

Pathways to Accountability in the Global Land Rush: Lessons from West Africa

The challenge

While investment in agriculture can create jobs, improve access to markets, and develop infrastructure for agricultural development, large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) are also associated with negative impacts on local populations. These include depriving them of their land and access to other resources. If they are not properly managed, LSLAs can also increase the risk of conflict, both between and among companies and communities.

The research

This project aims to fill a crucial knowledge gap on what practical steps can best promote and improve accountability in LSLAs. The researchers are assessing the strengths and weaknesses of legal frameworks in regulating LSLAs through desk reviews. The frameworks are being evaluated against guidance contained in the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land.

Findings from the desk reviews are feeding into participatory debates, facilitated in selected sites, on legal protection of local land rights. The multi-stakeholder consultations are informing a participatory process to design and experiment with tools that will enable local communities to engage in advocacy activities to improve accountability. In each country, new Legal and Social Accountability Tools (LSAT) are being tested in pilot sites, or existing ones further adapted and developed.

The Partners

- *Innovations, Environnement Développement en Afrique, Sénégal*
- *Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement (CED), Cameroon*
- Land Resource Management Centre (LRMC), Ghana
- International Institute for Environment and Development, UK



A LSLA site in Cameroon

Photo: *Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement*

Country-level interventions

- **Cameroon:** Research is taking place in three regions, South (plantation), South-West (agro-industry) and Adamaoua region (farming).
- **Ghana:** Three case study areas were selected to reflect the diversity of the Ghanaian context. These include consideration of the north-south divide as well as the different tenure regimes (such as matrilineal and patrilineal or stool versus skin land ownership regimes). The areas are Daboase (Western Region), Kadelso enclave, comprising of Kadelso, Gulumpe and Kawumpe (BrongAhafo) and Yapei (Northern Region).
- **Senegal:** Research is taking place in Diogo and Darou Khoudoss (extractive), Diokoul Diawrigne (agriculture) and in Beud Dieng (bio-fuel industries).

The expected outcomes

The analysis and findings will

- help communities gain a better understanding of existing legal processes
- feed into a participatory process that will enable local communities to design, experiment, and engage in activities to improve accountability in agricultural

investment processes

- map gaps in legislation, and propose alternatives to existing legal frameworks and governance structures.
- form part of larger efforts to engage policymakers on how to achieve inclusive, transparent, and accountable decision-making around land and investment.

The findings and achievements so far

- ⇒ Preliminary research findings in **Ghana** show that challenges experienced with LSLAs are largely due to lack of awareness or inadequate political will to implement the laws by the state actors. A culture change among the state agencies is required but crucially, there is the urgent need to develop tools to empower local communities in order to ensure that processes of large scale land acquisitions are transparent, community leaders are accountable and any benefits are equitably distributed among stakeholders.
- ⇒ Working closely with communities and other stakeholders, researchers have identified land tools which could potentially help to bridge the existing legal gaps. These tools include, Community and Investor Guiding Protocols and Check list for Land Leasing, Community Development/ Land Management Committee, Guiding Protocols for leasing of state lands for private investor (Divestiture).
- ⇒ At national level, project has engaged with the Lands Commission, delivering presentations on equitable benefit sharing strategies and civil society perspectives in land investments. Project has also engaged with Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC).
- ⇒ In **Cameroon**, an analysis of LSLA legal frameworks was presented in a workshop attended by civil society representatives, public officials and lawmakers. A manual for young lawyers is being developed while 20 young lawyers have been identified.
- ⇒ Field level activities have just been initiated. Preliminary assessments indicate that customary land rights are not always protected and legal reform processes remain non-inclusive. Lack of coordina-

tion among different ministries and administrative bodies undermine the land rights of the community.

- ⇒ Land investment projects leave little space for participation of the citizens, who often do not have access to relevant information. Research has underscored the importance of managing the 'risks' to the communities affected by the LSLAs. Research found that certain public offices prevented the community from taking recourse in the land acquisition process.
- ⇒ In **Senegal**, local community members have been closely engaged in the project. Workshops were held to select local actors, including representatives from women, youth, farmers, and village chiefs, who would initiate activities related to protecting land rights.
- ⇒ Two meetings were held with local administration and elected officials to identify the gaps and solutions to the problems associated with land acquisitions.
- ⇒ In the Beud Dieng region, where the investors have already taken control of the land without consent of the local people, a process of redress has been initiated with engagement of the local authorities.
- ⇒ **IIED, UK** is providing technical support to the project. At cross-country level, preliminary findings highlight the importance of understanding and addressing the context-specific political economies of deal making. Depending on the country context, accountability strategies may need to target central government agencies, local government bodies and/or customary institutions. This affects the most relevant configuration of actors, tools and strategies in any given country.

The timeline

2013-2016

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

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