

CELADA Statement of Principles

The Challenge: Land rights and agricultural development have become inescapable topics on national and international policy agendas in the context of many regions of the world, particularly the African continent. As land markets are increasingly internationalized with large tracts of land now changing hands at unprecedented speed, economic growth and poverty levels in certain African countries have experienced significant impacts – both positive and negative depending on their political context. The majority of African populations are heavily reliant on agriculture, often in a smallholder subsistence farming capacity where land and water access, management and ownership directly impact their livelihoods. As a result, effective global regulations and national level policies are now vital to ensuring international land transactions provide for sustainable and equitable development for the African people.

Some African governments have short-changed their citizens in prohibiting their ownership of land or rescinding such ownership later on for alleged national interests. Political leaders of many of these countries are simultaneously partnering with foreign investors and national elites to offer long-term leases of prime agricultural land along with rights to extract oil, gas, mineral reserves and unlimited use of water. In this process African farmers and pastoralists have been displaced from their land and thus their livelihoods, making it almost impossible for them to feed themselves and prosper as a result.

These largely secretive deals are frequently regarded as “land grabs” and typically exclude the main stakeholders –African farmers and pastoralists – from decision-making and any ensuing benefits. Most of the output produced as a result of these land acquisitions is destined for export, even in many of the food-deficit countries dependent on food aid. Environmental degradation has caused concern as foreign investors are inherently less vested in issues of the African environment. The UN has confirmed that competition for land, particularly land with access to water, will be one of the biggest security issues on the African continent in the coming years. Therefore, if this issue is not addressed, many Africans will face a hopeless future of deeper poverty, greater food insecurity, increasing environmental degradation and growing political instability.

The increasing need for food and resources in the world is a global issue closely linked to Africa, as Africa now possesses the largest sources of untapped land and water resources in the world. Despite this promising context, many African populations are poor and vulnerable to exploitation by corrupt governments, as well as elites, foreign investors and other nations pursuing their own self-interests at the expense of Africans.

The ***Coalition for Equitable Land Acquisitions and Development in Africa (CELADA)*** is an international campaign to end the indiscriminate alienation of African land to external and domestic commercial interests; to restore, reform and ensure sustainable land rights; and to promote equitable agricultural development, including land access, management and ownership for the African people.

CELADA seeks to achieve these goals by raising awareness of the issues surrounding these land and resource transactions; promoting and conducting research, dialogue and debate among local, regional and international decision-makers; and lobbying relevant institutions and governments for improvements. In the process, CELADA seeks to develop and strengthen partnerships with individuals, citizen groups, organizations, the business community and governments. Ultimately CELADA aims to engage those who care about ethical and sustainable development, social justice issues, and world security to shape the discussion and outcomes of the “coming age of Africa”