

Sleeping giants and the 'wasteland' thesis: what should we learn from land deals in Africa?

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Awakening Africa's Sleeping Giant?

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Questions – and key messages

1. What are the current uses and claims over land in the Guinea Savannah?
 - The view that African land is unused or under-utilised is a powerful but often misleading narrative;
 - Even where land is currently underused and seems abundant, it is still likely to be claimed by somebody.
2. What social impacts have been associated with recent land deals?
 - ‘Commercialisation’ is underway and proceeding apace in the form of large-scale (often transnational) land deals;
 - Even where these are producing some of the 6 crops suggested by AASG, this is not for local markets;
 - Documented impacts include displacement of food production and heightened social differentiation.

Acknowledgements

This presentation draws from:

1. IIED – FAO – IFAD quantitative inventory of land deals in Mali, Ghana, Ethiopia, Sudan and Madagascar and qualitative studies in Tanzania and Mozambique.
2. IFPRI media monitoring work on transnational land deals globally.
3. Case studies from Mozambique, by PLAAS with in-country researchers, under the aegis of a ‘Strengthening women’s access to land’ research project.
4. Reports of available information on land deals and their impacts in 9 countries in Southern Africa by a network of researchers and NGOs, at a PLAAS regional workshop earlier this year.

- *‘Although not all of the African Guinea Savannah zone is suitable for agriculture, clearly it represents one of the world’s largest underused agricultural land reserves. There is no question that to feed the world, meet the growing demand for agricultural raw materials, and generate the feedstuffs needed for production of biofuels, a significant share of this zone will eventually have to be converted to agriculture, probably under more intensive land-use systems than are currently prevalent.’ - World Bank 2009: 171*

How under-utilised is Africa's agricultural land?

- Possibly less than AASG claims, because of the importance of shifting cultivation and fallow systems that underpin dryland cropping (as well as fodder for livestock in mixed farming systems)
- FAO's Global Agro-ecological Assessment, based on satellite imagery, produced estimates for SSA as at 1995-1996:
 - 807 mill ha total cultivable land
 - Of which 197-227 million ha were under cultivation (24-28%).
- But these measurements do not capture practices of shifting cultivation and fallow systems
 - In SSA, a ratio of five plots under fallow to every plot under cultivation
 - Implies a range of the total 'cultivated' land up to a maximum of 1,182 million ha – well above the available reserves.
- In addition, since 1996, there is likely to have been an increase in land under cultivation, plus a decline in available agricultural land due to competing land uses.

What is happening to population density?

Strong demographic growth alongside uneven urbanisation is leading to higher population to land ratios.

Table: Population density over time (population/sq.km)

	Ethiopia	Ghana	Madagascar	Mali	Mozambique	Sudan	Tanzania
1950	17	21	7	3	5	4	8
2000	59	82	26	7	23	14	36
2050	157	190	73	23	55	30	116

Source: United Nations (2008), actual data and projections, cited in IIED 2009:60

IIED has demonstrated that these ratios are substantially higher when population density is related to land areas suitable for cultivation – rather than all land (ie. excluding barren land and desert, protected areas, etc)

The 'wasteland' or 'vacant land' thesis

- The view that African land is unused or under-utilised is a powerful and often misleading narrative that has paved the way for rights allocations that have dispossessed people.
 - Concepts such as 'available', 'idle' or 'waste' land have been widely used to justify land allocations to investors – but can be misleading and require critical analysis.
- In Ethiopia, all land allocations recorded at the national investment promotion agency are classified as involving 'wastelands' with no pre-existing users.
 - But this formal classification is open to question, in a country with a population of about 75 million, the vast majority of whom live in rural areas.
 - IIED's in-country research finds that lands allocated to investors in the Benishangul Gumuz and Afar regions were previously being used for shifting cultivation and dry-season grazing, respectively.

Reconsidering 'wasteland'

- Concepts such as 'idle' land often reflect an assessment of the *productivity* rather than *existence* of resource uses
 - these terms are often applied not to unoccupied lands, but to lands used in ways that are not perceived (by governments) as 'productive'.
- Perceptions about productivity may not necessarily be backed up by economic evidence
 - for instance, the economic value of livestock in mixed farming systems as well as pastoralist systems is frequently underestimated (Barrett 1992; Hesse and Thébaud, 2006).
- Low-productivity uses may still play a crucial role in local livelihood and food security strategies.

Claims on 'wasteland'

- The IIED inventory concludes that in the regions it studied in seven countries:
 - *'Although all seven countries display positive net land balances, particularly Sudan, the availability of land should not be taken for granted, even in Africa. Even where land is currently underused and seems abundant, it is still likely to be claimed by somebody.'*
 - *'Most if not all productive land targeted for potential investment is likely to be already claimed by farmers, herders, hunters or foragers. Such land claims may be based on present, seasonal or future use. They may involve multiple and nested claims by communal groups (e.g. lineages, extended families), traditional authorities, households or individuals).'* (IIED 2009: 90)

Historicising under-utilisation

- To the degree to which there is under-utilisation, this may be in part the product of past policy choices
 - in particular the policy measures taken to remove state support to smallholder farmers since the 1980s in response to structural adjustment conditionalities.
- This history needs to inform both analysis and prescription.
- To what degree is AASG a recognition of a secure future for smallholder agriculture, and for the return of a strong state role in shaping and enabling its success?
- WDR 2008 is ultimately skeptical about smallholder farming in the long-term in 'agriculture-based' countries; instead envisages its displacement by large-scale and corporate agriculture.

‘Wasteland’ has become hot property

- Unprecedented investor interest in Africa’s land (and water)
 - IFPRI: 15-20 million ha under negotiation in dev countries btw 2006-2009
 - IIED: 2.5 million ha approved transnational allocations in 5 African countries
- Trend towards more, and larger, projects:
 - Some very big, ranging from 100,000 ha irrigation project in Mali, 150,000 ha livestock project in Ethiopia, 452,500 ha biofuel project in Madagascar.
- Drivers and actors:
 - Asian powers seeking to secure food supply
 - Oil-rich (but land and water poor) Gulf States
 - European and North American banks, financiers and sovereign funds, in response to financial crisis, new buoyancy of commodity markets and long-term growth in demand for renewables
 - All of the above often in partnerships with African governments and/or domestic partners.

Transnational land investments to secure food and fuel supplies



Source: von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009,
with data compiled from media reports.

We are at a particular historical moment in which the natural assets of the continent are in high demand – and the displacement of some existing farmers and other land users is not only threatened but underway in the name of commercialisation.

Land tenure focus is important

Comprehensive land policy needs to include the following:

- A legal framework for the allocation of land to smallholders, including women, and to national or international investors, combined with clearly spelled-out processes for community consultation, involvement, and/compensation*
 - Legal provisions that make land leases fully tradable and usable as collateral for credit and the capacity to register land transactions*
 - A land tax to discourage acquisition of land for speculative purposes*
 - Strong decentralized administrative capacity to implement the legal provisions, combined with the political will to do so*
 - Certification of communal land rights, on either a group or individual basis, using low-cost participatory methods (p. 183-4, emphasis added)*
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- Emphasis on certification to facilitate transfer of land to more entrepreneurial and productive users, ie. to facilitate land markets.
 - What seems missing is a framework to secure the existing rights of legitimate landholders and users – in law and practice – in ways that can enable people to resist new claims on their land.

Land tenure reforms: a precondition but not adequate to protect from exclusion

- AASG on land tenure reforms and land administration:
 - *Providing secure and transferable land rights is critical to protecting the interests of indigenous populations while allowing entrepreneurial farmers to acquire unused land in regions of low population density. This allows land to change hands over time and to flow to those who can use it most productively, which in turn provides incentives to invest in increasing land productivity. The new Mozambican land policy and land law provide a state-of-the-art framework for balancing competing interests, and the legal frameworks of Madagascar and Zambia are similarly well designed. (p. 182)*
- But the countries mentioned as best practice examples of land rights administration – Moz, Madag, Ethiopia, Zambia – are centres of major transnational land deals that appear to be
 - excluding local small-scale farmers from new patterns of accumulation,
 - transforming some small-scale farmers into low-paid wage labourers,
 - producing land-related conflict.

Compensation regimes

Country studied	For private ownership	For other legally recognised rights	Paid by	Rates	In-kind compensation allowed?	Compliance*	Deemed sufficient to restore livelihoods*
Ethiopia	Not applicable	Yes	Government in theory, investor in practice	Value of improvements and 10-year harvest	Yes	Mostly	No
Ghana	Yes	Yes		Loss of land and improvements based on national rates	Yes	Yes	No – the values used by the Land Valuation Board are usually the minimum rates
Madagascar	Yes	Yes	Government in theory, investor in practice	Loss of land, loss of improvements	Yes	Mostly (sometimes in the case of rights which are not legally recognised)	Yes, but problems experienced in resettlement
Mali	Yes	Yes	Government in theory, investor in practice	Loss of improvements and harvests; also loss of land if ownership	Yes	Yes if ownership, otherwise dependent on negotiation	Yes for ownership, not for other rights
Mozambique	Not applicable	Yes	Government in theory, investor in practice	Loss of improvements	Yes		
Tanzania	Not applicable	Yes	Government in theory, investor in practice	Loss of improvements	Yes		

Forest clearance and biofuel production in Kilwa, Tanzania

- Biofuels investor acquired 34,000 ha for a pilot jatropha estate
- The company installed the largest sawmill in the region
 - Able to harvest up to 800,000 cubic metres of timber
 - More than the total harvested in the whole of southern Tanzania at the previous peak of logging in 2003.
- Village was the legal manager under customary tenure
- Compensation was paid
 - US\$ 324,000 (US\$ 9.50 per hectare)
 - 60% to District, 40% to Village for distribution to villagers

Source: Sulle 2010



Forest livelihood at Kilwa, Tanzania
(Sulle, undated)

- Forests estimated to provide
 - 75% of building materials
 - 100% of traditional medicines
 - 95% of households' energy
 - Pastures for pastoralists
 - Cultural activities

Source: Sulle 2010



Cleared forest at Bioshape jatropha plantation 'trial plot' Kilwa district (IFM report, 2009)

Sugar cane for ethanol in Maragra, Mozambique

- Mozambique's Green Revolution action plan: expansion of sugar estate under Illovo (SA)
 - Former Portuguese estates in Maputo province had been allocated to ex-combatants from North
 - Eviction of peasant producers after being able to harvest standing crops, with the sanction of traditional leaders and district authorities.
 - Municipality allocated compensatory land, to produce sugar for the estate
- Estate production with small growers mostly on 0.5 to 1 hectare plots
- Gender differentiated impacts and displaced food production:
 - Men predominate amongst the uptake of employment in the factories and expansion of smallholder sugar cane production
 - Displacement of women's land access and food production for consumption and local markets – including bananas previously marketed cooperatively in Maputo.
- Increasing dependence of women on renting in land for own production – an option available only to some.

New wave commercialisation *not* for food for local markets

- AASG focuses on 6 main crops that it thinks can feature prominently in any agricultural intensification effort in the Guinea Savannah zone
 - cassava, cotton, soybean, maize, sugarcane and rice.
 - It suggests that domestic markets are likely to be the main destinations for much (although not all) of this produce
- But available information suggests this is *not* the case.
- Commercialisation through large-scale land deals is taking land out of food crops to non-food crops (esp. biofuels), or towards crops for export
- Some of these are among the 6 crops the report suggests:
 - Rice for export to East Asia in Madagascar and Mozambique
 - Cotton for the Chinese market in Malawi
 - Sugar cane (mostly by SA companies, for export and for ethanol) in Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe
- So is the push towards commercialisation, intensification, and production of ‘food to feed the world’ and ‘feedstock for biofuels’ undermining local food production for domestic markets?

What kind of 'commercialisation'?

- We need to conceptually distinguish between
 - commercialisation 'from below', indigenous bottom-up commercialisation involving reinvestment by large numbers of smallholders and social differentiation at local level, and
 - commercialisation 'from above', involving external investors, whether domestic or foreign, with local elites, scale economies and either exclusion or adverse incorporation of smallholder producers
- The focus of AASG is on the former, but some of its proposals, and the 'wasteland' narrative on which they rest, potentially lay the foundation for the latter.

Some concluding thoughts and questions

1. Dispossession and displacement of an existing population of small-scale farmers seems a significant feature of Brazil's trajectory.

Some of the region's indigenous peoples and many early settlers – smallholder farmers as well as landless farm laborers – lost their lands, livelihoods, and in some cases their lives as the result of the expansion of large-scale mechanized agriculture (p. 139).

2. Will African countries go the Brazilian route or the Thai route? And what policy advice might influence this?
3. 'Managing social impacts' requires more than getting land policies and market signals right – central to policy direction.
4. How can we learn from the win-lose dimensions of past and current processes to think through the really hard policy choices – and the political economy context in which they will play out.

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