

Agrarian change under the radar screen

Rising farmland acquisitions by domestic investors in West Africa

Results from a survey in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger

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International Conference on Global Land Grabbing 6-8 april 2011 Univ. of Sussex



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Land Governance for
Equitable and Sustainable Development

Outline presentation

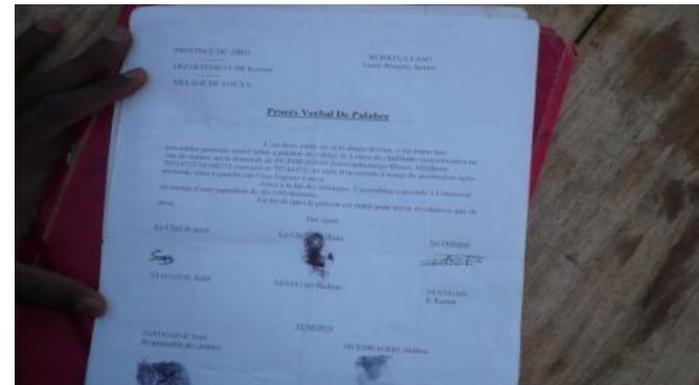
1. Context and research
2. Results
3. Scenarios of what might happen next
4. Responses

Agrarian Context

- **Mainly rainfed farming**/ livestock + irrigation schemes (Office du Niger + smaller schemes)
- Colonial period: **cash crops produced by smallholders** (groundnut, cotton)- no settlers
- **“industrial” farming projects 1960s/1970s => poor results; abandoned** following the droughts (1974; 1985)
- Gov. focus on smallholder farming: 1980s-1990s (production/ productivity, market liberalisation, supply chain for cotton)
- Last decade: **policy shift towards promoting “industrial farming”**; **smallholder sector => social**; although still input promotion around key crops (rice, maize)
 - Burkina Faso most explicit since 1999; focus on agri-business, smallholders to make space and provide labour => now mainstream amongst African governments?

Institutional/ Land tenure context

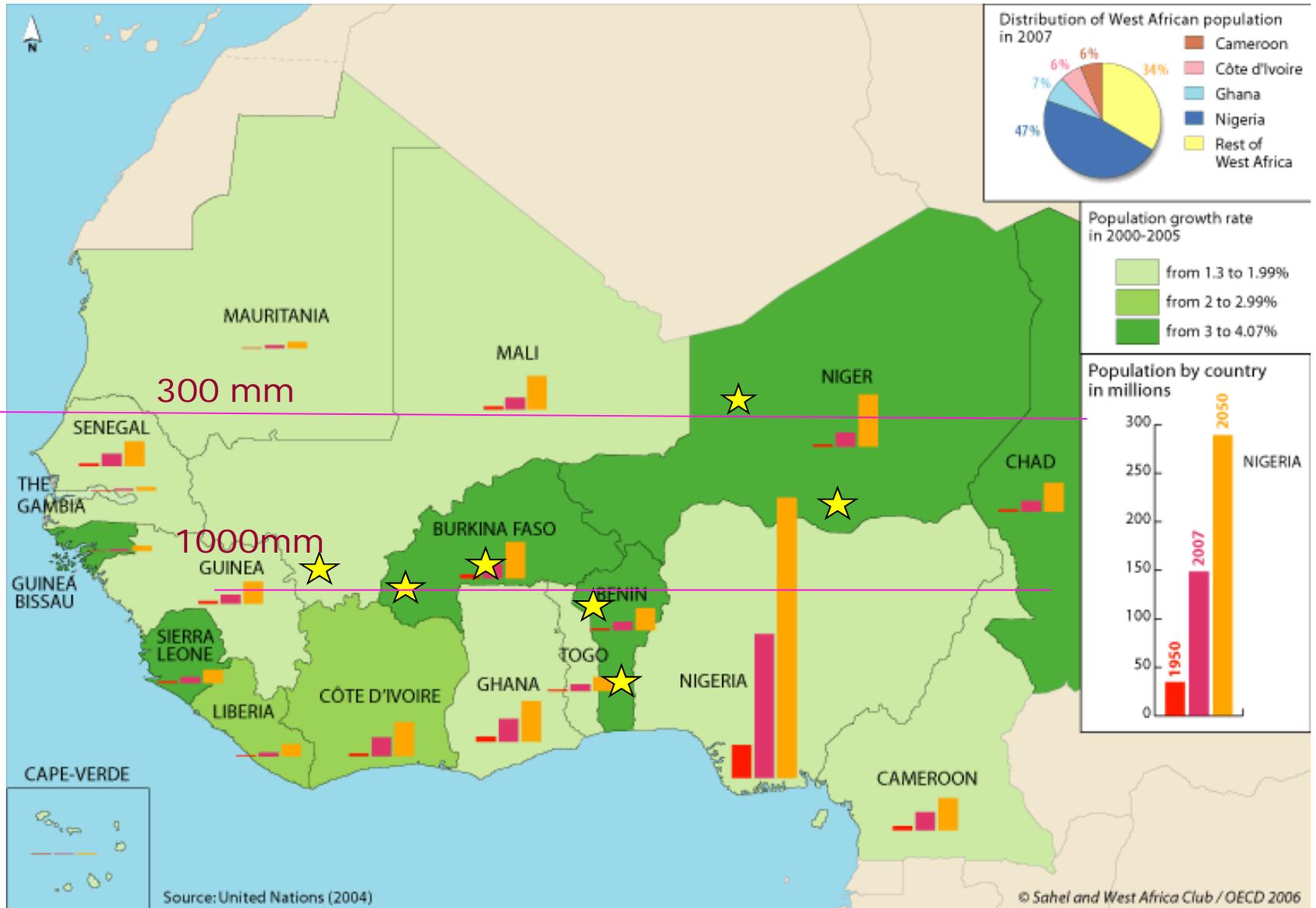
- **Legal pluralism in rural areas** => customary land governance systems dominate (farm land & commons) except for irrigation schemes
- **Establishment Local governments** (Benin 2002, Niger 2004, BF 2006 - *Mali 1999*)
- **Land policy change:**
 - Code rural **Niger** (1993), “commissions foncières” +/-operational;
 - **Benin** 2007 (registration), **BF** 2009 (‘charter’)
- More **recognition of local land governance systems**; more support for decentralised management of land and natural resources
 - Local governments, land commissions ; but what parts will be implemented first
- **Increase in competing claims** over land and resources use => conflicts



Survey 2010

- **“Action oriented”:**
 - More insight are needed in process and implication for developing effective responses requires facts
 - In close collaboration with farmer organisations
- **Case studies:** Selection of 6 sites in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger **where the phenomenon is present**, in consultation with local governments: Survey of “new agro-investors” what type of land, how much, what conditions, why, economic activities, results for investors (**99 cases: 21 Benin, 56 Burkina 22 Niger**)
- Survey/ focus group on why communities accept these transfers & implications; local responses
- Analysis- Results compared with findings other studies on Burkina Faso (GRAF 2011) and Benin (Synergie Paysanne 2010)
- Workshops to discuss implications & next steps

West Africa and survey sites



Distribution and Evolution of the West African Population

Findings: domestic agro-investors

- **Since 2000s: more & larger (size) acquisitions**
 - Saving/ expectation of rising land values; expectations of registration; urban land becoming expensive; speculating international interest (Benin)
 - In absolute terms a “massive land grab” not (yet) visible
 - **No records**; What happens when registration becomes possible or interesting deals (out grower contracts?)
- **Where investors acquire land**
 - “**Easy access**”/ roads (proximity of cities at 1-2 hrs),
 - Availability of reserves (range lands/ forests);
 - Entry points/**brokers**, **Avoid “hostile”** communities/ local government
 - Some go back to region of origin; others avoid these (social obligations)
- **Who are the investors:**
 - Mostly **individual**; some cases of NGO-s and 1 business (Benin)
 - **Non-professional** in agric. (except Niger): civil servants, traders, politicians
 - **Do not live** on the land (55% in capital/ abroad); 30% have a care taker
 - 18% no crop: **unused**– bias towards those who are locally known, present

Type of transaction & contracts

- All transaction **involve customary authorities**; investors then **seek to formalise**, but none have succeeded yet
- Why do customary land chiefs accept?:
 - Belief in **promises** of development (particularly more remote communities)
 - Tempted by **money/ gifts** (motorbikes)
 - **Use investors to settle conflicts**: to remove other users (herders, tenants); reclaiming “lost” rights (Benin- paramount chiefs)
 - **coercion/ manipulation** => brokers via children/relatives
- What Contract
 - **Lack of clarity** on exact size & boundaries & agreements (lease? Sale?); expectations of reciprocity?) Different perceptions => may result in conflict
 - Few investors have to respect ‘conditions of contract’ (**no “cahier de charge”**)

Clear land => Environmental destruction – regulations bypassed



- Photos: Kleene/Zongo
- SNV-Niger



« Modernisation »?



- *Agro-investors are heterogeneous: 4 profiles and strategies*
 1. -/-: Little/no cultivation, speculators, “weekend farmers”, wood may be cut;
 2. -/+ Farming (on part of) acquired land: mechanised/ extensive; production/productivity low
 3. +/-: Farming (part of) acquired land, following common practice; productivity similar to smallholders
 4. +/+: Minority: agric. innovation, lucrative niches – often livestock related, urban markets
- **There is almost no impetus towards agric. ‘professionalization’, ‘modernisation’**
 - At best they perform as good as small scale family farmers;
 - Many not “investors”
- Most innovation is by (larger) family farms (*productivity, new crops, new markets*)

What may happen next with the land?



Effects on existing production systems

- **Less reserves** for smallholder farms: 'locks' future development
- More **insecurity for tenants**
- **No collaboration with smallholders** (technology exchange, markets, connections, innovations)
- **Hardly rural employment** creation. (problems reported with management of labour => productivity)
- **Local politics:** some "absentee landlords" are inviting & installing migrants (cases in Niger and Burkina)
- **Commons: reduced size and blocked access to resources**
 - Effects felt on livestock keeping/ gathering fruits => shea-nut butter production (women) (pastoralist worried; women?)

Responses for “communities” farmer organisations : local & nat.

1. Influence “real” policy /decision making & implementation
 - *transparency, accountability; monitor; denounce..*
2. Engage with domestic investors (and investment funds)
 - *Orient towards Value chain development, part of the enterprise?*
3. Engage with local authorities (informal, formal) => resistance is starting here:
 - regulate; be selective,
 - Monitor
 - transparency/ accountability;

1. Farmer organisations to engage with « real » policy decision making/actions

- **Address discourse & framing of issues at stake:**
 - **Gap between official policy** on sustaining family farming **and practice** of promoting agro-investors (domestic and international)
 - Decisions influenced by caricatures & ideology around “modernisation”, professionalization; presumed roles of “agro-investors”, “small-holders”, etc. ;
 - No understanding/ appreciation for local dynamics and innovation
- **Confront efforts for (re) centralising control over land**
 - including **expropriation** for investors/ investment;
- **Policies to curb land speculation** (taxation?)
- **Uphold legislation around environmental/eco services protection** and protected areas...

2. Engage with those willing to invest and agribusiness sector

- How can farmer organisation, communities, local authorities engage with investors:
 - Orient towards **“real” agribusiness**: value chain development – possibly more profitable for both investors and smallholders (**new markets, ‘downstream’ in chain**)
 - **Engage** with large **development funds/equity funds** and **forge inclusive deals/** produce real benefits?
- What contacts & **capacities** are required? Need for incentives?

3. Local authorities

- **Customary authorities:** 'discredited' and/or 'overwhelmed'?
Prohibition on selling land ignored..
 - N.B. probable bias, because we focus on sites where LA takes place
- **Local governments:**
 - *Difficulties in getting to get grip with process: no **monitoring/** records, limited registration/ by-passing; pressure central government/ elites;*
 - *Unsure about **mandate** (de jure; de facto)..*
 - *Some **complicity** too*
- Some start to **renegotiate at time of formalisation** (size; location)
- Make better **use of mandate** around "cahier de charge" /land use planning; by- laws; mobility/ environmental protection
- **And –particularly-:** local authorities/ customary authorities/ farmer organisation should evaluate **(better) intentions & check of those seeking land and build in safeguards** in contracts
 - Better to prevent than to correct

Next steps

- Present results at national level
- Discuss with key actors at local level
 - (customary authorities, local authorities, farmer organisations, other civil society)
 - Interested investors
- ... And build awareness, inventory of available tools; build scenarios / responses
- **Need to act: when the land is lost it is too late**