

Bottom-Up Accountability Initiatives and Large-Scale Land Acquisitions in Africa

The challenge

In 2007, the absolute number of people living in urban centres worldwide overtook the number of people living in the countryside for the first time ever. As a result, the attention of the international development community is increasingly turning urban. Yet, data from the United Nations indicates that three-fourths of sub-Saharan Africa's poor still live and work in the countryside.

Effective access to, and ownership over, land and associated natural resources remains critically important for rural poor people in Africa to be able to build decent economic livelihoods and participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. Against this backdrop, a recent convergence of multiple crises of food, fuel/energy, climate, and finance has occurred and one of the most immediate and important implications of these convergent crises is the revaluation of land as a scarce resource.

This reality has driven industries governments, communities and individuals to acquire land at a scale never witnessed before, and Africa has played centre stage to this wave of large-scale land acquisitions. In fact, estimates indicate that since 2006, international and domestic investors have acquired some 50-80 million hectares of land in middle and low income countries.

The research

The objective of this project is to understand how the UN Committee on Food Security Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests can be used to increase accountability and to protect the rights of poor people in the context of large-scale land acquisitions in Mali, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa.

The research team is applying a case study and participatory action-research approach. The project is expected to generate evidence about how local residents

can enhance their ability to promote more equitable, transparent, and accountable governance of land, fisheries and forests.



Protest against LSLA in Mali

Photo: *Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes*

The partners

- *Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes*, Mali
- Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, Nigeria
- Masifundise Development Trust, South Africa
- Kotasi Women Development Trust, Uganda
- FoodFirst Information & Action Network, Germany
- The International Institute of Social Studies, Netherlands
- PLASS, South Africa
- Transnational Institute, Netherlands

Country-level interventions

- Mali: Fonsira Coro (mining)
- Nigeria: Betem, Akpet, Idoma, and Akampka in Cross Rivers state (palm oil plantations)
- Uganda: Nangoma, Bulebi, Kiziru and Mbale landing sites at Lake Victoria (mining)
- South Africa: Fishing Community of Arniston on the Western Capes South Coast region (defense and marine protection industries)

The expected outcomes

The analysis and findings will

- map the differentiated impacts (gender, ethnicity, generation, class) of LSLAs on local people and their responses to LSLAs in Mali, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa
- generate empirical evidence about how local, national, and international factors, actors and institutions are re-shaping the existing governance of lands in these countries within the framework of the Tenure Guidelines (TGs)
- identify and analyze the various strategies that can enhance the capacity of civil society organizations and rural female and male workers to hold decision-makers at all levels accountable in the context of LSLAs through use of TGs
- contribute to broader scientific debates and promote policy changes on LSLAs in these countries.

The findings and achievements so far

- ⇒ The first loop of action research process has been completed. Preliminary findings seem to suggest that, across the countries (**Uganda, Mali, South Africa and Nigeria**), LSLAs have differentiated impacts on local people. These were observed at the level of gender, class and generation (youth and elderly people).
- ⇒ The research found that, LSLAs impacted women and men differently. Amid forced evictions, land dispossessions, and other LSLA related activities that resulted in landlessness or limited access to land, the burden of household food provision weighed more on the shoulders of the women who sometimes had to deal with malnourished kids as well as ensure that there was food on their husband's table.
- ⇒ In **Nigeria**, findings suggest that, when some men lost access to their lands which they considered to be the source of financial autonomy, they became violent against women, leading to an increase in gender based violence.
- ⇒ In **South Africa** and **Uganda**, the acquisition of large parcels of lands surrounding fishing areas

(lakes, seas and oceans) by foreign and national investors either for fishing or for the construction of coastal resorts has heightened the prices of farm lands for fishing communities, who are resorting to agriculture as an alternative to fishing for their livelihoods. In these fishing communities, limitations of access to fishing areas, as well as the reduction in the quantity of fish caught, has led to a surge in alternative agricultural based livelihood activities for women.

- ⇒ In **Mali**, findings suggest that LSLAs tend to be highly mechanized industries or factories, requiring specialized training, which rural youths often don't have. On the other hand, the jobs that require minimal educational training are very manual, exhaustive with extremely low wages that do not often enable the youths to feed themselves and their families. In the communities the very phenomenon of LSLAs has driven up the prices of local food-stuffs. It has been observed that LSLAs has led to an increase of exodus among youths in affected communities.
- ⇒ Preliminary findings seem to suggest that, across the four countries, local people tend to respond to LSLAs in very similar ways (within the same communities, some local people feel powerless to influence the ongoing processes of land governance, other local people resist the land deals, while others 'connive' with elites/authorities to facilitate the deals). These divided responses seem to be impacting on social stability, as conflicts among community members have been reported in four countries.

Project time-line

2014-2016

A key part of Canada's aid program, IDRC supports research in developing countries to promote growth and development.

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