sv.cfm?stid=1736.

and only a quarter consist of less than 10,000 hectares—a scale which is disproportionate in size in comparison to average land holdings in the affected regions.[5]

At a time of heightened market volatility, this ongoing and dramatic rise in the volume of cross-border land grabs is driven by a complex combination of mechanisms of accumulation. National governments in a number of "finance-rich, resource-poor" countries have started to invest in offshore farming projects through government agencies, sovereign wealth funds, public and para-statal enterprises, in order to guarantee their access to productive lands and water resources as part of a long-term strategy for food and energy security (Daniel and Mittal 2009:3, Borras and Franco 2011:14). Correspondingly, increasing investment opportunities in the fuel and food sectors, combined with a general decrease in trade and investment barriers, have prompted a surge in land acquisitions by corporate players pursuing vertical integration strategies and seeking "to build, maintain, or extend large-scale extractive and agro-industrial enterprises" (Borras and Franco 2010a:508, Taylor and Bending 2009:9). In particular, private investors have been encouraged to acquire land for agro-fuel production by public policies that make it mandatory to include a percentage of biodiesel and ethanol in transportation fuels, or that grant subsidies and tax exemptions to processing companies (Meinzen-Dick and Markelova 2009:70).[6] The emergence of new markets for carbon credits and payments for biomass conservation within the context of cap and trade programs and REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) initiatives has further contributed to the rush to control agricultural and forest lands all over Africa, Asia, and Latin America. (AGTER 2010:16).

[5] According to the World Bank (2010: xiv), more than 75% of these deals involve African land. Strikingly, in a continent where most small holdings consist of no more than two-or three-hectares plots (Kugelman 2009:1), land transfers amounted to 2.7 million ha in Mozambique, 4 million in Sudan, 1.6 million in Liberia, and 1.2 million in Ethiopia.

[6] Specifically, the US Renewable Fuel Standard aims to increase ethanol use by 3.5 billion gallons between 2005 and 2012, and the EU aims to increase the proportion of agrofuels used in land transport to 10 percent by 2020. Not surprisingly, as Franco et al. (2010: 664) underscore, most members of the European Biofuel Technology Platform (EBFTP)—the EU consultative body which has highly influenced the formation and implementation of EU agrofuel policies—come from the oil, auto, biotech, biofuels, and forest products industries, as well as from the industrial farmers' organization COPA-COGECA. Within this framework, Borras and Franco (2011:28) argue, "biofuels policy will be aggressively pursued based on calculations about corporate profit, rather than on official discourses around GHG savings or livelihood generation in producing countries." Indeed, as reported by Friends of the Earth Europe (2010), European companies figure prominently in the recent surge of land grabbing for agrofuels in Africa. For example, the UK company Sun Biofuels has acquired land in Ethiopia (80,000ha), Tanzania (8,000 ha) and Mozambique (5,000 ha) to grow jatropha; the UK-based CAMS Group bought 45,000 ha in Tanzania to produce ethanol from sweet sorghum; and the German company Flora Eco Power has spent $77 million in land purchases in Ethiopia for biofuel production using contract farming.

In a parallel development, many private-sector financiers are turning towards land and agriculture as strategic assets poised to produce significant returns in an otherwise shaky financial climate. Seeking to capitalize financially on the food and energy crises, and convinced that the price of arable land will continue to rise in the future, private investors have unleashed a wave of newly created investment structures and financial instruments over the past few years, raising capital to acquire land overseas and invest across the entire agricultural value chain (GRAIN 2009, Graham et al. 2010). In their pursuit of double-digit revenue gains, hedge funds, investment banks, private equity funds and the like are treating not only land but also food security as an increasingly globalized commodity that "provides a hedge against inflation, contributes to portfolio diversification," and could even be traded in futures markets (Blumenthal 2009:58).[7] By the same token, the recent, aggressive inflow of capital into farmland and agribusiness transactions has attracted a significant volume of funds from a large number of multilateral development organizations and development financial institutions (DFI) such as the WB's IFC, the European Investment Bank (EIB), and the African Development Bank (AfDB), as well as single-country development agencies. Financed by "public" investors (i.e. member states), these institutions are working to provide a war chest of financial, advisory, technical, legal, and infrastructural tools through which corporate agendas can be sustained and pushed forward.

Fuelling new waves of massive land enclosures by foreign investors, along with the conversion of local land uses into monoculture-based, export-oriented enterprises, this global rush for farmland poses a direct threat to rural economies and livelihoods, land reform agendas, and international food security. Paradoxically, while "host" governments are involved in a "race to the bottom" to attract investors, the expansion of corporate farming is exacerbating tenure insecurity, displacing local producers, and undermining the ecological sustainability of local land and water resources with profound and long-term implications for the economic and social structures of rural societies. As such, "land grabbing is not simply the latest opportunity to make speculative investments for quick, massive profits; it is part of a longer process in which

[7] In this respect, while Soros Economic Development Fund President Stewart Paperin maintains that "food security will become the next tradable commodity" in what can be considered as "the decade of agriculture in Africa" (Gillam 2010), new proposals for "alternative food security investments" have recently emerged within the finance industry. These include the creation of "farmland futures contracts" to be traded by investors, hedgers and speculators in addition to current financial assets like equity, debt, and commodity derivatives (Kanitra 2011).

agrochemical–pharma–food–transport corporations are taking control of agriculture" to the detriment of millions of small producers and land users who are struggling to achieve and secure their access to land and food sovereignty rights (GRAIN 2010a:3).

To be sure, the case studies included in the World Bank's 2010 publication "Rising Global Interest in Farmland" document clearly that these deals are disproportionately benefiting corporate players at the expense of rural livelihoods and environments. Focusing on large land transfers in 14 different countries during 2004-09, the report underscores how most projects: i) ignored the proper legal procedures for land acquisitions; ii) displaced local people without compensation; iii) encroached on areas not transferred to the investor; iv) had strong negative gender effects; v) were environmentally destructive; vi) created far fewer jobs than promised; vii) leased land for free or well below its value; and viii) excluded pastoralists and internally displaced people from consultations (World Bank 2010:xxii,50). Accordingly, the overall conclusion of the report is that "many investments…failed to live up to expectations and, instead of generating sustainable benefits, contributed to asset loss and left local people worse off than they would have been without the investment." In fact, "even though an effort was made to cover a wide spectrum of situations, case studies confirm that in many cases benefits were lower than anticipated or did not materialize at all" (World Bank 2010:51).

And yet, rather than calling for a moratorium on large-scale land allocations, the World Bank claims that we should not get alarmed, for these "immense risks" and "real dangers" can be turned into "equally large opportunities." Specifically, the World Bank insistently points out that "new investments in agriculture could help create the preconditions for sustained, broad-based development" by allowing "land abundant countries to gain access to better technology and more jobs for poor farmers and other rural citizens" while increasing "productivity and effectiveness" in the utilization of large areas of uncultivated or low-yield land (ix). Similarly, several research institutions and international governance agencies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), have proposed ways to make the land grab phenomenon a "win-win" situation for both investors and "host" countries, whereby profit-seeking endeavors can be reconciled with broader "development" goals.[8] In this respect, the International Food Policy

[8] As early as September 2008, Director-General of the FAO Jacques Diouf expressed his support to the increase in farmland investments from oil rich Middle-East states, arguing that "if the deals are constructed properly, they have

Research Institute (IFPRI) believes that investment projects can "provide key resources for agriculture" and benefit smallholders involved in contract farming and out-grower schemes (Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009). Following this view, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) portrays massive foreign investments in rural areas as an opportunity for agriculture-led development, poverty reduction and economic growth. Indeed, while recognizing that "landlessness and land fragmentation are growing worldwide," and that large-scale acquisitions have led to increased land concentration, forced evictions and "land-use changes to the detriment of food security, bio-diversity and the environment" (2009:5,7), IFAD goes on to argue that "increased investments in food and agro-fuel production flowing to rural areas of developing countries could present important benefits and opportunities for poor rural communities" (ibid: 8). These include: the development of processing industries; increased agricultural productivity through the provision of improved seed varieties, know-how, financial services, and new technologies; livelihood diversification and employment generation through contract farming/out-grower schemes; and increased access to reliable markets (ibid).

Arguably, the institutional framing of land grabs as win-win development outcomes is premised upon a number of assumptions that need to be overcome when considering adequate responses to this global phenomenon. On the one hand, the claim that large-scale investments can improve global food and energy security by increasing production in "low-yield" areas of "land abundant" countries reflects the reductionism of mainstream, capital-centric projects of agrarian transformation and provides no account of actual land uses, resource rights, and land reform agendas. On the other hand, the argument that land acquisitions contribute to rural development by "enabling" smallholders to gain access to inputs, technologies, and markets through contract farming and other "partnership" arrangements fails to locate the expansion of commercially-oriented farming within global agro-food-fuel commodity chains controlled by the monopoly power of corporate capital.

As a whole, the institutional legitimization of land grabs is rooted in a "model" of agricultural development which is fomenting rural displacement and dispossession while exacerbating environmental problems on a global scale. Such an approach, as Borras and Franco (2010:515) put it, "a priori dismisses the possibility of other development pathway options and

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the potential to transform developing economies by providing jobs both in agriculture and other supporting industries like transportation and warehousing" (Coker 2008).

ignores the clamor of those who believe that other pathways are possible—and better—and are either working toward or attempting to actualize them." Correspondingly, it is precisely in the name of "development" that public investors are becoming increasingly complicit of and directly engaged in processes of land grabbing, thus deepening the fundamental causes of the global food, energy, and climate crises.

Yield gaps, satellite images, and corporate enclosures

> *There's no other place in the world where there's as much acreage that is low productivity as in Africa. Well, you just need to help these farmers get their productivity up. Many of those land deals are beneficial, and it would be too bad if some were held back because of Western groups' ways of looking at things.* (Bill Gates interviewed by Tami Hultman, AllAfrica, 9 February 2011).

In 2008, agricultural commodity prices on world markets reached their highest levels in 30 years: global wheat prices rose 130 percent, rice 74 percent, with similar spiraling costs of corn, soybeans, cooking oil, and other major foodstuffs. As a result, a cascade of food riots erupted in more than 40 countries around the globe, from Haiti to Cameroon to Indonesia, where people took the streets in anger at being unable to afford the food they need. At the same time, bringing together different factors (weather problems, the diversion of crops into agrofuels, oil price hikes, speculative trade, and growing meat consumption) into a "perfect storm scenario" (McMichael 2009) of dwindling supplies and rising demand, much of the official discourse called for the formulation of production-oriented, market-based responses to the surge in food prices. Correspondingly, global development institutions like the World Bank were quick to reframe the food crisis as an "opportunity" to reverse a long period of declining investment in agriculture, bring more land into production, increase productivity by means of agribusiness technologies, and enhance trade liberalization (cf. McMichael and Schneider 2011:121). This "narrow economistic conceptualization" (Scoones 2010) of the crisis is in turn directly related to the characterization of large-scale investments in farmland as a win-win situation whereby "development" is achieved through mechanized farming and higher yields.

The argument that land grabs constitute a "development opportunity" insofar as they are aimed at boosting crop production is part of an ongoing effort to promote the role of the

corporate sector in the global provisioning of food and energy supplies. During the height of the 2008 agflation, for example, the World Bank launched a New Deal on Global Food Policy, which pushed for a vast expansion in agricultural production through increased lending to agribusiness and the agro-industry. The number of IFC's investments across the agribusiness value chain has also grown exponentially since 2008, with special emphasis on the increased incorporation of large tracts of fertile land into productive use. In particular, in February 2009, the IFC teamed up with Altima Partners to create the $625 million "One World Agricultural Development Fund" aimed at investing in farm production, high-input technologies, and agricultural land in "emerging market countries" (IFCa 2009). Similarly, the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) recently established a Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) with the aim to "raise the capacity of private entrepreneurs" as a key plank in the quest to boost agricultural productivity. Within this framework, the rhetoric of the global food crisis is deployed as a legitimizing device for land grabs, prioritizing an approach to development that reflects the agribusiness model of "productivity increase" and is geared toward deepened private sector control.[9]

This model is further reproduced by the assumption that large-scale investments could rehabilitate "idle," "marginal" or "under-utilized" agricultural land and therefore be beneficial for local communities and environments in the host nations. Premised on such assumption, the World Bank's 2010 report puts forward a "global assessment" of the amount of land "where investor interest may actually materialize," by classifying countries according to the availability of "uncultivated" but "agronomically suitable" land as well as the "share of potential output achieved on areas currently cultivated (the yield gap)" (World Bank 2010: x, xvi). Using "geographically referenced data," satellite imagery, and agro-ecological simulations[10] to quantify

[9] Not surprisingly, as Holt-Gimenez and Schattuck (2011) among others underscore, "the global food crisis of 2008 ushered in record levels of hunger for the world's poor at a time of record global harvests as well as record profits for the world's major agrifoods corporations." With more than enough food in the world to feed everyone (FAO 2009a), the confluence of factors that led to the dramatic surge in world prices highlights an underlying structural crisis of the global food system brought about by decades of agricultural restructuring under capitalist relations of value extraction. Within this context, increasing food production does not necessarily lead to increased food security – nor does it implement the right to food – unless it takes place on the fields of small scale producers who do so in ecologically and socially sustainable ways (Graham et al. 2010).

[10] In order to assess potential yields that can be achieved on a given plot, the Bank uses the agroecological zoning (AEZ) methodology developed by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IISA) for five main rainfed crops. This predicts potential yields based on simulation of plant growth—which depends on agroecological factors, such as soil, temperature, precipitation, elevation, and other terrain factors—together with assumptions on

the gap between actual and potential yields by current producers, the report classifies much of sub-Saharan Africa as a Type 4 region (with suitable land available, high yield gap) where, it argues, rainfed cultivation could be massively intensified. In a similar vein, the promotion materials issued by both the IFC and its country-specific agencies like SLIEPA in Sierra Leone encourage investors to take advantage of acquiring "idle" or "unused" land in developing countries, while providing detailed information about its "availability" (cf. Daniel and Mittal 2010, IFCa 2009, SLIEPA 2009).

By the same token, far from being coerced into these land deals, many developing-country governments are welcoming them—and even lobbying aggressively for them—by declaring the land for sale or lease as "idle land." In Ethiopia, for example, all land allocations recorded at the national investment promotion agency are classified as involving "wastelands" with no pre-existing users (IIED 2009:2). The strategy is being replicated all over the global South, where governments such as those of Mozambique, Tanzania, Indonesia, and the Philippines are engaged in the attempt to quantify the amount of "reserve" land available within their borders in order to attract investors (ILC 7, Kugelman 2009:10). As such, "the very notion of 'reserve' more or less automatically renders such land, by definition, 'available,' amenable to, and appropriate for transformation into global granaries or new oil wells" (Borras and Franco 2010:516), at the expense of local livelihood practices that do not fit this top-down classificatory grid.

While no large-scale land allocations can take place without displacing or affecting local populations, existing land uses and claims are made "illegible" by the politics of satellite maps, yield gap analyses, and government inventories. In many countries, the category of marginal land is applied to areas that are officially catalogued as "public" or state-owned, but in fact provide livelihoods to millions of cultivators, pastoralists and forest users "under a variety of unofficial and semi-official or 'customary,' individual or collective, tenurial relationships" (White and Dasgupta 2010:600). Top-down calculations of land availability are drawn from official census data about land use and land property relations that recognize only those rights awarded by the State and therefore facilitate central state regulation and administration (Borras and Franco 2010:516). The livelihood practices of unrepresented and marginalized groups are

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management and input intensity. The potential revenue from cultivation is then assessed by applying a price vector (using 2005 prices) and identifying the highest value of output (World Bank 2010:53-54).

particularly affected by nation-state classifications that seek to entice investors while developing tightened forms of territorial rule. Indeed, by targeting countries with a poor track record of protecting the land rights of their citizens, the current investment rush is riding a tide of state-sponsored grabbing of resources that directly interferes with social justice and land redistribution agendas.

On the other hand, when drawn from satellite images and projections that are not rooted in on-the-ground understanding of land-based practices, the notion of "marginal land" reflects a capital-centric "assessment" of the *productivity* rather than *existence* of resource uses. In the World Bank report, for example, the terms "suitable," "available" and "uncultivated" are applied not to unoccupied lands, but to lands used in ways that are not perceived as "productive" (cf. Cotula et al. 2009:100). In this respect, the World Bank focuses on low productivity and yield gaps, "as a justification for a procedural approach to regulating land deals in such a way as to facilitate transfer of land rights from less to more efficient producers," following the same logic that underlies its market-based land and agricultural reforms over the past two decades (Hall 2010:6). As a result, the politics of land grabbing gets absorbed into a technocratic definition of "productivity" that portrays the expansion of large-scale, industrialized, capitalist agriculture as the only viable strategy to achieve tangible development outcomes (cf. Borras and Franco 2010b).

Contract farming, adverse incorporation, and accumulation by dispossession

> *Basically, millions of small holder farmers have to go through a transformation from being subsistence to commercial producers, and by doing so, help maintain Africa's march toward economic growth (Kurt Hoffman, Director of TransFarm Africa quoted in Gillam 2010).*

According to win-win narratives on land grabs, farmland investments work particularly well as a rural development strategy when they create the conditions for new contractual arrangements between smallholders and agribusinesses. Notably, all development agencies are calling for the formulation of contract farming schemes as an alternative to outright purchases or leasing of land that can provide farmers with access to credit and technological improvements, a ready market, and increased cash earnings (Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009) while allowing corporations to

acquire a secured supply of produce at no risk (IFAD 2009: 8-9). The expectation is that the private sector will drive "the organization of value chains that bring the market to smallholders and commercial farms," thereby fostering the growth of what the World Bank calls a "new agriculture" for development (World Bank 2008). The characterization of contractual partnerships as a "development tool" has in turn been integrated in the discursive strategies of international investment funds promoting commercial land deals and agro-industrial projects across the global South. In particular, while engaged in the attempt to incorporate smallholders into commercial food chains, both institutional and private land grabbers are increasingly portraying their initiatives as "impact investing" for the growth of "transformative" agriculture and "mutually profitable partnerships" in the developing world (Gillam 2010, Chen 2010). Put differently, to demonstrate that farmland investments have a "social impact" in addition to being commercially viable, the private sector has reframed contract farming as a new business model that can "transform" traditional farming systems into dynamic and opportunistic enterprises to the benefit of both small farmers and agro-industries (cf. McLaren 2010, Chen 2010, SAGCOT 2011).

To be sure, contract farming historically emerged—and currently operates—as a mechanism to eliminate intermediaries, bypass competition, and structure the operation of markets to the advantage of dominant agents in increasingly globalized agrofood commodity chains.[11] More specifically, contract farming entails relations that "substitute for open-market exchanges by linking nominally 'independent' family farmers with a central processing, export, or purchasing unit that regulates prices, production practices, product quality, and credit arranged in advance under contract" (Watts 1992:69). As a means to introduce new on-farm technologies and distinctive work routines, the contract circumscribes "what one might call the social space of autonomy and subordination that the grower occupies in relation to the labor process" (ibid:70). As such, contracting represents a *recomposition of peasant producers* in which peasants are

[11] The contracts under study could be of three types: a) *market specification contracts* are pre-harvest agreements that bind the firm and grower to a particular set of conditions governing the sale of the crop (such as price, quantity and timing); b) *resource providing contracts* include the provision of crop inputs, extension, or credit in exchange for a marketing agreement; and c) *production management contracts* bind the farmer to follow a particular production method or input regimen. In all cases, there is systematic link between product and factor markets as contracts require definite quality of produce and, therefore, specific inputs (cf. Key and Runsten 1999, Little and Watts 1994).

increasingly captured by, and incorporated into, new social relations and patterns of accumulation (ibid:75, Hall 2010).

Plenty of studies in the last two decades have shown that large-scale plantations and areas where smallholder contract-farming is practiced are typically not zones of prosperity but zones of poverty. The controversial nature of contract farming schemes in Africa has been extensively analyzed by Watts (1994), who points to the widespread manipulation of contracts and the growing household tensions generated by this externally induced change parallel to the rise of flexible accumulation in advanced capitalist industrial organization. In a similar vein, focusing on the very weak position of contract growers in relation to agribusiness, White (1997) argues that contract farming in Indonesia has trapped peasants in debt and forced them to gradually degrade their position from landowners to labourers while allowing the processing industries to exploit unpaid rents and family labor. More recent research by Sawit Watch and Forest Peoples Programme into the conditions of some of Indonesia's 4-4.5 million oil palm smallholders has revealed that, as a result of contractual agreements that force them to sell to a particular company, they often receive below market prices and suffer from practices such as questionable product grading and late payment (Taylor and Bending 2009:16). This analysis corresponds to what has been observed in the industrial tomato sector of the Dominican Republic, where contract growers, faced with rising costs generated by the compulsory introduction of increased chemical inputs and mechanical cultivation, have become "tied to their processors via their debts" (Raynolds 2000).

The role of debt and the distribution of risks in contract farming make the contract relationship significantly more complicated than the employer-worker relation. On the one hand, most growers require credit to finance their sowing and harvesting operations because the crops purchased by agroindustrial processors entail higher production costs. Yet, unlike state-owned or even commercial banks, agro-processors can: i) extract a grower's debt directly from the crop revenue before the grower receives his payment; ii) obtain raw agricultural product at below-market prices, in exchange for credit (Key and Runsten 1999:384); and iii) oblige indebted growers to renew their contracts the next season, with high percentages of resulting profits going to debt repayment (Raynolds 2000). On the other hand, many studies have shown that contract agreements protect agro-food companies from all and even unforeseen obligations, shifting

responsibility for assembling labor, assuring work performance, and dealing with crop failure from the contractors to the growers. Specifically, in most contracts the farmers are bound to sell to the company only and are penalized for default, whereas there is no specified company liability for the failure to buy the farm produce (Singh 2002:1633).

In a growing trend, agribusinesses are pursuing contract production as a strategy to avoid both labor and environment-related costs. In the Philippines, for example, contract growing has become more popular in recent years as it "enables firms to reduce their employee-related costs and obligations, to subvert the power of unions, and to acquire the flexibility to reduce their workforce without having to worry about retrenchment and retirement costs" (Montemayor 2009:105). Within this context, contract farming does lead to gender inequalities both in the quantity and the quality of work for women (and children) who not only end up working longer hours in the fields (Collins 1993), but also carry the burden of off-farm work (White 1997). Correspondingly, as contract farmers are often selected on the basis of their land suitability, assured irrigation, financial position, and ability to adopt new technologies, the development of these arrangements has caused deepened regional and socioeconomic differentiation among producers (Singh 2002). At the same time, the growth of contract farming leading to industrialized, export-oriented agriculture typically results in the overexploitation of groundwater, salination of soils, soil fertility decline, and pollution (Siddiqui, 1998). The cost of these "environmental externalities" is nonetheless avoided by firms that tend to move on to new growers and lands after exhausting the potential of productive resources in a given area.

Whatever its origins, contract farming constitutes a particular form of rural proletarianization, premised on the "adverse incorporation"[12] of smallholders into new value chains dominated by corporate capital. Put differently, the establishment of contract and outgrower schemes becomes a vehicle for deepened rural dispossession precisely because small producers are institutionally captured into, rather than excluded from, global food and agricultural markets (Akram-Lodhi 2009). This insertion is inevitably based on the subordination of smallholders to the power of firms with monopoly or oligopoly control over inputs (such as

[12] The concept of "adverse incorporation" embodies a critique of neoliberal agricultural policies and mainstream development narratives which fail to account for the risks and disadvantages associated with the inclusion and participation of smallholders in global value chains, by positing a "level playing field" whereby new entrants are assumed to compete in the same way, and in the same markets as their large-industrial, corporate equivalents (cf. Hickey and DuToit 2007, McCarthy 2010, Borras and Franco 2011).

seed varieties, and agro-chemicals) as well as firms with monopsony or oligopsony control of processing facilities or market access. Indeed, as White (1997:105) puts it:

> In all food commodity chains…the setting of prices at the various points in the production, processing and marketing chain is not a matter of 'real' value added or of supply-demand interactions, but reflects more the relative social/political bargaining strength of the parties involved. Contract farming, through institutionalizing monopoly/monopsony relations between farm and agribusiness, can reflect this property of 'real' markets in exaggerated ways.

And yet, other than promoting the formulation of contractual partnerships within win-win agro-investment scenarios, development institutions make no recommendations for tackling the monopoly/monopsony power of capital in these markets (Akram-Lodhi 2008:1159).

More to the point, the characterization of contract farming as a "development opportunity" is rooted in the obsessive tendency of win-win approaches to "naturalize" unequal social relations and "to represent that inequality as just" (Clapp 1994:92). In this respect, instead of addressing the root causes of rural poverty from a politico-economic perspective, the rhetoric of win-win scenarios reflects the attempt "to neglect, silence, or misrepresent power struggles and unequal and conflictual relations, which are pervasive among participants in global value chains, and clearly intrinsic to the structure of relations of production and surplus extraction in contemporary capitalism" (Oya 2009:598). As a result, these discursive formulations further reproduce and entrench the mechanisms –the contracts and monopolies—that act as "conduits" to extract value from producers which are increasingly subsumed in real and formal terms to capital (Akram-Lodhi 2008:1159, Watts 1992:75).

Beyond codes of conduct: public investors' involvement in land grabs

> *IFC is implementing a market-driven and private sector–led strategy to increase global food production…and is providing $75 million, its largest equity investment in agribusiness, to help set up a fund that will invest in world-class farm operators to increase the global food supply (IFCb 2009).*

Over the past few years, the development apparatus has become increasingly involved in land grabs well beyond the formulation of legitimizing narratives. In fact, while putting forward a façade of proposals for monitoring land deals through voluntary guidelines and codes of conduct,

development institutions from the World Bank to UN, regional, and single-country agencies have unleashed an array of resources aimed at: i) financing profit-seeking enterprises through investment funds; ii) providing information, consultancy, and infrastructure to private investors; iii) changing laws to create investment-friendly environments in target countries; and iv) implementing investment protection treaties.

On a first level, the presence of multilateral and development financial institutions as cornerstone or anchor investors in a range of international investment funds has played a crucial role in attracting private capital for land grabs. Most privately-run financial vehicles that are leading the rush for the world's farmland with "an out-and-out mission to generate above-market returns" have in other words been created through the direct engagement of "public" development money (Miller et al. 2010:7). The Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund, for example, constitutes a special partnership initiative of AGRA also funded by the Australian Government Aid Program, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA). Focusing on agribusinesses as key drivers of agricultural growth, the fund provides for-profit private sector companies looking to work in Africa with kick-start grants of between $150,000 and $2.5 million, and has so far committed more than $30 million to 40 business deals, leveraging about $150 million from the private sector (AEFC 2010). In a similar vein, IFAD, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the French development agency (Agence Française de Développement), the Spanish Agency for International Development and Cooperation (AECID), AGRA, and the West African Development Bank have partnered with the private equity and corporate finance advisory firm Phatisa Group to create the African Agriculture Fund (AAF). The fund, whose total size exceeds $300 million, is aimed at "backing private-sector companies that implement strategies to increase and diversify food production and distribution in Africa" (Hansen and Oshry 2011).[13] Overall, the involvement of UN agencies, European DFIs, as well as IFC, AfDB, and EIB encompasses a whole host of investment programs geared toward the development of agribusiness value chains across the global South (see Table 1).

[13] Specifically, IFAD will manage the Technical Assistance Facility of the AAF for which core funding has been committed by the European Commission with the contribution of AGRA and the Italian Cooperation.

Table 1: Development Institutions' Involvement in Investment Funds

	Investment Sector		Type of Investment	Development Institutions Involved
	Agri-business	Smallholders		
Actis Africa Agribusiness Fund	X		Private equity investments in agro-infrastructure, agro-processing, and the bio fuel sub sectors.	Commonwealth Development Company (CDC)/British Govt.
Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund	X		Special partnership initiative of AGRA to encourage private sector investment	Australian Government Aid Program, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), IFAD, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA).
African Agriculture Fund	X		Private-sector companies with strategies to increase and diversify food production and distribution	IFAD, AfDB, the French, and Spanish Agencies for International Development Cooperation, AGRA—core funding from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID)
Africa Seed Development Fund	X		Seed companies	AGRA
Emerging Capital Partners Africa Fund	X		Equity and quasi-equity investments such as convertible debt focusing on high-growth agribusinesses	AfDB, IFC, OPIC (U.S. Government's development finance institution) and CDC
Africa Agribusiness Investment Fund (Agri-Vie)	X		Agri-business value-chain	AfDB, Industrial Development Corp (using money from EIB)
Fanisi Venture Capital Fund	X		Agribusiness, retail, financial Services	Proparco (DFI majority owned by the French government), Finnfund (Finnish government's development finance agency), IFC

Aventura Rural Enterprise Fund	X	Agribusiness value-chain and rural services	EIB, FMO (The Netherlands’ Entrepreneurial Development Bank), CDC, and Finn Fund
India Agribusiness Fund	X	Agri-business, agro-infrastructure	IFC, FMO, CDC, DEG (German Development Bank)
Atlantic Coast Capital Fund (ACRF)	X	Agribusiness, transportation and logistics, financial services, mining and manufacturing	AfDB, CDC, EIB, FinnFund, and IFC
AfricInvest Fund	X	Agribusiness companies	IFC, AfDB and EIB
Altima One World Agriculture Development Fund	X	Agri-business production	IFC

(Sources: FAO 2010, Mullin 2010).

On a second level, the World Bank and other multilateral organizations are fueling the global land grab through the provision of technical assistance and advisory services aimed at improving the investment climate of foreign markets. Specifically, both IFC and the Foreign Investment Advisory Service (FIAS) of the World Bank have devised a wide range of “products” to assist countries in opening their land markets to foreign investors,[14] developing “domestic” investment promotion agencies, and cutting down on administrative and institutional barriers that “inhibit business growth” (cf. Daniel and Mittal 2010). Within this framework, teams of consultants are constantly being parachuted all around Africa, Asia and Latin America “to rewrite laws, register titles and set up satellite mapping and cadastral systems to smooth the way for foreign investors to acquire farmland” (GRAIN 2010c). FIAS for instance helped Sudan modify six investment laws in 2008, and various land deals have occurred since then allocating over a million hectares of land (PANAP 2010:24). Correspondingly, FIAS has worked to create or bolster Investment Promotion Agencies in Sierra Leone, Cape Verde, Senegal, and Tanzania

[14] In this respect, FIAS has developed a “Land Market” product aimed at “designing and implementing effective policies and procedures for making land available for new and expansion investment” as well as “developing simple and transparent procedures for investors to acquire and secure land property rights (or land use rights), at reasonable costs” (FIAS 2008).

among others, in the attempt to streamline the process through which foreign investors must go through in order to acquire land (Daniel and Mittal 2010:11). At the same time, IFC has set up or improved leasing legislation and regulations in 60 countries, and has provided advisory services to leasing facilities in Ghana, Tanzania, Rwanda, Madagascar, Senegal, Cameroon, DRC, Mali, and Ethiopia (ibid:19).

On a third level, land deals are facilitated by the enabling environment provided by an array of bilateral and multilateral trade and investment treaties—collectively known as the international investment protection regime. As part of broader bundles of non-financial assistance and development aid, bilateral investment treaties (BITs) provide legal protection to cross-border investments against "adverse host state action" such as expropriation and arbitrary treatment (Cotula et al. 2009). More specifically, investment treaties typically include provisions on profit repatriation and currency convertibility, they require host governments to treat the foreign investor exactly like domestic investors, and they strengthen the legal value of individual contracts by making their violation a breach of international law (Spiedloch and Murphy 2009:44). Although State-to-State agreements, BITs pave the way to investor-to-state claims, by giving investors direct access to international arbitration in case of disputes with the host government, even when specific investment contracts are silent on this (Graham et al.2010: 56).

The past two decades have witnessed a boom in the number of bilateral investment treaties. In 2008 only, African governments signed 12 new BITs, 8 of them with European countries (UNCTAD 2009:32). Significantly, while host states enter into such agreements to attract FDI as a tool of economic "development," most BITs include provisions that strengthen the legal power of the foreign investor vis-à-vis the position and rights of local communities. In particular, through the clause of "national treatment" and the prohibition of using "performance requirements" these treaties give investors the right to avoid any linkages with the local community (such as local employment or local input use) in addition to exporting all or almost all of what is produced (Graham et al.2010: 57). Moreover, most BITs allow host countries to limit exports in the midst of a financial crisis but not necessarily in times of food shortages, and allow foreign investors to sue host governments for any lost profits (Spiedloch and Murphy 2009:44). Coupled with the direct involvement of development agencies in for-profit investment funds, and the creation of business enabling environments in recipient countries, this special

international regime of investment protection is directly shaping social and economic outcomes that affect local livelihoods and food security. In fact, by promoting enhanced rights and protections for private investors, the combination of these policies is leading to the "broader development outcome" of increased land grabbing and rural dispossession on a global scale.

Conclusion

The politics of win-win narratives on land grabs reflects the attempt to re-legitimize a specific model of agricultural development brought about by three decades of neoliberalism. Notably, this model encourages policies geared toward the concentration of corporate power in the food system, the expansion of "value chains," the commodification of land and labor, and the removal of public interventions such as price controls and subsidies to small producers. Bound up with larger dynamics of international capitalist expansion and financial speculation, the neoliberal model is thus entirely consistent with the promotion of farmland investments as a core component of agricultural and economic restructuring across the global South. In this respect, what is being promoted "is not agricultural development, much less rural development but simply agribusiness development" (GRAIN 2008).

Despite the prominent role of the development apparatus in responding to the 2008 food and financial crises, the formulation of policies and financial mechanisms that indiscriminately enhance the position of corporate players through massive transfer of land rights is leading to increased food insecurity and rural poverty. To be sure, there can be no "socially acceptable" or "development-oriented" land grabbing insofar as this process–even where there are no related forced evictions—"denies land for local communities, destroys livelihoods, accelerates eco-system destruction, reduces the political space for peasant oriented agricultural policies and distorts markets towards increasingly concentrated agribusiness interests and global trade rather than towards sustainable peasant/smallholder production for local and national markets" (GRAIN 2010c). Again, while investment in the agricultural sector is vital, as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter (2009) underscores, the issue is not one of merely increasing budget allocations to agriculture, or promoting land acquisitions as a vehicle for capital inflows, but rather, "that of choosing from different models of agricultural development" which have "different impacts and benefit various groups differently."

Moving beyond the mechanisms of neoliberal market rationality, the solution to the structural meltdown of the corporate food regime stems from redistributive land reforms, agro-ecological farming practices, and food sovereignty approaches that can address global food security needs in a democratic and participatory way. Without redistribution, the attainment of "development" goals is bound to be dependent on external sources and policies which have become hegemonic through the ability of institutions like the World Bank to reproduce their own self-legitimating knowledge (Wolford 2009). Correspondingly, in order to overcome the root causes of the current food-fuel-climate crises, the formulation of alternatives must prioritize small scale farming, domestic food provision, and the collective engagement of producers in agro-ecological research and breeding techniques, within the comprehensive human rights approach to land and food expounded by civil society groups and peasant movements on a transnational scale.

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