

## **Brief to the 2016 International Assistance Review**

**Submitted by**

**The Coalition for Equitable Land Acquisitions and Development in Africa (CELADA)**

### **Land as a cross-cutting theme in Canada's international assistance policy and funding framework**

#### **Issue**

At the moment, Global Affairs Canada's policy, programme and research initiatives do very little to tackle land-related issues – such as the protection of land rights, equitable access to land, and tenure security for vulnerable populations – despite their critical role in poverty reduction, food security and various other development goals. The IAR Discussion Paper (p.10) refers to water as having a direct bearing on many issues pertaining to sustainable development. Land should similarly be regarded as a cross-cutting theme. Indeed, land and water are usually accessed in tandem for survival and livelihood purposes by most rural populations in developing countries

#### **Background**

Land has become a critical development issue as lagging governance models have failed to recognize and protect vulnerable populations within an increasingly liberalized and globalized land market. While national policy, legislation, and enforcement offer a means to regulate this evolving transnational market in developing contexts, there are real limits to state level regulation. Inter- and intra-country power dynamics, the proliferation of implicated corporations, and state-level corruption demand a global approach, in which Canada's role is critical.

Since the World Food Price crisis of 2008, the world has witnessed an exponential increase in demand for agricultural land. From agricultural producers looking to cash in on high profit margins to state-backed investors seeking to bolster their nation's food security to financial investors engaged in speculative transactions, land has become an important international commodity. Although growth in the global land market has facilitated some investments that are conducive to inclusive and sustainable development, many more have wreaked havoc on vulnerable populations.

"Land grabs", as defined in relation to the most recent global land rush, is the buying and leasing of large tracts of agricultural territory by both foreign and domestic investors through transactions that are notably unjust to the supplier. While proponents claim these transactions create employment opportunities, improve infrastructure and transfer skills and knowledge to rural populations, the extent to which many of these types of investments are beneficial is questionable. In addition to the dispossession of land and water assets, land grabs often entail the expropriation of livelihoods and human rights abuses, including the forced relocation of farmers to inferior land. This is especially true in many developing countries where the majority of the population are smallholder farmers or pastoralists, and are therefore highly dependent on land for shelter, income, food and water.

The environmental impacts of land grabs amplify the negative impacts of land grabs when commercial, monoculture-focused, agricultural production is the end goal. Shifting from subsistence to commercial monoculture farming methods has broad consequences for the surrounding communities, such as land degradation, overuse of fresh water ways, heavy use of fertilisers and pesticides, and increased emissions due to dependence on fossil fuels for machinery.

Consequently, unregulated, large-scale land acquisitions have the potential to undermine international development efforts – a fact which the rest of the international development community has sought to address. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example, address the need for secure and equal ownership and access to land throughout its targets (i.e. target 1.4, 2.3 and 5.a).

Development and human rights policy-making, programming and research that is sensitive to land issues – such as the protection of land rights, equitable access to land, and tenure security for vulnerable populations – is therefore crucial to an effective international assistance policy. Refusal to acknowledge or address this issue will not only impact Canada’s deliverables, as many programs will prove ineffective without thorough land-access-impact considerations, it will also ensure Canada remains laggard on an issue that can only worsen as populations increase and land degradation continues.

To its credit, IDRC is currently supporting research on large-scale land acquisitions in Africa (Russell 2015). Preliminary results of that research find that in many instances, agricultural investments have failed to live up to expectations and are not generating sustainable benefits. Furthermore in many instances, land deals are leaving local people worse off than they would have been without the investment. The report says that “this finding is particularly troublesome when coupled with the fact that two-thirds of foreign land deals take place in developing countries with serious hunger problems and the weakest land rights protection laws.” The recommendations below draw in part on IDRC’s research findings.

## **Recommendations**

The time is right for Canada to re-examine and re-think its approach to land rights, equitable land access and tenure security. Given land issues are interwoven throughout the 2030 Agenda, Canada should be working with its civil society and private sector partners at home and abroad to address it.

Land impacts all of Global Affairs Canada’s proposed international assistance themes. For example, although women produce the majority of the world’s food, men are more likely to possess formal ownership and secure access to agricultural land. Given many women are at constant risk of losing their only source of food, shelter and income, **land-sensitive and land-specific policies, programmes and research** offer an avenue to the empowerment and protection of women and girls.

Similarly, as mentioned previously, unregulated land markets enable commercial, monoculture-focused producers to take over vast tracts of land without consideration to the biodiversity, water quality and the soil fertility of that area. There are also few incentives to ensure the socio-economic impacts of these investments are inclusive and sustainable. Focusing on **better land governance – both within Canada to regulate Canadian companies acquiring land abroad, as well as assisting developing countries to develop better investment and land tenure policies** – could therefore ensure cleaner and more inclusive economic growth.

From a human rights perspective, while the right to property was included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>1</sup>, it was the only right not integrated into one of the legally binding covenants that were developed as a result of the Declaration. Many UN agencies argue it should have been included in light of the growing commercialization and globalization of land, and various international instruments since the UN Declaration have recognized its importance (i.e. the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure, the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems). We would therefore argue that

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<sup>1</sup> Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others .... And ... No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property (article 17)

**land rights should be considered, if not prioritized, when pursuing a human rights based approach to policy, programmes and research.**

Looking at the security implications of the increasing demand for land, 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. We would therefore argue the **need to include land as a fundamental consideration in Canada's international assistance efforts** since it will play a vital role in Canada's continued support of fragile states.

With regards to the theme of responding to the challenges faced by displaced persons, although we have no statistics, population displacement is one of the main impacts of land grabs. Yet, as we have learned in advocating on behalf of our members this year to address one such displacement, there are currently few resources within Global Affairs Canada to support communities who have been forced from their land as a result of land grabbing. **Canada could therefore work more closely with international institutions, such as UNHCR and UN Habitat, to facilitate humanitarian aid and assistance to communities in need.**

Looking more broadly, CELADA feels **Canada's commitment to the UN's Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development is vital.** The key characteristics of these frameworks clearly demonstrate why land is such an important issue. For example, as we look at the **interconnectedness** of Canada's international assistance policy, it is important to remember that we cannot effectively tackle hunger or poverty without considering and addressing how land is accessed and controlled. In considering the **universality** of Canada's policy, we should also acknowledge the land issues that exist within our own country, most notably with regards to the contention that exists around the historic land rights of our indigenous populations. Finally, in ensuring Canada's policy represents a **global effort**, we should seek to work with as wide an array of actors as possible in addressing land issues. From the Canadian companies investing in land (both for agricultural and other purposes), to developing country partner governments, to civil society actors both at home and abroad, to the Canadian public, we need to ensure widespread engagement on this significant issue.

## References

Russell, Anna F.S. (2015). "Preliminary Synthesis: IDRC-supported research on large-scale land acquisitions in Africa. Using action research to build greater accountability." Available at: <https://www.idrc.ca/sites/default/files/sp/Documents%20EN/idrc-preliminary-synthesis-lslas-and-accountability-final.pdf>

*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.*