

Climate Change, Land Grabbing and Food Security

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Abstract

This paper examines the nexus of climate change, new agro-development model – which has engendered land grabbing – and food security in Africa. It shows how the critical intersections of climate change, sustainable energy development, and food security forged one-sided land deals which eventually triggered off the land grab phenomenon. Africa, it argues, is a prime target of this development where populations are displaced and dislocated, as their prime lands are leased out for agro production meant for overseas economies. It argues that two factors related to this development – the alienation of the local poor from land, and the new agro-development – continue to undermine food security and socio-economic livelihoods in Africa. It concludes by highlighting the diverse implications of the tight interconnectedness of climate change with land grabbing, one of which is agro-development, which, it shows, predicates the nature of food (in)security, local livelihoods and human development in Africa.

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed an accelerating intense pressure by wealthy foreign governments, agencies and private investors on land resources of developing countries.² This revaluation of land by powerful economic and political actors has led to the dramatic rise in the number and extent of land transactions. The targets of this development are largely developing countries as they have once more become very important in the global calculations for land resources. These aggressive commercial land transactions, popularly dubbed “land grabbing”, have been triggered largely by developments directly tied to the incidence of climate change.³ Both phenomena – climate change and land grabbing – and their critical nexus are today a ‘political’ reality, which remains one of the prototypical challenges of global development in modern times. Without a doubt, both phenomena have impacted each other in significant ways. Importantly, their challenge has forcefully prioritized the issue of responsibility (in climate change mitigation and land governance) in global discourses.

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² Friis, Cecilie and Reenberg, Anette. “Land Grab in Africa: Emerging Land System Drivers in a Teleconnected World,” GLP Report No. 1. GLP-IPO, Copenhagen (2010), 1; Cotula, L., Vermeulen, S., Leonard, R. and Keeley, J. *Land Grab or Development Opportunity? Agricultural Investment and International Land Deals in Africa* (London/Rome: FAO, IIED and IFAD, 2009); Daniel, S. and Mittal, A. *The Great Land Grab: Rush for World’s Farmland Threatens Food Security For the Poor* (Oakland, CA: The Oakland Institute, 2009); GRAIN. “Seized: The 2008 Land Grab for Food and Financial Security,” *GRAIN Briefings*, (October 2008). <http://www.grain.org/briefings/?id=212> (accessed 28 May 2010).

³ Friis and Reenberg, “Land Grab in Africa...”; Cotula *et al*, *Land Grab or Development Opportunity?*; Daniel and Mittal, *The Great Land Grab*.

This paper makes a contribution in this context. It interrogates and offers a nuanced understanding of the critical intersections and interaction of the two phenomena, and further exhibits the challenges they pose to our world in modern times. For this purpose, this paper is divided into seven sections and proceeds as follows. Subsequent to these introductory remarks, we delve into a clarification of ‘land grabbing’, which helps in the mapping and delineation of the discourse. In the following section we take a look at the factors which drive the land grabbing tendencies and their connexion with the incidence of climate change. A crucial perspective to the climate change and land grab phenomena discourse – the links with agriculture, and by extension, food (in)security – is interrogated in the fourth section, while the fifth examines the susceptibility of societies to these phenomena, especially their disparate distributional effects to diverse global settings. We then focus on the consequences of these phenomena on affected societies, particularly focusing on food security. The paper concludes by reflecting on the lessons drawn from the study.

What is Land Grabbing?

The term, land grabbing, needs some critical *expose*, particularly on account of its prominence and consequent apparent overuse, and probably misuses and abuse in contemporary literature and discourses. Indeed there is a reluctance and sometimes, outright refusal by many scholars to accept the term land grab(bing) as it seems to be biased and judgemental well before the facts are laid out. Indeed, this is very much so as not all land deals being undertaken (especially in the global south) are ‘land grabs’. In other words, there is great need for some kind of clarification and explication of this term for a proper understanding and usage in our context, by delineating what factors that make a deal illegal, and thus, a grab.

One general criticism about most definitions of land grabbing is their inability to focus on or highlight the abusive practices noted in the process of land acquisitions. This is despite the ubiquity of and local resistances to such abusive practices, thus warranting the “grab” garb put on the phenomenon which obviously has a negative connotation. Indeed, with such negative tag, definitions that presage a ‘nothing really wrong’ situation (ethically/morally, procedurally, or otherwise) do not just add up. Again, the failure of most definitions to engage with the local populations’ diverse rights – to dignity, food, livelihoods, survival, natural resources (land, waters, and so on) – for both the present and foreseeable future is equally a limitation. Of course, something is not just defined in a vacuum, but done after it has existed, as well as been critically observed and examined. A critical analysis of many land transactions reveals scales of rights abuses or denials, and consequent outcries of the victims. These have not been taken care of in most definitions. Thus, the negligence of these two critical issues,

which are quite indispensable in understanding the phenomenon, clearly underlines the weaknesses and failure of most current definitions.

So, what exactly is “land grabbing”? Under what conditions can it be observed? Is it associated with particular kinds of people’s involvement? Is it historical or wholly contemporary? This paper defines “land grabbing” as ‘the forced acquisition of land without valid consent and reasonable commitment to the future survival of the dispossessed.’ Clearly, this definition does not presuppose the identity of the perpetrator, the scale or extent of the act, nor even the purpose for which the land is or was acquired. In contradistinction, it points to the *process* undergone to acquire the land as the key to understanding a land grab. To further strengthen this definition, I would argue that three basic, pre-conditional principles of good conduct must be present in any land acquisition deal so that it is ‘legitimate’ and, thus, not a ‘grab’ of sort. Without these principles being met, land grabbing could be said to have taken place in such context. These principles include: (1) primacy of the indigenous peoples,⁴ (2) valid consent, and (3) non-coercion.

The first principle places the locals at the centre of a potential transaction and underscores the thinking that the overall interests and welfare of the locals whose lands are sought after are pre-eminent throughout the land acquisition processes. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2007, outlines some of these internationally recognized rights of indigenous peoples. The convention’s Article 45 indicates that the rights in the Declaration are “the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples,” and do not in any way limit greater rights.⁵ The declaration established the primacy that should be accorded indigenous peoples in matter concerning them. The convention clearly states that this is “the obligation of states to protect or fulfil”.⁶ Particularly important in this context are issues of survival, food sustainability, and livelihood support, which are often adversely affected or even totally destroyed by the outcomes of such land dispossessions and subsequent projects.⁷ Yet, this is a standard that is almost never adhered to in land deals in many target countries.

⁴ The term, ‘indigenous peoples’, is being used here in its broadest sense, that is, as it is used in international law, to include peoples locally referred to as ‘aboriginal’, ‘native’, and ‘tribal’; people who are still transferring and inheriting lands through the application of customary law. Many local communities in a majority of the developing world are inhabited by such ‘indigenous peoples’. They are also often interchangeably referred to as ‘locals’ in this article.

⁵ United Nations Organizations. *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (New York: UNO, 2007).

⁶ UN, *Declaration on the Rights...*, Art. 22 (2).

⁷ Nolte, K. “Large-Scale Agricultural Investments under Poor Land Governance Systems: Actors and Institutions in the Case of Zambia”, *GIGA Working Paper*, No. 221 (April 2013).

In practical terms, giving primacy to the locals means that both investors and government must come to a full understanding and realization of the diverse and potentially dire consequences of the land acquisition for local landholders – economic, social, cultural, political and spiritual – all of which impact on their survival. The first step would be proper consultation of the local populace, followed by addressing concerns through a reasonable commitment to their future survival. For instance, there must be critical evidence that such concerns are (and will continue to be) dealt with in a sincere manner. The first principle, ‘primacy of the locals’, is the fundamental and all-encompassing principle from which the other two – ‘valid consent’ and ‘non-coercion’ – derive. In other words, when the locals are truly given primacy and prioritized in things that concern them, their valid consent would not only be sought but there would be no use of force or duress in the process of engagement. However, given their importance, each of the latter principles also merits discussion.

The notion of ‘valid consent’ presupposes that before any land is acquired, adequate information would be given to the land owner(s) – person, family or community – and informed approval sought and obtained from the person(s). To be ‘valid’, such consent must be prior and exhaustively *informed* with widespread consultations, as well as free (voluntary) and ‘open’ (devoid of secrecy). The *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention* of 1989 (No. 169) calls for such consent from locals in all affairs that affect them.⁸ Article 6(a) of the Convention provides that governments shall “consult the peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, whenever consideration is being given to legislative or administrative measures which may affect them directly”. Such consultations “shall be undertaken in good faith and in a form appropriate to the circumstances, with the objective of achieving agreement or consent to the proposed measures”.⁹ Unfortunately, most land deals in many developing economies exhibit colonial-style deceptions and dispossessions.¹⁰

Non-coercion is the third principle of good conduct in any land deal. It presumes that from the periods of negotiations to the eventual execution of the project(s) for which the land is acquired, every engagement with the local land owner(s) must be such that excludes any forms of coercion or duress – that is, the use of threatened force, intimidation with harm, or actual

⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO). *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention*, 72 ILO Official Bull, 59; 28 ILM 1382 (1989) (No. 169).

⁹ International Labour Organization (ILO). “Contribution of the ILO”, paper present at the international workshop on Free, Prior and Informed Consent and Indigenous Peoples”, New York (17-19 January 2005), 2

¹⁰ Comstock, Courtney. “Kofi Annan Blasts Hedge Funders for Acquiring so Much African Land”, (27 June 2011); <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/kofi-annan-blasts-hedge-funders-acquiring-so-much-african-land-0> (accessed 24 January 2014).

violence to induce an adversary to behave differently than it otherwise would.¹¹ Indeed, this is an accepted legal standard in international law enshrined in Article 31 (1) (d) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In other words, even during the process of a consented acquisition and relocation, not a form of coerciveness should be adopted or witnessed. However, this principle has been frequently violated in many land dispossessions across the world.

These principles, which are premised on internationally recognised rights of local/indigenous peoples, were in practice often denied of them. The consequences thereafter are often abuses of varied dimensions and violations of layers of rights. The argument thus is that ‘land grabbing’ is defined in the *process*; the procedure through which a land acquisition is made – the minimum international standards being those we have here laid out. Thus, any land deal which falls short of any of these is a land grab. However, this development is certainly not a new phenomenon in any part of the world, neither is it a fresh theme in scholarship. In virtually every society there is something that people might call a land grab of sort. It has been an overarching historical experience among humanity tracing back through centuries. For instance, it encompasses many episodes and innumerable examples – from pre-colonial land seizures associated with territorial wars,¹² through European enclosures and dispossession of native peoples in North America and Australasia,¹³ to the imperialist expansions into Africa,¹⁴ Asia and the Americas, as well as post-colonial government-led land acquisitions through myriads of ‘land reforms’.¹⁵

Surprisingly, much of the discourses on land grabbing are framed in ahistorical terms,¹⁶ giving off the impression that the phenomenon is contemporary. But again, tracing the history of land grabbing reveals much more than just the fact that land grabbing is not new. Past land grabbing has mattered for the political processes and precedents that were established and which are still shaping how and where land grabbing is happening in contemporary times.¹⁷

¹¹ Byman, Daniel L. and Waxman, Matthew C. “Kosovo and the Great Air Power Debate”, *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Spring 2000), 9; Black, Henry Campbell. *Black’s Law Dictionary* (5th Ed.) (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1979), 504.

¹² White, B., Borrás, S., Hall, R., Scoones, I. and Wolford, W.. “The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals”, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 39:3-4 (2012), 6230.

¹³ Transnational Institute. *The Global Land Grab: A Primer* (Amsterdam: TNI Agrarian Justice Programme) (February 2013), 10.

¹⁴ To be sure, a discourse of this trend in Africa must necessarily begin with an insight into the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884/5 – an unprecedented landmark event that radically shaped the historical trajectory of the African continent from the late 19th century and onwards.

¹⁵ Cotula, Lorenzo. 2013. *The Great African Land Grab?: Agricultural Investments and the Global Food System* (London and New York: Zed); Peters, Pauline E. 2013. “Conflicts over Land and Threats to Customary Tenure in Africa,” *African Affairs* Vol. 112, No. 449; White *et al.*, “The New Enclosures...”, 623. Such reforms often claimed rights of universal land ownership – a legal presumption dating back to colonial authority (Peters, “Conflicts over Land”).

¹⁶ Cotula, *The Great African Land Grab?*

¹⁷ Transnational Institute, *The Global Land Grab*.

What is new, however, is that contemporary land dispossessions seem to be unprecedented in velocity and scale. For instance, independent estimate of the size of land that has been acquired every single year since 2007 was some 40 million hectares,¹⁸ and between 2008 and 2009 was more than ten times what it had been in previous annual averages.¹⁹ Of recent, figures from Oxfam showed that an area the size of London was being sold off to investors every six days.²⁰ Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that quite unlike the historical ‘scrambles’ of lands which had occurred throughout history until during the post-colonial periods, contemporary land grabbing undeniably have active ‘local content’ – the agency of the local elite. In all contemporary cases, land grabbing has gone on with apparent complicity and connivances of the local elite and the governments of ‘host’ countries.²¹ Thus, these were ‘grabs’ agreed to, and most times orchestrated by the elite of power in most affected societies. Many host countries have encouraged this type of investment and are keen to develop it as a potentially lucrative activity²² within the framework of alternative development model.²³

Drivers of Land Grabbing and the Climate Change Connexion

What exactly accounts for the current trends in land grabbing around the world? In addition, what are their nexuses with climate change? Contemporary land acquisition development, with its unprecedented velocity, intensity and scale which clearly marks it out, was triggered by a convergence and critical nexus of global human-environmental factors which are equally ‘new’ in the context of the land grabbing dynamic. These include: the fuel (energy) crisis, the food (agriculture) crisis, and the financial (economic) crisis – the ‘3F crises

¹⁸ GRAIN. *The Great Food Robbery: How Corporations Control Food, Grab Land and Destroy the Climate* (Barcelona: GRAIN, 2012); The World Bank Group. *The Global Land Rush: Can it Yield Sustainable and Equitable Benefits?* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2010).

¹⁹ Perez, J., Gistelink, M. and Karbala, D. “Sleeping Lions: International Investment Treaties, State-investor Disputes and Access to Food, Land and Water,” Oxfam Discussion Papers, Oxfam International, (May 2011), 8.

²⁰ McElroy, Damien. “Protest at the Great African Land Grab,” *The Telegraph* (04 October 2012); <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/liberia/9584931/Protest-at-the-great-African-land-grab.html> (accessed 17 December 2013). Often times these were very conservative and under-representations of actual situations, as the scale were often bigger. See: Hall, Ruth. “Land Grabbing in Southern Africa: The Many Faces of the Investor Rush”, *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 38:128 (2011); The World Bank Group, *The Global Land Rush*.

²¹ Odoemene, Akachi. “White Zimbabwean Farmers in Nigeria: Issues in ‘New Nigerian’ Land Deal and the Implications for Food and Human Security,” *African Identities*, Vol. 10 (1) (February 2012); Burley and Bebb, “Africa: Up for grabs...”.

²² von Braun, Joachim and Meinzen-Dick, Ruth. “Land Grabbing” by Foreign Investors in Developing Countries: Risks and Opportunities,” IFPRI Policy Brief 13, International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington (April 2009).

²³ Odoemene, Akachi. “Socio-Political Economy and Dynamics of Government-Driven Land Grabbing in Nigeria since 2000,” Global Economic Governance Working Paper 2015/103, University of Oxford (June 2015); Oakland Institute. “Understanding Land Investment Deals in Africa” (The Oakland Institute, 2011); http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OI_Ethiopia_Land_Investment_report.pdf (accessed 08 April 2013).

nexus' or what Stephens and Headey *et al* have appropriately dubbed “a perfect storm”.²⁴ A close observation will reveal that two most important of these crises that are driving contemporary land grabbing – fuel and food – were directly triggered by the incidence and pervasiveness of climate change. The three crises, as drivers of land grabbing developments, and their interconnections with climate change, will next be considered.

Fuel (Energy) Crisis

The most important factor in the ‘3F crises nexus’ is the drive for one part of the land-based climate change mitigation strategies: the production of biofuels by many countries desirous of a shift from fossil fuel to biofuel consumption.²⁵ Three clear goals stand out for the desired energy-source migration. The first is a major global effort to contain climate change through the use of ‘greener’ fuels, particularly pioneered by the global West. This development, through the production of ethanol and biodiesel from agricultural crops and feedstock, has been to migrating to a cleaner and cheaper transport fuel supplement towards mitigating climate change. The second goal is directed towards the development of alternative energy sources, thus expanding the fuel energy resource mix that could overcome the ‘peak oil’ problems which often resulted in unstable oil prices and energy crisis. This, the advocates of this historic switch stressed and argued, would help achieve ‘more reliable’ energy sources and higher levels of energy security.²⁶ The fostering of rural development in target societies is the third goal of this development.²⁷ We will come back to this vital issue sometime later. It is noteworthy that the perceived importance of these goals has seen biofuels touted prominently on the international agenda.

Biofuel production has been central to the land grabbing phenomenon, and thus is a big issue in the climate-energy-food nexus. Indeed, the Global Land Report 2010 (GLP) aptly noted biofuels production as an important driver of the global land investments.²⁸ The great

²⁴ Stephens, Phoebe. “The Global Land Grab: An Analysis of Extant Governance Institutions”, *International Affairs Review*, Vol. XX (1) (Summer 2011), 3, 5; Headey, Derek; Malaiyandi, Sangeetha and Fan, Shengagn. “Navigating the Perfect Storm: Reflections on the Food, Energy, and Financial Crises,” (Washington: IFPRI, 2007).

²⁵ The other part of the strategy – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and enhanced forest carbon stocks (REDD+) – equally results in another form of land grabbing: ‘green grabbing’, often for ‘environmental ends’. It must be noted that while both strategies hold potentials for a socially-inclusive growth, they can and do lead to land grabs. For further insights, see: Institute of Social Studies (ISS) “The MOSAIC Project: Climate Change Mitigation Policies, Land Grabbing and Conflict in Fragile States: Understanding Intersections, Exploring Transformations in Myanmar and Cambodia” (2014); www.iss.nl/MOSAIC (accessed 28 December 2014); Fairhead, J., Leach, M. and Scoones, I. “Green Grabbing: A New Appropriation of Nature?”, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 39 (2) (2012).

²⁶ Fischer, Günther, Eva Hizsnyik, Sylvia Prieler Mahendra Shah and Harrij van Velthuisen. *Biofuels and Food Security* (Vienna and Schlossplatz: The OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) (2009), 30.

²⁷ Fischer *et al*, *Biofuels and Food Security*.

²⁸ Friis and Reenberg, “Land Grab in Africa...”.

rush towards biofuels has been a direct result of global factors, such as the European Union's mandatory 10% biofuel target for transport fuels by 2020, the US domestic energy policy of use 36 billion gallons of renewable biofuel by 2022, and India's 20% ethanol mandate in 2017.²⁹ Meeting these targets requires the sourcing, leasing and cultivation of large expanse of lands for the production of biofuel stocks. For instance, over 70% of the total number of land deals cross-checked between 2001 and 2011 is in agriculture,³⁰ while more than 60% of the deals were to grow crops that would be used for biofuels.³¹ Indeed, even greater production, and associated land acquisitions will be required.³² The destination of such land acquisition has been poor, developing countries where access to land is easy and cheap. Another important dimension to this is that such biofuels are predominantly for the European and Western markets.³³ The United Kingdom is the biggest investor in biofuel production, followed by the United States, India, Norway and Germany respectively.³⁴ The major crops used in this development include jatropha, palm oil, cassava and sugar cane.

Figure I: *Global Land Acquisitions by sectors (in millions of hectares)*

²⁹ Anseeuw, Ward; Boche, Mathieu; Breu, Thomas; Giger, Markus; Lay, Jann; Messerli, Peter and Nolte, Kerstin. *Transnational Land Deals for Agriculture in the Global South: Analytical Report based on the Land Matrix Database* (Bern, Montpellier and Hamburg: CDE, CIRAD and GIGA, 2012); Stephens, "The Global Land Grab..."; Lonza, L.; Hass, H.; Maas, H.; Reid, A. and Rose, K.D. "EU Renewable Energy Targets in 2020: Analysis of Scenarios for Transport," (JEC Biofuels Programme, 2011), Joint Scientific and Technical Report; http://ies.jrc.ec.europa.eu/uploads/jec/JECBiofuels%20Report_2011_PRINT.pdf (accessed 27 October 2012); Arezki, R., Deininger, K. and Selod, H. "What Drives the Global Land Rush?", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. WPS5864 (2011); Brüntrup, M. "Detrimental Land Grabbing or Growth Poles?: Determinants and Potential Development Effects of Foreign Direct Land Investments", *Technikfolgenabschätzung – Theorie und Praxis* (Bonn: German Development Institute, 2011); Deininger, K., Byerlee, D., Lindsay, J., Norton, A., Selod, H., Stickler, M. *Rising Global Interest in Farmland: Can it Yield Sustainable and Equitable Benefits?* (Washington DC: The World Bank Group, 2011); Friis and Reenberg, "Land Grab in Africa..."; Daniel, S. and Mittal, A., *The Great Land Grab: Rush for World's Farmland Threatens Food Security For the Poor* (Oakland: the Oakland Institute, 2009); Cotula, Lorenzo and Vermeulen, Sonja. "Deal or no Deal: The Outlook of Agricultural Land Investment in Africa," *International Affairs*, Vol. 85(6) (2009).

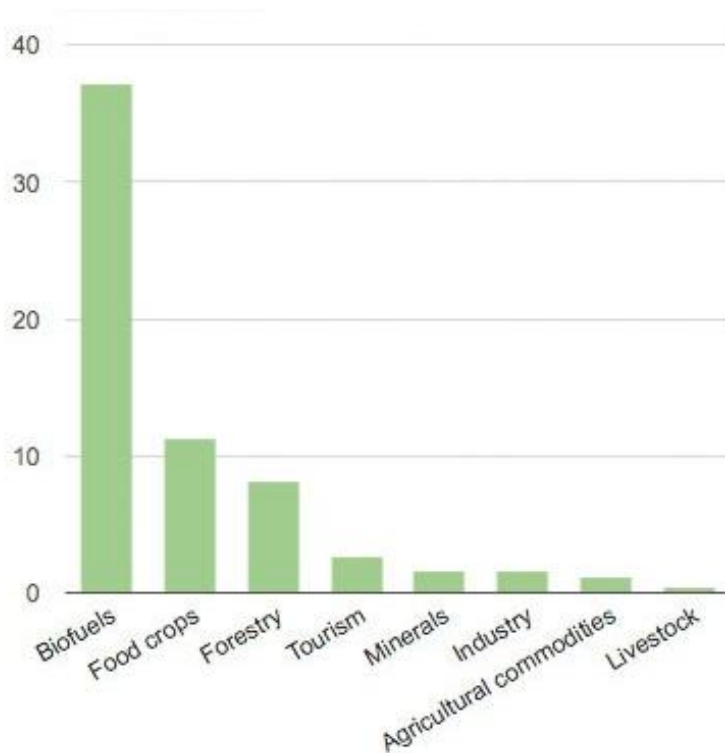
³⁰ Oxfam International. "Land and Power: The Growing Scandal Surrounding the new wave of Investments in Land" Oxfam Briefing Paper 151 (22 September 2011). 5.

³¹ Vidal, John. "Land Acquired Over Past Decade Could Have Produced Food for a Billion People", *The Guardian* Newspaper (London); Thursday, 4 October 2012.

³² *Friends of the Earth International* (FoEI). "Africa: Up for Grabs: The Scale and Impact of Land Grabbing for Agrofuels," Friends of the Earth International (2010); www.foeeurope.org/.../FoEI_Africa_up_for_grabs_2010.pdf (accessed 30 October 2012).

³³ FoEI, "Africa: Up for Grabs...". There is also the shift in energy policy among Southern African countries, which is geared towards fulfilling their energy needs with their own natural resources. See: Sulle, E. and Nelson, F. "Biofuels, Land Access and Rural Livelihoods in Tanzania," London: International Institute for Environment [IIED], 2009).

³⁴ Koscieljew, M. "The New Scramble for Africa: Land-grabbing Exploitation Presented as Economic Development" (15 December 2011); <http://www.caaglop.com/robbenisland-blog/economy/the-new-scramble-for-africa-land-grabbing-exploitation-presented-as-economic-development/> (accessed 17 July 2012).



Source: Land Matrix, 2012.

Food (Agriculture) Crisis

The second most significant factor for the rise in land acquisitions is the fear of food insecurity occasioned by the 2007-08 global food crisis. During this crisis world commodity prices rose precipitously sparking fears among many net food-importing countries about the security of their food supplies. Many of them sought land and food investment opportunities elsewhere to ensure some level of food security in their home countries. These countries' compromised capacity to produce enough food for their citizens was as a result of either the lack of arable land on which to farm or the exigencies of climate change, including extreme weather events – such as droughts and floods – which may have affected agricultural production.³⁵ For instance, China holds approximately 20% of the world's population but possesses no more than seven percent of the world's arable land,³⁶ and for many years was a net exporter of agricultural goods. However, due to diverse factors including its rapid economic growth, higher population income, changes in diets, and limited arable land, it became a net

³⁵ Anseeuw *et al*, *Transnational Land Deals*; Arezki, R., Deininger, K. and Selod, H. 2011. "What Drives the Global Land Rush?", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. WPS5864; Brüntrup, "Detrimental Land Grabbing; Deininger *et al.*, *Rising Global Interest in Farmland*; Odoemene, "White Zimbabwean Farmers in Nigeria..."; Friis and Reenberg, "Land Grab in Africa..."; Daniel and Mittal, *The Great Land Grab*; Cotula *et al.*, *Land Grab or Development Opportunity?*; Liverman, D. and Kapadia, K. "Food Systems and the Global Environmental Change: An Overview," in: Ingram, J., Ericksen, P. and Liverman, D. (eds.) *Food Security and Global Climate Change* (London: Earthscan, 2010), 324.

³⁶ Freeman, D., Holslag, J. and Weil, S. "China's Foreign Farming Policy: Can Land Provide Security?," BICCS Asia Paper, 3nr 9, Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies, Brussels (2009).

importer of agricultural goods since the beginning of the 2000s. To guarantee its food security, Chinese government and private corporations began to invest in land suitable for agriculture outside its national borders.³⁷ Similarly, import-dependent countries, such as Japan and South Korea follow this same trend.

A slightly different scenario is being experienced among the arid, oil-rich countries from the Gulf States such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Due to harsh climatic conditions, poor soils and scarce land and water, among other limitations,³⁸ these Gulf States also began to outsource food supplies through investments in farmlands outside their borders in an attempt to reduce its domestic water use.³⁹ Thus, by controlling farmlands beyond their national borders these countries (in both cases) are gaining control of the international supply-chain of food stuffs.⁴⁰ The food produced by these countries or their agents on farmlands elsewhere is specifically meant for export or repatriation back to the investor countries.⁴¹ This practice is perceived as an innovative, long-term strategy to ensure the food security of its population at cheap prices.⁴² Important investment players in this respect include China, India, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Japan, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates.⁴³ According to Seo and Rodriguez, a report by the FAO in 2009 noted these countries as currently food self-sufficient,⁴⁴ even as much of the host countries' own population lacks sufficient food.⁴⁵

Relevant to our discourse here is the fact that extreme weather events were noted as having affected cereal exports in 2005-06 and decreased cereal production worldwide by 10% especially by major cereal producers such as the USA, EU and China, which was a major cause of the 2007-08 food crisis.⁴⁶ Similarly, the first factor – fuel crisis – equally interconnects with the second factor – food crisis – in certain fashions. For instance, it has been argued that the fertilizer prices and transportation costs which increased from 2003 to 2008 were due to the oil

³⁷ Seo, Kihwan and Rodriguez, Natalia. "Land Grab, Food Security and Climate Change: A Vicious Circle in the Global South," in Chhetri, Netra (ed). *Human and Social Dimensions of Climate Change* (InTech, 2012).

³⁸ Haralambous, S., Liversage, H. and Romano, M. "The Growing Demand for Land Risks and Opportunities for Smallholder Farmers," discussion paper prepared for the 32nd session of the Governing Council of IFAD (Rome, 2009), 17.

³⁹ "Food and Water Europe: Global Land Grab Undermines Food Security in the Developing World,"; <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/factsheet/global-land-grab/> (accessed 02 June 2012)

⁴⁰ Cochrane, L. *Food Security or Food Sovereignty: The Case of Land Grabs*, *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* (2011); Online: <http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/1241> (accessed 20 October 2011).

⁴¹ Friis and Reenberg, "Land Grab in Africa...".

⁴² GRAIN, "Seized...".

⁴³ Koscieljew, "The New Scramble for Africa...".

⁴⁴ Seo and Rodriguez, "Land Grab, Food Security and Climate Change...".

⁴⁵ Zoomers, A. "Globalisation and the Foreignisation of Space: Seven Processes Driving the Current Global Land Grab," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 37(2) (2010).

⁴⁶ Liverman, D. and Kapadia, K. "Food Systems and the Global Environmental Change: An Overview," in: Ingram, J., Ericksen, P., Liverman, D. (eds.) *Food Security and Global Climate Change* (London: Earthscan, 2010), 324.

price hike.⁴⁷ Again, the increased demand for the production of biofuels – owing to the fuel crisis – conflicted with food crops as land was diverted for the production of monocultures such as sugar cane, oilseeds, palm oil and cereals for biofuels.⁴⁸

Financial and Economic Crisis

Beyond the need for sustainable biofuel energy sources and the fears of food insecurity, a third important factor is pure land speculation from which the aim is neither food nor biofuel, but profits and high returns. This is either from increasing land values or short-term land exploitation. This came about after the 2007-2008 financial (and economic) crisis, which also had a dramatic impact on food prices. Indeed, as Ghosh appositely argues, the two – food crisis and financial crisis) should not be treated as discrete from each other, but rather seen as very well connected phenomena.⁴⁹ Thus, while the financial crisis is not related to climate change (at least, in no direct manner), it would be necessary to consider its importance here, particularly because of its links to the land grabbing dynamic.

When the financial (and economic) crisis hit the US, causing series of collapses in its housing and derivative markets and equally having a ripple effect on the world, “investors were left searching for new areas in which to channel their funds”.⁵⁰ In this vein, the agricultural sector was ‘rediscovered’ by multiple actors as a reliable investment destination.⁵¹ George Soros, the US billionaire and investment expert, unequivocally expressed his conviction over this trend in June 2009, noting that “farmland is going to be one of the best investments of our time”.⁵² As the sharp upward trend in commodity prices increased returns on investment in production, as Cotula and Vermeulen⁵³ have noted, there emerged a great interest by numerous investors in owning land or shares in companies that are involved in the production end of the value-chain.⁵⁴ Thus, the attention of food corporations, financial investors and other global institutions – including some world class universities – who were hungry for profits in the midst of the deepening financial crises, was drawn to the profits of investment opportunities presented by cheap and “available” farmlands in the developing world.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ghosh, Jayati. “The Unnatural Coupling: Food and Global Finance”, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 10 (1) (2010), 72.

⁵⁰ Stephens, “The Global Land Grab: ...”, 4.

⁵¹ Deininger *et al.*, *Rising Global Interest in Farmland*, xxxii.

⁵² GRAIN, *The Great Food Robbery*, 121.

⁵³ Cotula and Vermeulen, “Deal or no Deal...”, 1237.

⁵⁴ Stephens, “The Global Land Grab: ...”.

Table I: *Global estimates (as at 2012) of major land deals.*

Countries involved	Land purchased/leased (in ha)	Number of deals
United Kingdom	4,941,765	40
USA	4,162,394	42
UAE	3,182,950	19
India	2,101,400	28
China	1,953,527	36
South Korea	1,412,394	16
Saudi Arabia	1,132,945	20
Germany	525,345	22

Source: Seo and Rodriguez, 2012.

Without a doubt, any one of these factors, or the sum of all of them, typically poses significant challenges. The development constitutes a major threat to land ownership in most target countries, and has led to an all-time surge in farmland purchases. In addition to these global drivers that have been considered, there were other domestic factors, which were country-specific, that further exacerbated the likelihood of land grabbing. These included ineffectual rural land claims, contentious land laws, corruption, weak governance institutions and high poverty levels. Often governance-related, these factors created a permissive environment at the domestic or national levels in which the three principles of good conduct are likely to be abrogated, thus gave rise to a high likelihood that a land acquisition will be a land grab. In other words, due to the changes in and urgency of these three global crises, and their interaction with some or all the listed domestic factors, as the case may be, wealthy elements, either the State or corporate entities or persons – particularly Western democracies and other emerging powers – began to acquire agricultural farmlands in poor, developing but resource rich countries.⁵⁵

At this stage, it would be necessary to consider and have some insight into who the land grabbers and their supporters/sponsors are. In the first place, it is on record that major international development agencies, including the World Bank Group and USAID, are often the architects of these deals.⁵⁶ In the other realm, the main actors within this development are mainly governments of the world's wealthiest and most acquisitive countries – who act directly

⁵⁵ Koscieljew, "The New Scramble for Africa..."; Agbu, O. "The New Scramble for Africa: Re-enactment of History and Africa's Response in the 21st Century", paper presented at the 13 CODESRIA General Assembly, Rabat, Morocco (5-9 December 2011).

⁵⁶ The Oakland Institute. "Land Grabs: False Climate Change Solutions Hurt Africa," *Black Business Quarterly*, (6 February 2012); <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/land-grabs-false-climate-change-solutions-hurt-africa> (accessed 23 February 2013).

or through state-owned enterprises – international and trans-national mega-corporations, agribusiness corporations, sovereign wealth funds, private equity firms, pensions/hedge funds and international financial speculators and individuals – oligarchs, *sheikhs* and private wealthy investors.⁵⁷ In the main, such developments were mostly investor – government deals using private capital. Interestingly, many reputable academic institutions, such as Harvard and Vanderbilt in the US, were also involved in leasing vast areas of African farmland in deals through hedge funds and financial speculators.⁵⁸

Crucial Agricultural Dynamic of the Phenomena

One dynamic primary dynamic connects the three factors we have considered. This is agriculture – which nexus with climate change is perceived as “one of the quintessential challenges of sustainable development”⁵⁹ in the contemporary world. All the three factors point to the suitability of agricultural lands investments as a means towards solving the crises. Instructively, this also has direct links with climate change, as agriculture, particularly the commercial and mechanised forms, has direct impact on the phenomenon. For instance, on the one hand, agriculture – which has always been highly dependent on climate patterns and variations⁶⁰ – contributes to climate change by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs),⁶¹ changes in land surfaces through conversion of non-agricultural lands (like forests) into agricultural land (deforestation and the burning of biomass),⁶² and the use of fossil fuel-based fertilizers.⁶³ These influence and impact both local and regional climates, and have been

⁵⁷ Friis and Reenberg, “Land Grab in Africa...”; Pearce, Fred. *The Landgrabbers: The New Fight over Who Owns the Planet* (London: Eden Project Books, 2012).

⁵⁸ Vidal, John and Provost, Claire. “US Universities in Africa ‘Land Grab’,” *The Guardian* (Wednesday 8 June 2011); <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/08/us-universities-africa-land-grab> (accessed 09 March 2014).

⁵⁹ Clark, William C., Patti Kristjanson, Bruce Campbell, Calestous Juma, Noel M. Holbrook, Gerald Nelson and Nancy Dickson. “Enhancing Food Security in an Era of Global Climate Change,” CID Working Paper No. 198 (July 2010), 5.

⁶⁰ For instance, solar radiation, temperature, and precipitation are noted as the main drivers of crop growth.

⁶¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) aptly noted that the three main causes of the increase in greenhouse gases observed over the past 250 years have been fossil fuels, land use, and agriculture. About 25% of carbon dioxide emissions are produced by agricultural sources, while most of the methane in the atmosphere comes from domestic ruminants, forest fires, wetland rice cultivation and waste products, and conventional tillage and fertilizer use account for 70% of the nitrous oxides. Furthermore, it has been suggested that agriculture, forestry and land-use change contributed around 20% - 25% to global annual emissions in 2010 alone (see: Smith, P., M. Bustamante, H. Ahammad, H. Clark, H. Dong, E.A. Elsiddig, H. Haberl, R. Harper, J. House, M. Jafari, O. Masera, C. Mbow, N.H. Ravindranath, C.W. Rice, C. Robledo Abad, A. Romanovskaya, F. Sperling, and F. Tubiello, 2014: “Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU),” in: Edenhofer, O., R. Pichs-Madruga, Y. Sokona, E. Farahani, S. Kadner, K. Seyboth, A. Adler, I. Baum, S. Brunner, P. Eickemeier, B. Kriemann, J. Savolainen, S. Schlömer, C. von Stechow, T. Zwickel and J.C. Minx (eds.), *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change – Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press), 383.

⁶² Rosenzweig, C.; Tubiello, F.N.; Goldberg, R.; Mills, E. and Bloomfield, J. “Increased Crop Damage in the US from Excess Precipitation under Climate Change, *Global Environmental Change*, Vol. 12(3) (2002).

⁶³ See: Boland, Tommy. “The Contribution of Global Agriculture to Greenhouse Gas Emissions,” presentation at ‘Feeding the World in 2050 – a Policy Symposium’, University College Dublin, Ireland; 15 - 16 January 2013.

estimated to have been responsible for 1/3 (one-third) of climate change.⁶⁴ Again, the competition for land, water, and energy will only intensify along with the need to reduce the many negative impacts of agriculture to the environment.⁶⁵ Thus, the agricultural sector has become one of the main driving forces in gas emissions and land use effects.

On the other hand, climate change also adversely affects agriculture in a number of ways. These could be biophysical, ecological, and/or socio-economic in nature. They include through changes in average temperatures, rainfall, and climate extremes (like heat waves); changes in pests and diseases; changes in atmospheric carbon dioxide and ground-level ozone concentrations; changes in the nutritional quality of some foods; changes in sea level;⁶⁶ a shift in climate and agricultural zones towards the poles; and increased vulnerability of the landless and the poor.⁶⁷ These effects are unevenly distributed across the world,⁶⁸ and will probably increase the risk of food insecurity for some vulnerable groups, such as the poor.⁶⁹ FAO argues that developing countries are more vulnerable to climate change than developed countries.⁷⁰ This is crucial particularly as a strong consensus has also emerged pointing to the fact that climate change poses new challenges to already-vulnerable populations – developing economies. Thus, not only are developing countries already (at present) bearing the brunt of its adverse consequences, but will continue to do so in the future.⁷¹ In other words, climate change

⁶⁴ Climate Institute. “Agriculture”; <http://www.climate.org/topics/agriculture.html> (accessed 15 August 2014).

⁶⁵ Scherr, S.J. and McNeely, J.A. “Biodiversity Conservation and Agricultural Sustainability: Towards a New Paradigm of ‘Ecoagriculture’ Landscapes,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 363 (2008); Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis* (Island Press, Washington DC., 2005).

⁶⁶ Hoffmann, Ulrich. “Agriculture at the Crossroads: Assuring Food Security in Developing Countries under the Challenge of Global Warming,” *Trade and Environment Review* (Geneva: UNCTAD, 2013), 3, 5

⁶⁷ Climate Institute, “Agriculture”.

⁶⁸ Porter, J.R., L. Xie, A.J. Challinor, K. Cochrane, S.M. Howden, M.M. Iqbal, D.B. Lobell, and M.I. Travasso, 2014: “Food Security and Food Production Systems,” in: Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken, P.R. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.), *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability* (Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects) – Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 488-489.

⁶⁹ Climate Institute, “Agriculture”.

⁷⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). “Climate Change, Bioenergy and Food Security: Options for Decision Makers Identified by Expert Meeting,” paper prepared for the high-level conference on *World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy*; Rome, 3-5 June 2008; FAO-IWGCC. *Climate Change and Food Security: A Framework Document* (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization, 2008).

⁷¹ This is because of the predominance of agriculture in their weak economies, high poverty rates, the scarcity of capital for adaptation measures, high vulnerability levels due to their warmer baseline climates and their heightened exposure to extreme events. See: Thompson, Heather E., Berrang-Ford, Lea and Ford, James D. “Climate Change and Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Literature Review”, *Sustainability* 2 (2010), 2720; Ringler, C., Zhu, T., Cai, X., Koo, J. and Wang, D. “Climate Change Impacts on Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa: Insights from Comprehensive Climate Change Scenarios,” IFPRI Discussion Paper 01042 (December 2010); FAO, “Climate Change, Bioenergy and Food Security...”; FAO-IWGCC, *Climate Change and Food Security*; Cooper, P.J.M., Dimes, J., Rao, K., Shapiro, B. and Twomlow, S. “Coping better with current climatic variability in the rain-fed farming systems of Sub-Saharan Africa: An essential first step in adapting to future climate change?” *Agric. Ecosyst. Environ* 126, (2008).

is having (and would continue to have) particularly serious consequences for associated societies in largely uncertain ways.⁷²

For instance, sub-Saharan Africa is not only commonly identified as a region highly vulnerable to climate change,⁷³ but agriculture, agricultural livelihoods and food security figure prominently in the list of human activities and ecosystem services under threat of dangerous anthropogenic interference by climate change.⁷⁴ This is because climate change is a major factor, alongside energy, which is redefining the world food equation and having an enormous impact on food security, especially of the poor in developing countries.⁷⁵ As climate change puts additional pressure on already over-exploited natural resources and also negatively affects crop yields, stability of food supplies, and the ability of people to access and utilize food in many parts of the developing world,⁷⁶ this is grossly problematic for about ⅔ (two-thirds) of the work force in sub-Saharan Africa living from agriculture.⁷⁷ In fact, it has been projected that by 2080, agricultural output in developing countries may decline by 20% due to the cumulative effects of climate change.⁷⁸

Susceptibility to Land Grabbing

The increasing global demand for food production and alternative energy development led to the deliberate targeting of the global south (southern hemisphere) as an idoneous reservoir of arable land capable of satisfying the international needs.⁷⁹ Based on evidence one contends that developing economies in the southern hemisphere (Africa, Asia and Latin America) are the main targets for investors seeking farmlands.⁸⁰ Going back a bit, one wishes to recall the arguments put forward for the goals of the biofuels development. One of its goals

⁷² Ringler *et al.*, “Climate Change Impacts on Food Security...”.

⁷³ Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change (CSACC). “Achieving Food Security in the Face of Climate Change” (Final report), (March 2012); Thompson *et al.*, “Climate Change and Food Security...”; Christensen, J., Hewitson, B.C. and Mearns, L.O. “Regional Climate Projections”, in Solomon, S., Qin, D., Manning, M. (eds.) *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis: Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁷⁴ Watson, R.T., Noble, I.R., Bolin, B., Ravindranath, N.H. and Verardo, D.J. (eds.) “Land Use, Land-use Change, and Forestry.” Special report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). “Climate change 2001: impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability,” Contribution of Working Group II to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷⁵ CSACC, “Achieving Food Security...”.

⁷⁶ von Braun, Joachim. 2008. “Impact of Climate Change on Food Security in Times of High Energy Prices,” a background paper prepared for the Future of Agriculture: A Global Dialogue amongst Stakeholders; Barcelona (30th and 31st May); FAO-IWGCC, *Climate Change and Food Security*.

⁷⁷ International Labour Organization (ILO). “Employment by Sector” (Chapter 4), in *Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)*, 5th Edition (Geneva: ILO, 2007).

⁷⁸ Cline, W.R. *Global Warming and Agriculture: Impact estimates by Country* (Washington, DC.: Center for Global Development and Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2007).

⁷⁹ Seo and Rodriguez, “Land Grab, Food Security and Climate Change...”.

⁸⁰ De Schutter, Olivier. “Large-scale Land Acquisitions and Leases: A Set of Core Principles and Measures to Address the Human Rights Challenge,” UN Doc A/HRC/13/33/Add.2. (June 2009).

was to foster “rural development” in target societies. Without a doubt, the target for “rural development” is the developing countries where more than 70% of the poor reside in rural areas, and thus, in need of such ‘development’ model. Following this trend of thought, it would be fair to argue, therefore, that as 40 of the 65 “least-developed countries” are in Africa,⁸¹ the continent is essentially a foremost target of the development.⁸² Indeed, the imprints of the scale and intensity of land grabbing in the continent, particularly in comparison to others, eloquently demonstrates and lays credence to this fact.

For instance, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) estimated that deals of 15 to 20 million hectares of farmland in developing countries were under negotiation between 2006 and 2009,⁸³ while out of all such land deals counted in the 2008-2009 period, just under half (48%) are located in sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁴ In 2009 alone, the World Bank estimated that 56 million hectares of farmland – an area seven times the size of Sierra Leone – were acquired around the world. Two-thirds of these, it noted, were in Africa.⁸⁵ Again, Vidal and Provost⁸⁶ reported that between 2009 and 2011 nearly 60 million hectares of land – an area the size of France – was bought or leased in Africa by foreign companies. Furthermore, a preliminary research by the Land Matrix Partnership indicated that as many as 227 million hectares, an area of land the size of North-Western Europe, have been acquired since 2001, half of which were in Africa.⁸⁷ It was also estimated that more than 250 million of hectares have been ‘grabbed’ (sold, leased or licensed) by foreign interests in the developing world between 2001 and 2012; two-thirds of these were in Africa.⁸⁸

Figure II: *Top target regions for foreign farmland investment (since 2000)*

⁸¹ Fischer, Günther, Eva Hizsnyik, Sylvia Prieler Mahendra Shah and Harrij van Velthuizen, *Biofuels and Food Security* (Vienna and Schlossplatz: The OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) and International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), 2009), 31.

⁸² FFF, “2025 – Fields for Food or Fuel?...”.

⁸³ Cotula *et al*, *Land Grab or Development Opportunity?*.

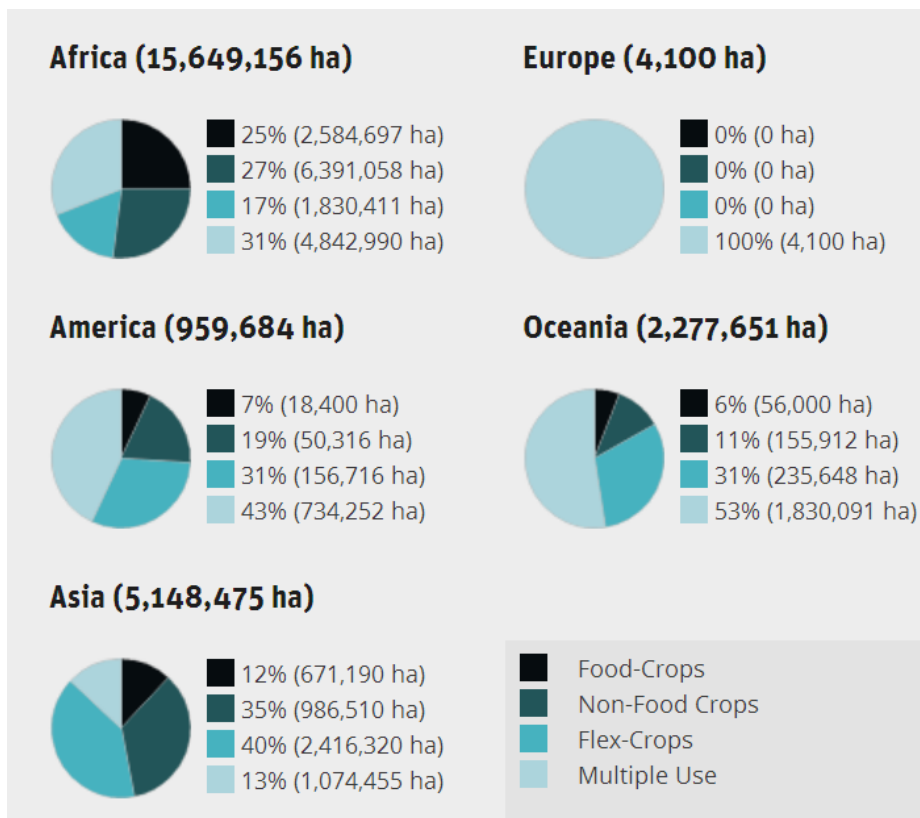
⁸⁴ Deininger *et al.*, *Rising Global Interest in Farmland*.

⁸⁵ Deininger *et al.*, *Rising Global Interest in Farmland*, xiv; *Standard Times* Newspaper (Sierra Leone), Thursday, October 20, 2011, 19; Friis and Reenberg, “Land Grab in Africa...”.

⁸⁶ Vidal, John and Provost, Claire. “US universities in Africa ‘land grab’”, *The Guardian* (London), (Wednesday, 8 June 2011).

⁸⁷ Oxfam International. “Land and Power: The Growing Scandal Surrounding the New Wave of Investments in Land,” Oxfam Briefing Paper 151 (22 September 2011), 5.

⁸⁸ GRAIN, *The Great Food Robbery*. Instructively though, all these represented only land deals with foreign concerns; almost nothing was reported on those involving the local elite, which in some instances could have been equally pervasive.



Source: Land Matrix, 2013 (published 14 June).

The question is: Why the rush for Africa’s land? Three reasons would suffice: beliefs of land availability, land affordability and the vulnerability of the States due to poverty. Firstly, the notion being portrayed is that Africa’s arable land is ‘empty’, ‘un-used’ ‘marginal’, ‘idle’ or ‘degraded’, ‘available in abundance’ and unlikely to compete with local food production.⁸⁹ This idea was originally ‘animated’ by the World Bank which saw Africa as an uncrowded space of opportunities, and suggested that such world’s largest excessive expanse of land reserves amidst low population densities would be key to meeting the world’s growing food and biofuels demands.⁹⁰ Apparently, this of course sent a remarkable positive signal to potential investors that Africa’s landed resources are, indeed, available and up for grabs, while the sustenance of the myth by the same institution has served to justify the continuous grabbing of land in the continent. This declaration, however, is clearly a myth and quite faulty.

In contradistinction, the reality is that the land is not empty, idle, or unused as suggested. To be sure, lands with such characterizations that could be utilized by investors are rare. If such lands existed, why was it that in almost all the recorded grab cases in Africa thousands of smallholder farmers, thousands of families and several rural communities were

⁸⁹ Friis and Reenberg, “Land Grab in Africa...”; World Bank. *Awakening Africa’s Sleeping Giant: Prospects for Commercial Agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone and Beyond* [Directions in Development] (New York: World Bank, 2009).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

often forcibly evicted from and dispossessed of lands on which they have lived on, cultivated crops and/or grazed cattle for centuries, to make way for new users? Indeed, lands that are ‘empty’, ‘un-used’, ‘marginal’, ‘idle’, and ‘available’ should not elicit such mass dislodgement and dislocations in societies, nor should it cause such resistances as have been noted. Paul *et al* has, however, argued that land so labelled as ‘empty’, ‘un-used’, ‘marginal’, ‘idle’:

...is often land used by marginalized people, by economically weaker sectors of communities, especially women. Much of it is communal land, collectively used by local people who might not have an individual land title, but for whom it is a vital resource for water, feed, food, medicines, fuel and other purposes. Such land is also essential for biodiversity, water supplies, soil and ecosystem regeneration.⁹¹

A typical example in this regard can be demonstrated with the case of Sierra Leone, a relatively small country of about 7.2 million hectares. Of this, about 5.4 million hectares (74%) of the country’s land is considered suitable for agriculture. From the foregoing, it would be quite normal for observers to speculate that since only 15% of the country’s arable land is currently under cultivation,⁹² the rest is ‘empty’, ‘un-used’, ‘marginal’, ‘idle’ or ‘under-used’, thus ‘available’, probably for long-term lease to investors. However, this would be misleading. Indeed, a study on *Rural Agricultural Finance in Sierra Leone* commissioned by the Bank of Sierra Leone and the German Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation revealed that “there is no remaining potential to significantly enlarge the area under cultivation anywhere in Sierra Leone”.⁹³ Without a doubt, this is one reason why the country is currently witnessing a great land grabbing crises today.

With regards to the land affordability factor, there is the belief that Africa’s land is cheap,⁹⁴ undervalued, or even free.⁹⁵ Really, this is so, but its disclosure sounded a dangerous exploitative tone, nonetheless, seemed a good business call and an excellent investment opportunity for many cash-rich and wealthy countries and their citizens. For example, it has been noted that land in Zambia, which is the most expensive in Sub-Saharan Africa, is just

⁹¹ Paul, Helena; Almuth Ernsting; Stella Semino; Susanne Gura and Antje Lorch. “Agriculture and Climate Change – Real Problems, False Solutions,” Report published for the Conference of the Parties, COP15, of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen (December 2009), 23.

⁹² *Standard Times* Newspaper, 19.

⁹³ Bello, Daniel Adebawale. “Land Grabbing in Sierra Leone: Who Benefits – Farmers or Investors?,” (Friday, 11 November 2011). <http://futurechallenges.org/local/land-grabbing-in-sierra-leone-who-is-benefiting-the-investors-or-the-farmers/> (accessed 05 December 2011).

⁹⁴ Seo and Rodriguez, “Land Grab, Food Security and Climate Change, 2.

⁹⁵ Future Agricultures. “Land Grabbing in Africa and the New Politics of Food”, Policy Brief 041 (June 2011). www.future-agricultures.org (accessed 26 January 2012), 2.

about one-eighth (12.5%) the price of similar size of land in Argentina or Brazil, and less than one-twentieth (5%) of that in Germany.⁹⁶ Similarly, in Sierra Leone official regulation requires investors to pay \$5 US Dollars *per acre*, or \$12 US Dollars *per hectare* for leasing of land *per year*, while same goes for just between \$1.25 US Dollars and \$6.75 US Dollars *per hectare* in Ethiopia, and has been agreed for some \$5 – \$7 US Dollars *per hectare* in Liberia. In comparison, land prices in Brazil or Argentina are \$5,000 US Dollars – \$6,000 US Dollars *per hectare*.⁹⁷ Thus, the extremely low land sale or leasehold prices have been a significant contributory factor for the upsurge in the interest in Africa's land.

The last of these factors is the vulnerability of the African state. Undeniably, Africa has been 'the sick man of the world' since the late 1970s. It has been a continent of largely ineffectual and unsuccessful states mostly plagued by decades of corruption, misrule and maladministration, poverty and hunger, diseases, and general underdevelopment. Due to these vices, most African states witnessed debilitating socio-economic, political and cultural breakdowns leading to unacceptable underdevelopment and gross impoverishment of the majority of its peoples. This grim condition of most African states is being taken advantage of by global players, acting in conjunction with complicit, corrupt and rent-seeking leaderships and 'predatory' local elite. They only see an excellent investment opportunity in such circumstances. This situation is made worse, and indeed, poignantly 'perfect' by the weak and broken governance institution and regimes, as well as ineffectual land policies.

Murphy has pointed out that most of the target countries for such investments have problematic governments (weak or corrupt or both), in which case "accountability, transparency and the enforcement of law can hardly be expected".⁹⁸ This fact is corroborated by Phil Heilberg, a United States' investor with allocation of one million acres in Southern Sudan, about investing in Africa's land. He aptly notes thus: "Listen, I want to control that ground. ... I want a country that's weaker. There's a cost to dealing with strong countries: resource nationalism".⁹⁹ Furthermore, the deep financial indebtedness of most African states to many of the investor countries is equally an important factor. In the face of such glaring

⁹⁶ Oxfam International, "Land and Power..."; Osabuohien, Evans, Efobi, U. and Ogundipe, O. "The Land Rush in Africa- Implications and Institutional Panacea", paper presented at United Nations University-Institute for Natural Resources in Africa (UNU-INRA) International Conference on Sustainable Development in Africa, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana 5-8th December 2011.

⁹⁷ Cotula, Lorenzo. "Land Deals in Africa: What is in the Contracts?" (London: IIED, 2011); Krasting, Bruce.. "Land Grab: African Farmland Purchases have surged 1500% since 2008", *Business Insider* Online (12 June 2011). Internet Resource: <http://www.businessinsider.com/african-land-grab-acres-for-a-bottle-of-scotch-2011-6> (accessed 02 January 2014); Mats, Hårsmar. "Land Grabbing in Africa", paper delivered at the DevNet international workshop, 'Land Grabbing in Africa: Global Resource Scarcity and Competition for Survival', Uppsala (21 October 2011).

⁹⁸ Murphy, Sophia. "Land Grabs and Fragile Food Systems: The Role of Globalization", Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (February 2013), 5.

⁹⁹ Cited in: Funk, McKenzie. "Will Global Warming, Overpopulation, Floods, Droughts and Food Riots Make This Man Rich? Meet the New Capitalists of Chaos," *Rolling Stone* (27 May 2010), 62.

weakness many of the African states would be unable to insist even on best practices, the minimum of which is the benchmark elsewhere. The level of impoverishment of the vast local peoples in Africa, who also lack a voice and are often weak politically, constitute yet another factor. With such status, Africans often lacked ‘real powers’ to face of such onslaught on their natural resources by powerful global actors. With the often lopsided power relations and divergence of interests associated with the land deals, it is clear that the vulnerability of the African continent was being exploited and the transacting parties would always leverage on such weaknesses of the continent to secure their own interests.

Consequences of the Land Grabbing Phenomenon

While some have seen great socio-economic potentials and benefits in the land grab development,¹⁰⁰ many others are of the opinion that it portends grave dangers to the existence and livelihoods of the rural poor.¹⁰¹ For the first group, such potentials and benefits could be perceived as the injection of the much-needed capital to re-vitalize agriculture (through the introduction of commercial and mechanised farming)¹⁰² and therefore the creation of on-farm and off-farm jobs, the development of rural infrastructure such as the provision of amenities (electricity, pipe-borne water, irrigation canals, the construction of schools and health clinics) that will improve rural lives and local livelihoods. In contradistinction, land deals have resulted most of the time in the forceful and violent dispossession, displacement, dislocation and disenfranchisement of local smallholders and communities.¹⁰³ Clearly, this development spells the end of small-scale farming and rural livelihoods in affected societies.¹⁰⁴ Women, who make up 70% of farmers in the developing world, are often the most vulnerable to this development.

An important consideration in this discourse is the distinctiveness of *land* in the affected societies – thus the crucial importance of the destructive nature of land alienation. For the people of these regions identified as witnessing enormous waves of land grabbing, land is very critical and lies at the heart of social, spiritual, economic and political life. Indeed, it is often the only source of wealth, livelihood and survival for most persons and/or families. This is not merely for its economics, but because of the social recognition and status it confers, as well as

¹⁰⁰ von Braun, Joachim and Meinzen-Dick, Ruth. “Land Grabbing by Foreign Investors in Developing Countries: Risks and Opportunities,” *IFPRI Policy Brief* No. 13, (April 2009); World Bank, *Awakening Africa’s Sleeping Giant*.

¹⁰¹ Odoemene, “White Zimbabwean Farmers in Nigeria; Akachi Odoemene. “Land grab conflicts in Africa: Engaging landscapes of resistance and alternatives”, research proposal presented for the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) fellowship competition of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), New York (June 2012); Daniel and Mittal, 2009; Oxfam International, “Land and Power...”; Oxfam International. “Bio-fuelling Poverty: Why the EU Renewable-Fuel Target May be Disastrous for Poor People.” *Oxfam Briefing Note* (November 2007).

¹⁰² Cotula, “Land Deals in Africa...”

¹⁰³ Friis and Reenberg, “Land Grab in Africa...”; Matondi, P., Håvnevik, K., Beyene, A. (eds.) *Biofuels, Land Grabbing and Food Security in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ GRAIN, “Seized...”

its spiritual implications for the owner(s), and the dire cultural challenges of landlessness in such contexts.¹⁰⁵ To be sure, much of the rural population ‘lives’ on such lands which have been in the family for generations, transferred from ages to the present. For these rural peoples, land is everything and ‘all that matters’ – a matter of identity and dignity, factor of production, socio-economic front, and even more.

With the grabbing of arable land also came ‘water grab’ as investors’ main targets are lands with access to irrigation for better potential production.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the acquisition of the water rights was the ultimate goal of the purchase or long-term lease of lands.¹⁰⁷ This new pressure on water resources will adversely impact small farmers, pastoralists, and fisherfolk, who rely on water resources for their livelihoods. In this respect, it has been warned that jeopardizing Africa’s fragile river systems, which are already under serious stress, will have both political and ecological consequences.¹⁰⁸ Politically, these grabbing developments have been described as a ‘neo-colonial approach’ by wealthy countries to take over the key natural resources of poor countries.¹⁰⁹ Most of the global farmland, 80% of which are located in Africa and South America,¹¹⁰ are either tropical rainforests, protected natural regions or are already used for shifting cultivation or grazing of animals.¹¹¹ Thus, they represent the most suitable regions for land deal investments. Ecologically, the conversion of tropical forests to crop land, (mostly monocrops) come as an inevitable threat to the regions’ biodiversity, carbon stocks and water resources which ultimately have impacts on the climate.¹¹² Besides, as the conversion of tropical landscapes to agricultural and pasture areas occur, soil productivity decreases due to less rainfall and drier lands occasioned by solar radiation partitioning.¹¹³ This development also makes livestock farming impossible.

¹⁰⁵ For instance, in certain societies where the people still bury their dead on their ancestral lands this issue becomes a very emotional one, as attempts at forcing them off the lands through grabbing directly implies cutting them off from their ancestry. This partly explains the spiritual dimensions of land to such peoples.

¹⁰⁶ Food and Water Watch. “Global Land Grab Undermines Food Security in the Developing World” (July 2009); <http://documents.foodandwaterwatch.org/doc/GlobalLandGrab.pdf> (accessed 05 May 2013); The Oakland Institute, “Land Grabs: False Climate Change Solutions...”.

¹⁰⁷ Smaller, Carin and Mann, Howard. “A Thirst for Distant Lands: Foreign Investment in Agricultural Land and Water” International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) (2009); <http://www.iisd.org/publications/thirst-distant-lands-foreign-investment-agricultural-land-and-water> (accessed 11 December 2014).

¹⁰⁸ The Oakland Institute, “Land Grabs: False Climate Change Solutions ...”.

¹⁰⁹ Hall, Ruth. “Land Grabbing in Southern Africa: the Many Faces of the Investor Rush,” *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 38(128) (2011).

¹¹⁰ Cotula *et al*, *Land Grab or Development Opportunity?*

¹¹¹ Ramankutty, N., Foley, J.A. and Olejniczak, N.J. “People on the Land: Changes in Global Population and Croplands during the 20th century,” *Ambio: A Journal of the Human Environment*, Vol. 31(3) (2002).

¹¹² von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, “Land Grabbing by Foreign Investors...”.

¹¹³ Pielke (Sr.), R.A.; Marland, G.; Betts, R.A.; Chase, T.N.; Eastman, J.L.; Niles, J.O.; Niyogi, D.S. and Running, W. “The Influence of Land-use Change and Landscape Dynamics on the Climate System: Relevance to Climate-Change Policy beyond the Radiative Effect of Greenhouse Gases,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A*, 360 (2002). As abundant as water may seem, predictions from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggest that fresh water supplies are likely to be depleted, especially in some parts of Africa.

Land grabbing also increases local food insufficiency and insecurity. As the rural agricultural work force – local smallholder farmers, fishermen and pastoralists – are dislocated and displaced, they become unable to meaningfully produce sufficient crops for societal survival. Furthermore, the export of locally produced agricultural products on sequestered farmlands force locals to purchase agricultural goods elsewhere as opposed to benefiting from the harvest of their own lands.¹¹⁴ In other words, these two scenarios for sure put at risk and create food insecurity and increase people’s vulnerability in the affected societies. Furthermore, the whole land grabbing arrangement means that crops are grown on these poor developing countries’ prime agricultural lands, not for the food plates of their largely impoverished and hungry citizens, but for fuel tanks in rich developed economies. Indeed, such trajectories merely orchestrate and reinforce poverty, hunger and destitution amongst the rural poor in the affected developing economies.

Land remains the most priced asset of most affected societies and people’s attachment to it is not just a mythical one. This means that land dynamics – rights, ownership, access and usage – form a critical part of the peoples’ existence. Thus, any attempt to ‘squeeze’ land from people would be strongly resisted. Indeed, it rests at the centre of theories of conflict and scarcity due to its assumed growing scarcity and has been a source and predisposing factor in the provocation and escalation of violent struggles and conflicts. As is being witnessed in many affected societies, land grabbing – for whatever reason(s) – are often and increasingly resisted and contested. Such contestations have been on two main fronts. The first is by the locals who have genuine fears of a threat to their livelihoods, food systems and survival. In this respect, such contestations have often been in the way of various forms of protests, and sometimes a legal challenge of such acquisitions.¹¹⁵ On the second front are international NGOs and a network of civil society and social movements, many of whom consider these land acquisitions as being grossly unethical, especially as it involves sophisticated forms of land seizures from local smallholders and the export of crops got from such expropriated lands from countries in which there is widespread hunger.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Climate change is tightly interconnected with land grabbing in ways that are both diverse and complex. These phenomena equally have both diverse and complex implications for populations, especially in the global hemisphere. Three global crises – in fuel, food, and finance – which are mostly climate change-related – drives wealthy but resource-poor

¹¹⁴ Seo and Rodriguez, “Land Grab, Food Security and Climate Change...”.

¹¹⁵ Odoemene, “Socio-Political Economy and Dynamics...”.

¹¹⁶ Seo and Rodriguez, “Land Grab, Food Security and Climate Change...”.

economies to acquire large-scale offshore lands for their needs and wants in poor and fragile but resource-rich economies. Obviously, this development forges one-sided land deals in which, capitalizing on these crises and the lucrative investment opportunities they create, the wealthy connives with local elites in affected regions in exploiting the land resources of the rural poor populations. The ‘urgency’ occasioned by the three crisis crates desperation in which the principles of good land deals are violated, thus leading to land grabbing. This has impacted negatively on affected populations: without a doubt, not only is it a major threat to local livelihoods, food security and human capital development, but a big blow to peasant agriculture and smallholder farming in the affected societies – just the same way climate change has affected these variables too.

A primary challenge is the obvious lack of, or weak political will by global political leaders, especially from ‘big global players’ in both climate change and land grabbing,¹¹⁷ to honestly resolve critical issues associated with the phenomena. The political controversy surrounding biofuels¹¹⁸ expose the efforts at climate change mitigation, especially through agrofuels, as a falsely upheld solution.¹¹⁹ Instead, the consequent biomass regime helped trigger massive land grabs, which proves a portent threat in diverse ways to the same vulnerable populations in fragile economies. Again, these phenomena and their critical intersections have produced diverse socio-environmental spill-over effects which changed both the nature of the contested resources and the social dynamics of resultant conflicts. Thus, these have not been ‘one-way political dynamics’. While widespread resistance to these developments is yet to be experienced, many affected populations have reacted to them in diverse significant ways. Whereas varied forms of active resistance by subordinate persons and communities continue to grow, there has been no halting of land grabbing or meaningful reduction of climate change incidents. To be sure, these will continue to produce chain reactions in the future.

Finally, from all indications, one is of the opinion that these phenomena and their diverse dire effects, have assumed postures of yet another set of global tragic episodes – very much like the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery, and colonialism – which will only be condemned, denounced and ‘regretted’ years after they had wrecked severe havoc in affected societies.

¹¹⁷ These include: United States, United Kingdom, Canada, China, India, continental Europe, the Gulf states and some other emerging economies.

¹¹⁸ Pretty, J. *et al.* “The Top 100 Questions of Importance to the Future of Global Agriculture,” *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, Vol. 8 (4) (2010).

¹¹⁹ The Oakland Institute, “Land Grabs: False Climate Change Solutions...”