

Biofuels, land grabbing and food security in Africa

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Conclusion: land grabbing, smallholder farmers and the meaning of agro-investor-driven agrarian change in Africa

Prosper B. Matondi, Kjell Havnevik and
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Introduction

The subject of land grabbing in Africa and related issues of food security and the search for alternative energy have moved the centre of relevant academic discourse to issues of continuity in global economic and power relations on the one hand and poverty, injustice and the 'squeeze' of smallholders on the other hand.¹ Issues of climate change and economic recession have also featured prominently in the global discourse, in what seems to be continuity in the historical relationships between Africa and the rest of the world. The enigma is that there seems to be a pretence by most actors, including international institutions, of having been ill prepared for the rapid interest in and growth of agro-investments. The search for energy and food security has resulted in processes that converge in land grabbing of unexpected intensity, with a number of implications that threaten to undermine broader development objectives related to poverty, land rights and environmental issues. This has intensified the furious search by international institutions for 'guidelines', 'best practices', 'responsible' or 'win-win' solutions for agro-investments where large tracts of land have to be acquired. Current studies have often concentrated more on the global aspects of land acquisition and less on the impact on African smallholders. By way of African case studies, this book presents findings on land grabbing by examining investments in agrofuels (jatropha, sugarcane, soya beans, etc.) and export food production in several countries. We examine biofuels, food security and energy from a number of perspectives, including environmental and ecology issues, rural development and agrarian change, political science and institutions.

Land grabbing in Africa today seems to be a reincarnation of the colonial land expropriations of the late 1800s, which were driven by capitalist expansion and were connected to the specific competition among European countries to access land, labour, natural resources and markets. This wrought economic, social, cultural and political havoc in Africa and endogenous processes of change and state formation were undermined (Ki-Zerbo 1995). The politics

of land grabbing in Africa is driven by commerce (money) rather than by force (weapons). The process is viewed as strategic by wealthy foreign nations, anxious to enhance their food and energy security, and at the same time to create wealth for their own citizens through the investment and state-related companies. This time the competition for African land and resources has widened to include transition countries in Asia with large populations, Arab nations with abundant petro-dollars but limited capacity for food production, and Brazil, which boasts the longest experience and the highest technological level of biofuel processing and use. Although global processes, such as peak oil, climate change and food security, are the essential driving forces in current agrofuel development, we stress that these have implications for local people in Africa and cannot be discussed in a vacuum. At the end of the day, many African states are key stakeholders who will be impacted by these processes. The desire to attract, or even to compete for, FDI in order to 'modernize' their agriculture and reduce their dependency on imported oil is driving African states to hastily promote guidelines and policies for biofuel production. This is leading to a situation where the access of international companies and external states to African rural land and resources, including labour, is gradually increasing and being protected. The problem here is that this is occurring at a time when the governance of African land and natural resources has not yet been settled. Not only is this unresolved issue a major (current and potential) source of conflict surrounding land access across Africa, but it has also allowed African states to apportion land at the expense of their own people.

Biofuels, land grabbing and the narratives in global relationships

Biofuel investments and land-related activities have generated fresh debates about North–South and South–South relations. A political view emerging in Africa is that the North is primarily interested in controlling resources because of growing competition over the past decade from such transition economies as China, India, Brazil and the Arab countries. This might also explain why Northern countries are shying away from implementing the Paris Declaration of 2005, which seeks to give aid-recipient countries more influence over their own development strategies (cf. the meagre outcome of the subsequent Accra agreement of 2008).

The biofuel narratives are, in important ways, shaped by the emerging transition economies, and therefore inspire many African leaders to search for other alliances and new future development paths. A case in point is Brazil – the world's largest producer of bioethanol. The bioethanol expansion in Brazil is also founded on such problematic premises as the invasion of tropical forests, labour problems, monoculture, land degradation, increased concentration of land and landlessness (Hollander 2010).

Economic and social progress in the transition countries, with their growing urban populations, has increased the demand for food and energy. Yet such growth has also created global price volatility and a growing distrust in the international trade system. The response has been a search for alternative sources of energy and food in the context of bilateral investment treaties and agreements (see Chapter 1). The grabbing of land in Africa and elsewhere is also based on fears that the world prices of energy and food will continue to rise, making land, water and associated resources critical and increasingly scarce factors. This has made these resources increasingly strategic in the North–South relationship. Yet there is also some land speculation by global risk capital through quick acquisition in anticipation of large capital gains.

Nonetheless, the discourse of land grabs in the context of continuity in global relationships raises questions about the role Africa plays in the global policy discourse. When carefully examined, land grabbing is part of globalization processes, in which African land has two main functions: (i) it has become part of the internationalization of capital, investment and trade, and (ii) it has come to constitute an integral part of enhancing food and energy security in developed and transition countries. The process by which nations that are rich in cash, but vulnerable in terms of their own future energy and food provisions, secure African land retains similarities with historical paradigms linked to mercantile trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism. In the new ‘scramble’ for Africa, governments of developed and transition countries encourage private investors, state companies, large investment and sovereign funds to acquire, lease or buy land in Africa.

However, behind this process lie deeper ‘security narratives’. These shape the search for land for biofuels and food, reflecting the fact that powerful nations cannot leave security provisioning to economic liberalization, markets and trade. Thus, the narrative of land grabbing for biofuels and food is often introduced and communicated as ‘development’ of a poor continent. This may be supported by sub-narratives related to ‘conservation’ and ‘environmental concerns’, in order to convince the general public and sceptical taxpayers that, for example, biofuel expansion is also addressing climate change. However, many Northern taxpaying consumers, whose resources subsidize the search for cleaner energy, tend to take a dim view of corporate and municipal companies pushing an agenda for profits, especially beyond their own borders.

The North–South differences also played out at the 2009 Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change. The developing nations demanded a stake through monetary compensation, which the developed nations were prepared to concede only to a limited extent. The narratives were shaped not just by policy-makers, but also by researchers and scientists. The problems ranged from scepticism over climate change data and evidence to uncertainty over the proposal to curb greenhouse gas emissions (in which biofuels feature as

an alternative option). In this context, the discussion on climate change is transmuted to the 'virtues' of biofuels and the need to put 'idle' land in the South to use. It is in this context that countries with land targeted respond by insisting on general monetary compensation. Nonetheless, such compensation for land in Africa does indicate that there is a market for transactions around land. However, more than 90 per cent of African lands are owned under various tenurial regimes (customary, leasehold, freehold title, permit), which differ from Western types of ownership. This implies that there is no standard global measure for compensation.

Biofuels as a limit of 'development' from the North

In the last decades, there has been a declining interest in Africa's agricultural and rural development, in spite of the fact that the majority of the African people reside in rural areas. Despite technological advances and global economic progress (albeit with increasing differentiation between nations), people in Africa continue to be mired in poverty. In the 1980s and 1990s, a range of scholarship emerged, asking questions about the 'positive' prospects for the neoliberal agenda of promoting economic liberalization in Africa. Havnevik and others wrote *Tanzania: The limits to development from above* (1993) and *African Agriculture and the World Bank* (2007), detailing how the neoliberal agenda was failing and had failed to generate agricultural and broad-based development in Tanzania and sub-Saharan Africa. Today, we might characterize land grabbing in the same vein, as the 'limits to development from the North'. Many African states are weak, following implementation of externally led economic reform programmes (Havnevik et al. 2007). However, the specific Northern worldview, supported by that of transition countries, has shaped the biofuel narratives over the last decade or so. Why this interest?

There is a contested view as to why and when exactly biofuels started to feature in the global debates, because biofuels, in the form of ethanol, have a long history both in the North and in the South. Those lobbying for biofuels point out that sufficient progress has been made with ethanol on a small scale, and, in view of climate change, the need for biofuels has become imperative. The pro-biofuels lobby views those who are anti-biofuel as having insufficient understanding of the role of biofuels in technological and economic progress. The pro-biofuel people acknowledge that the world food crisis around 2007/08 convoluted the progressive development of biofuel development. The anti-biofuel movement uses the food crisis as a foundation on which to attack the development of biofuels by connecting it to food insecurity. Sengers et al. (2010: 18) found that:

The practitioners also mention that the image of biofuels in the eye of the public has changed considerably for the worse over the last few years. One of

the interviewed mentions that 'Before [the food crisis] biofuels were THE green alternative'. Or, as another one of the practitioners puts it: 'When we started in 2004/2005 people saw biofuels as "a solution for everything"; good for climate, good for trade, good for farmers; pretty much good for everything. The undertone was much more positive then ... Only when the food crisis came along, was there attention for the negative side effects. What I read in the papers was a sort of mantra; when a piece on biofuels appeared in the media there was always the notion "but it has problems; forests and food". I'm talking about 2007/2008, when this is always mentioned.'

The 'agriculture for biofuels' narrative is predominantly within the confines of the 'agro-exporter' model, based on the neoliberal logic of market-based development, privatization and the transformation of natural resources – i.e. land, water, forests and fauna. This model is assumed to lead to maximization of investors' profits, an increase in land-based export production and the modernization of agriculture. This model does not arise out of national political processes, aimed at community welfare and the provision of clean sources of rural energy. The logic of the neoliberal model has resulted in an increased concentration and control of land, resources and production in the hands of African elites and external interests. Influence over the value chain of food and natural resources has increasingly been placed in the hands of a few multinational or transnational companies (Gibbon and Ponte 2005).

This development has made Africa assume a new importance for cash-rich nations. De Schutter (2009: 5) indicates that 'resource-poor but cash-rich countries have turned to large-scale acquisitions or rent of land in order to achieve food security'. Developed and emerging countries have led the race for land grabbing for the production of biofuels and food based on strategic political interests. African countries have largely been (or are intended as) recipients of foreign investments. Africans are expected to embrace foreign investments and external innovations because the continent is regarded as poor and backward. Therefore, when private companies enter the continent, they do not expect Africans to question the development that the investments are supposed to bring. Biofuel production has so far been pushed in a 'Big Brother' attitude that resembles the historical relationships of colonization. Africa and Africans are viewed as 'inferior and backward', needing development from outside. Since development assistance has failed to deliver in the African context over the last four decades, interest has turned to FDIs in the quest for dynamism and economic growth. This worldview is embedded in Western and transition states and global corporate institutions, and 'legitimizes' the global push for biofuels.

Corporate institutions in Western and transition countries that have taken the lead in biofuel investments have done so also on the basis of a strong claim that the world needs clean and cheap energy (Chapter 3). There is, however,

limited evidence of constructive technology transfers, of genuine involvement of smallholders, or even of anything approaching equal partnership in relations between external and domestic investors. Domestic investors are given the opportunity to share a fraction of the equity (e.g. in the Tanzanian case, 1.5 per cent), while they are given the responsibility for paving the way for access to the major sources of the investment – land and labour (Chapter 6).

The agricultural systems of Africa have been heavily disinvested over the last three decades – to the extent that the World Bank's *World Development Report* on agriculture (2007) called for greater attention to be paid to agriculture by the international donor community and African states. In this context, it is argued that renewable energy, led by bioenergy, represents an opportunity to reverse this trend and turn African agriculture into a dynamic and dominant sector for broad-based development.

In 2010, the World Bank, in cooperation with other international organizations such as IFAD and the IMF, elected to provide voluntary principles for land acquisition in foreign lands (World Bank 2010). In fact, it argued for a land governance that is open, especially for public purchase and leasing. The World Bank defined governance in terms of how public officials and institutions acquire and exercise their authority. In terms of land governance, it noted that the conduct of public officials in relation to property rights to land and to the exchange of such rights (as well as their transformation) is critical. The public authorities have weighty responsibility for oversight of land use, management and taxation. The public should have sufficient confidence in how land is administered, and clear knowledge of what is state owned and of how land is acquired or disposed of. In fact, the nature and quality of land ownership information available to the public, and the ease with which it can be accessed or modified, are likewise important elements in accountability and transparency. The development of these guidelines emerges from the reality that the bulk of the poor African population resides in rural areas. Therefore, while the modernization of African agriculture could help reduce poverty, at the same time these people remain exposed to greater negatives if such land acquisitions are hidden (Partners for Africa 2005). While the arguments advanced by the bank sound rational, there are questions of procedure in how they develop. The development of governance principles has largely come from the North (including from leading financial institutions and donors), which questions the 'political' motives, given that there has not been adequate consultation.

Challenging the neoliberal paradigm in land grabs

A significant number of the people in sub-Saharan Africa live in rural areas and pursue agriculture as a main livelihood, although diversification of rural economic activities and rural–urban migration have increased since the onset of the African crises in the late 1970s. The land issue continues to be crucial in

many respects: land rights, identification, status and recognition of customary rights (formalization and certification processes), tenure and rights of 'communal', national and protected lands.

Our assessment is that there is a need to go beyond the rhetoric of the benefits of a weak state – a notion that was driven by the neoliberal framework in Africa in the 1980s. This notion was pursued with less intensity in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it was acknowledged that it could not deliver (World Bank 1989). This abdicationist stance on the part of the state left communities exposed to local elites, ready to share the spoils of the promised investments in biofuels and food security. There is a need for the state to take a more central role in land deals and to ensure that the rights and interests of rural people are protected against investors. This calls for a strengthening of laws and policies on the management and administration of land, related to tenure reform, land redistribution and land restitution, which many African countries have struggled to develop over the past two decades. The lobbying of external investors, banks and financial institutions has made it extremely difficult for many African governments to arrive at land policies with a clearly defined role for foreign companies and investors, given the sensitivities that arise from property rights internationally. For instance, a ten-year domestic land policy and law process initiated in the early 1990s in Tanzania was confused when external donors (in this case the Norwegian aid agency), in alliance with the country's president, made the country one of two African pilots (the other being Egypt). The government of Tanzania gave Hernando de Soto, author of *The Mystery of Capital*, the task to find ways to speed up village and urban land titling processes. In so doing, but without proper consultation of current land legislation, new confusion was inserted into the village land certification process.

As global and national demand for agricultural products (energy and food) puts greater pressure on the land, so the widespread allocation of large areas to investors for food and biofuels can be problematic. De Schutter (2010: 39) writes:

global population increases by some 75 million individuals each year, diets evolve, demanding greater amounts of animal protein. But these facts matter only to the extent that, combined with the unsustainable levels of consumption in rich countries – the demand for meat and the thirst for agroenergy, in particular –, they lead to increased pressures on natural resources, encouraging in turn speculation over land and large-scale dispossessions of the poorest and the most vulnerable, particularly smallholders and indigenous communities that lack adequate protection and political support. It is not by producing more that we will effectively combat hunger: it is by protecting those who are hungry today, hungry because they are disempowered and marginalized.

The process of acquiring land for food and energy needs to be seen in rela-

tion to the broader land tenure policies of African states and rural conditions. We have shown that land targeted for biofuels includes both customary-owned land and land under freehold tenure. The governments of some countries have also ceded some of the land they own as statutory lands, by providing leases to biofuel companies. Issues related to customary land ownership of so-called 'unused' lands have created a huge controversy in Africa, because rural people hardly conceive any land to be unused. Some of the land that is assumed to be unoccupied is used for pastoralism and some for accessing natural resources important to people's livelihoods. In addition, many rural people see themselves as the stewards of land for future generations. Unused land will always be used.

The pitfalls of reverting to plantation agriculture

In many contexts, the large-scale acquisition of land also highlights a renewed interest in plantation-based agriculture. This is fuelled by an increasing scepticism regarding the effectiveness of market mechanisms and international trade in guaranteeing access to basic food and energy supplies. Loewenson (1992: 3) reminds us that 'violent land expropriation, the destruction of peasant farming and the often forced recruitment of slave, tenant or wage labour marked the earliest development of plantation agriculture'. History has shown that small family farms are much more efficient than large-scale farms (World Bank 2007). Plantation agriculture displaces local producers, who often have the knowledge to produce sustainably and who would be in a position to do so, with even higher yields, if they were provided with an enabling agricultural policy environment and with proper learning platforms and communication networks.

The implication is that large African land areas are appropriated for forms of economy and organization that are intended to promote efficient and voluminous food and energy feedstock production, and that may not accommodate small farms. Yet large-scale farming in Africa has historically faced specific difficulties. Large farms have only prospered in Africa when they have been able to capture some form of public subsidy. Many large-scale commercial Zimbabwean farmers who have emigrated elsewhere within the continent have found life hard without state subsidies.

However, the economics of biofuel production remains speculative, because the investments are largely subsidized, meaning they are not economically competitive. The economic sustainability of investments in biofuel is not actually clear (Chapter 3). Currently the biofuel product is, to a great extent, financed by subsidies. If the 'real price' were charged, without tax reductions and other benefits, bioethanol would probably be considerably more expensive than petrol is today. (That said, fossil fuels are also, in a way, subsidized, since the costs of their negative impact on the environment and on health – the result of their production and consumption – are not included in the price.)

The World Bank's *World Development Report* (2007) stressed the difficulties

that African smallholders face in trying to compete on the global market. Poverty levels in rural areas remain high and have been spreading to urban areas along with migration. The opportunities for generating incomes in rural areas have diminished. In this context, biofuels are seen as strategic in generating employment and income for rural areas, and they may help stem rural-to-urban migration. However, in large part, food insecurity is increasing. This is indicated by African countries' rising levels of food imports and famine relief. African governments and Western donors have called for renewed investment in agriculture, while drawing attention to the importance of global value chains, private capital, contract farming and different scales of farming units.

Smallholders, it is suggested, should scale up their input procurement and technology usage through producer organizations. Focusing on biofuels and food production, the issue of the scale of agricultural production and marketing is being reintroduced as a key one, especially in less-favoured areas. Yet smallholders face multiple threats. One of these – competition from cheap imports – often undermines indigenous farming units and forces people to migrate to urban areas, or else to move in and out of wage labour cyclically.

Pushing people into wage labour or migration forces them increasingly to purchase imported foods or food produced by large-scale farms. The linking of sectors to export markets frequently creates increased pressure on the rural poor to give up farming for employment. In most chapters of this book, we provide background and insights showing that much hinges on how biofuel production 'pans out' with respect to large or small agricultural production units. On the one hand, the current trends in agribusiness agitate for 'efficient', large-scale, capitalized biofuel production, as opposed to the efforts of scattered, small-scale farmers. On the other hand, the equity and livelihood of large segments of the rural population could suffer if such efficiency considerations were prioritized to the exclusion of welfare aspects.

Biofuel assault on the food security and sovereign rights of the poor

Rural areas in Africa are experiencing processes of globalization, commoditization and monetization. In the various chapters of this book, we have tried to make sense of how a number of global processes and relations with respect to biofuels and food security affect Africa. The rich nations' search for land for biofuels and food security no longer takes the form of veiled plundering of resources, based on the 'civilizing' motives of the pre-colonial period. Instead, new forms of accessing Africa's land and resources come through the economic interests of rich nations seeking to sustain their economies, which are marked by affluence and high resource consumption. One key issue emerging in many countries is the fact that there is limited land to satisfy the food needs of their own populations. This has triggered a rush for African lands in a world consumed by a human-led economic crisis. Eide (2008: 12) concluded that:

Any diversion of land from food or feed production to production of energy biomass will influence food prices from the start, as both compete for the same inputs. Putting it starkly, the 'food versus fuel' game could make it possible for a car owner in a developed country to fill his or her tank (50 litres) with biofuel produced from 200 kilograms of maize, which would have been enough to feed one person for one year. The purchasing power of the owner of the car is of course vastly higher than that of a food insecure person in a developing country; in an unregulated world market there is no doubt who would win.

Many African countries have large unemployed populations in both rural and urban areas. Though HIV and AIDS seem to have slowed population growth somewhat, especially in southern Africa, in general a high rate is still being maintained. As was pointed out in the Introduction and in Chapter 1, land and natural resources offer opportunities for labour-intensive food production. Many Africans in rural areas are tied to the monetary economies only to a limited extent, and exchanges happen informally on the basis of trust and relationships. Hence, although they may not be living sophisticated lives, they are secure in terms of food. Therefore, when foreign companies acquire land, as in Ethiopia (Chapter 5), the human right to food and life is compromised.

We have also noted that many foreign land acquisitions are oriented towards excessive profits and are largely for export. This implies that countries receiving such investments may see an industrial agricultural mode of production being developed. In the case of Zimbabwe and Ghana, massive mechanization is followed by massive land clearance for arable crop production. The process is ecologically destructive and will have far-reaching consequences for micro-climates. Land, water and forests form ecosystems that offer a wide range of 'services', ranging from cleaning of the natural environment, to water (aquatic resources), to fruits, etc., which can be damaged by land clearance or by the damming of rivers for large-scale irrigation. If contingent conservation measures are not put in place, there will be massive loss of nutrient-rich soils, destruction of biodiversity and large amounts of CO₂ released.

Agro-investments are premised on their supposed ability to increase agricultural production. However, as past efforts to promote the 'Green Revolution' show, the modernization of agriculture, which may well result in more food production, does not imply enhanced food security for local communities. In fact, the expansion of cash-crop monocultures has a severe impact on local availability of food, as it diverts food-producing resources and labour to cash-crop production. As a result, communities are forced to depend on the market, putting them at the mercy of volatile food prices. The lack of local food availability and the high level of dependence on food from elsewhere also reduce the quality and variety of the diet of communities and alter their food customs.

Natural heritage and environmental narratives

At another level, all the chapters in this book discuss how the politics of energy and food production impact on the livelihood of local people. This is with specific regard to the access and use of natural resources. Although it may seem that the land targeted for biofuels and food security is small, it will increase in proportion over time, due to peak oil and climate change. Climate change seems to be deepening and to have the potential to reduce the areas favourable to agricultural production. This means that large-scale, capital-intensive and energy-dependent agricultural production systems will compete with smallholder farmers on the most productive land. This is likely to exacerbate land conflicts. At the same time, as agriculture encroaches on wetter and ecologically productive areas, the ecosystem habitats (flora and fauna) are most likely to be casualties of resource competition.

The degradation of 'the commons' has also been used to justify the allocation of land to large-scale users, on the pretext that small farms are unable to mobilize financial resources. The argument is also that smallholders misuse natural resources because of pressure per unit of land caused by both livestock and human activities. In the context of local livelihoods, the transfer of skills and knowledge is embedded in the livelihood processes of local communities. This has been characterized as indigenous knowledge systems that are more likely to be lost with the creation of monocultural estates. Investors in large-scale farm units are rarely as concerned with flora and fauna as indigenous people are.

Smallholders are likely to have an adaptive advantage relative to large-scale producers for a number of reasons: (1) their in-depth environmental knowledge of their home areas; (2) their farms, which represent dispersed production units affording diverse, decentralized experimentation; and (3) their combination of subsistence and commercial cash cropping, which has accustomed them to growing an array of crops and livestock-sustaining products, and which comprises a diverse foundation for experimentation that can reduce risks to livelihood. Large-scale production, on the other hand, often does not have indigenous knowledge at its disposal and has a tendency towards monoculture. Costly investment in agriculture on the basis of economies of scale, could, in the face of climate uncertainty, prove to be ill judged and unsustainable.

Economic and social justice questions

In Africa, smallholder farmers account for the majority of the rural population, and constitute the economic, social and cultural bulwark of the African countryside. African governments face a kaleidoscope of pressures with respect to their smallholder farming populations. On top of productivity and welfare concerns, the opportunities and threats posed by the emergence of biofuels are increasingly coming to the fore. Balancing land and labour allocation, energy dependency and food supply in Africa is difficult for policy-makers, who often

end up taking part in projects such as biofuels without adequate feasibility analysis (see Chapter 6). People in Africa more often lack basic services and economic opportunities. The opportunities for Africans to invest in biofuels for the benefit of Africa are limited because of the market constraints and the context in which the majority of the people struggle to access food. Local people are primarily concerned with improving their living conditions, while taking responsibility for their own areas. Income and non-income inequalities are high in Africa, with the level of inequality being lower in rural areas. Countries with high initial income inequality find economic growth to be less efficient in reducing poverty. The pace of poverty reduction would have been substantial had it not been for the dampening effects of a rise in inequality in the wake of economic growth.

Many African countries see agricultural commercialization as an opportunity to achieve economic development and thereby stimulate their trade relations across regions. However, there are also concerns as to how such processes can contribute to a reduction in rural poverty. One major risk for many African countries is their over-dependence on land as an incentive for attracting foreign investors. In fact, as Chapter 5 of this book shows, some countries even go so far as to provide large pieces of land for lease or acquisition, low land rents and long lease terms to attract companies with an interest in biofuels. The private investment perspective has increasingly become the dominant discourse, after the failure of development assistance in Africa. This helps promote the assumptions, perceptions and interests of those shaping investment policy. However, this investment discourse, including that of biofuels, focuses too narrowly on technical and economic change, to the exclusion of structural, social and behavioural issues, which influence local people's perceptions of technological innovation. In general, current investment policies hardly try to embed biofuels within rural livelihoods, such as through the provision of clean and affordable household energy, by improving rural health, or by enhancing the gender and environmental impacts of rural energy. The policies fail to envisage a role for agrofuels in the rural transformation, through the localized consumption of biofuels, or through the technological, entrepreneurship and organizational requirements of the rural agrarian contexts.

Despite the paradox and conceptualization of a 'failed continent', rural Africans demonstrate a capacity to produce their own food, to supply food and labour to urban areas, to sustain indigenous and formal education systems, to endure deprivation and to reconstruct economic and social systems. They may not be doing this at the pace and in forms that policy-makers at the national or global level may wish. However, smallholders are living their own lives, which the proponents of biofuels and land grabbing have placed at stake.

The introduction of biofuels also has a specific impact on gender, labour and generational divides, all of which ultimately impinge on household welfare. The

biofuel investment comes with a specific focus on commercial production, on a continent where agriculture is dominated by female smallholders. It is most likely that men will willingly give up their land for shop-floor labour on the estates, resulting (among other things) in gender-differentiated labour migration (particularly male outmigration). At the same time, when contract farming and outgrower schemes are introduced, it is the landholder – usually the man – who will gain (though often only in the short term). There is a real possibility of a decline in the irregular (but critical) income that women earn from agriculture and contribute to the welfare and food security of their families. At the broader community level, Africans live in structured villages, following specific cultural norms and rules. Many of these are likely to be broken or weakened by new economic systems centred on agro-investment farms, without leading to the creation of new and sustainable rules and norms that can provide rural people with meaningful livelihoods and social orientation.

Individualism is likely to replace community collective effort and rules, thus undermining the orderly, however discriminatory, resource governance systems inherited from the past. Without the complexities of paperwork, these governance systems, based on oral tradition, were effective in determining land ownership, looking after natural resources and allocating land. Instead, with large-scale agricultural modernization, more competition and conflicts over land will emerge within families and communities, as they defy tradition by engaging in opportunistic behaviour, competition for profit and contract relationships that assume importance at the expense of family and community. Thus, in the long term, Africa is more likely to see the loss of community responsibilities, including access to and transmission of knowledge, the defence and negotiation of rights, and the regulation of relations between winners and losers. This development is likely to occur because there are limited options for the majority of rural African people to escape poverty. The loss of land, when capacity for industrialization is weak, creates grounds for conflicts, which may negatively affect the biofuel companies.

Complexities shaping policy-making on biofuels in Africa

On the question of narratives and ideologies that shape policy-making in developing countries, Scott (1985: 318) writes the following:

If there was a dominant, hegemonic ideology ... [it] would require that the beliefs and values of the agrarian elite penetrate and dominate the worldview of the poor so as to elicit their consent and approval of an agrarian order, which materially, does not serve their objective interests. Its function would be to conceal or misrepresent the real conflicts of class interests ... and to make of the poor, in effect, co-conspirators in their own victimisation.

In Africa, there is still a policy vacuum, which the proponents of large-scale

biofuel development are exploiting quietly and often with a lasting impact on smallholders. On the continent, competition for FDIs (Chapter 4) has seen policy-makers override even their own policies, as they try to attract investors. The policy-making process is not linear or orderly, because behind the scenes of the schemes various deal-makers are active in the land acquisitions. The chapters of this book confirm that the policy-making process is non-linear, complex and incremental, influenced by practices, interest groups, actors and policy networks in which agro-investors and political leadership in the host country play a significant role.

External investors see African lands providing scope for them to make easy money on a continent without strong regulations (see World Bank 2010). In addition, cheap land is a motivating factor for companies and host governments. Weak land and environmental laws mean that mechanisms for protecting local rights, interests and welfare tend to be disregarded. African policy-makers are increasingly responding to external pressures for biofuel investments in ways that dislocate them from people within their own countries. National interests and agendas are at stake, especially when they are tested with the lure of money directed towards an agriculture that underpins the livelihoods of the majority. The attraction of technological investments through estate agriculture in neglected areas is seen as a signature of economic progress that African governments find hard to resist. The emerging alliance between external investors and elite domestic investors in Africa has been highly secretive within the context of agro-investments.

While a number of African countries have tried to craft policies that can attract foreign investments, there remain policy inconsistencies with respect to land that touch on national interests. The asymmetric power relations caused by domestic class interests make it difficult to see the (otherwise obvious) need for legislative protection of land held by smallholders. In any case, foreign investors have identified the loopholes in local systems of land management and administration. The weaknesses that are reflected through lack of policy on land and indicators that need to be considered when public lands are targeted create conditions ripe for underhand deals. In most cases, public officials have capitulated to the money dangled by the corporate investor negotiators. At times the corporate negotiators go straight to the villagers and their traditional leaders, who seem to lack the protection that can only come from strong policies and an alert public bureaucracy (which is hard to find in most African countries).

There is no doubt that Africa does require economic development and external investment capital to unlock the greater economic value of its land and resources for its own peoples. However, the current trajectory has been dominated by investment in large-scale plantation agriculture, which most often replaces and undermines the livelihoods of African peoples. Mechanization

makes wage labour opportunities on plantations scarce, and only a limited proportion (if any) of the income generated from this form of agriculture is ploughed back into smallholder agriculture or into improving the welfare of rural people in other ways. A pertinent question needs to be raised: at what price should Africa give up its land?

Therefore, the political and governance contexts – in both the investor and the host countries – shape the discourses and narratives related to land grabbing (Roe 1991). In land grabbing, investors are manoeuvring complex political processes in varied contexts, because they compete for limited land and resources. Often external investors or companies find willing hosts, alliances and partners, both commercial and political, to make it possible for them to access land. At times, the local ‘hosts’ also act as a buffer between them and the people affected by the grabbing.

Emerging civic and community resistance to biofuel production

A range of civil society organizations inside and outside Africa have realigned their activism agenda to oppose large-scale African land grabbing – on behalf of the smallholder farmers. Africa has seen its fair share of such organizations, including RAINS and others that collaborate with international networks. At the international level, the FoodFirst Information and Action Network, the World Wildlife Fund, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, GRAIN, etc. have all played a critical role in disseminating messages and knowledge on biofuels, food security and land grabbing. Multilateral institutions, led by the World Bank and the FAO, have been at the forefront of developing voluntary guidelines for win-win solutions in agro-investments.

In the preceding chapters, through the various authors, we have given space to voices ‘from the field’, talking about how communities and local policy-makers are responding to land grabs. In general, the media and academics have picked up the biofuel and land-grabbing discourses and have strongly opposed the apparent trajectory – the massive land grabs, the increased food insecurity and the greater poverty – and have projected this into the future. The poor are not involved in public debates on land issues and foreign investors, yet the investments are billed as beneficial to them. Instead, the engagement is happening at the international level, based on limited knowledge of what biofuels have already done in local communities in Africa.

In Africa, NGOs involved in advocacy have noted an increase in the voices that oppose land grabbing by multinational companies. The opposition from people affected by land grabs does not follow any rational course, but is rather based on the practical realities they face as their ecosystems and resources disappear as the land is cleared. While Boamah (Chapter 8) argues that, in Ghana, there is evidence that civil society has built anti-biofuel narratives on very shaky ground, the voices of village women suggest otherwise:

'Look at all the sheanut trees you have cut down already and considering the fact that the nuts that I collect in a year give me cloth for the year and also a little capital. I can invest my petty income in the form of a ram and sometimes in a good year, I can buy a cow. Now you have destroyed the trees and you are promising me something you do not want to commit yourself to. Where then do you want me to go? What do you want me to do?' (Nyari 2008: 6)

The Tanzania case, however, reveals (Chapter 6) that there is an epistemic community promoting biofuels, ranging from environmentalists fighting for clean fuel energy to large-scale investors and sectoral associations. They actively raise issues and frame debates, outline possibilities and lobby governments, agencies and institutions. Unfortunately, since they are given their information by advocates for biofuels, governments have largely been weak in responding and non-committal as to whether they are willing to stop land grabbing that prejudices the poor. However, activists and researchers following the grabbing issues are carefully presenting their views and insights and sharing these with the media, in order to shape the public's views in the North on biofuels and their impact on African people.

In addition, issues of human rights, food and nutrition rights, and ecological concerns have been placed higher in the public domain, forcing multilateral institutions to think again about agro-investments by crafting what they call 'codes of conduct'. However, the issue is: what does this mean when these frameworks are to be applied in the villages and at the local level? In Africa, a combination of poverty, illiteracy, lack of democratic liberties and economic deficiencies will make it difficult to implement the codes of conduct. Moreover, the codes are voluntary and are not underpinned by institutions or resources to monitor and enforce compliance. Our fear is that such voluntary guidelines, oriented towards 'how things should be done', will divert attention from what is happening on the ground (see Chapter 1).

Setting the agenda for protecting the rights of smallholder farmers

Many studies have shown that investment to increase productivity in owner-operated smallholder agriculture has a great impact on growth and poverty reduction. Investments to bring about such productivity increases in Africa have historically amounted to only a fraction of what was spent in Asia at the height of the 'Green Revolution'. This is often seen as one of the reasons for Africa's dismal record in terms of agricultural growth and rural development. Investment in rural areas, based on African agrarian development vision, can close this gap. The challenge is to ensure that such investments respect the rights of existing land users and increase productivity and welfare in line with existing strategies for economic development and poverty reduction, but without further widening income gaps.

Private investment in the agricultural sector offers significant potential to complement public resources, and many countries with reasonably functioning markets have derived significant benefits from this. At the same time, there is evidence that, if rights are not well defined, if governance is weak, and if those affected lack voice, then such investments carry with them considerable risk. The investments may lead to the displacement of local populations; to the undermining or negating of existing rights; to corruption, food insecurity, local and global environmental damage; to loss of livelihoods or opportunity for land access by the vulnerable; to nutritional deprivation, social polarization and political instability. In the past, many large farming ventures have been unsuccessful. Mistaken beliefs in economies of scale in agricultural production, rather than value addition, have historically saddled several countries with subsidy-dependent large-farm sectors that provide few economic or social benefits.

Rural entrepreneurship and organizational issues provide another critical dimension. Rural producers do not respond as individual and independent actors to the political and economic imperatives. The entrepreneurial and organizational aspects of rural people are crucial in the dissemination of technical and management know-how, access to rural finance and connections to potential markets. The right to form economic associations that can be recognized by formal/state systems (as firms and economic actors) is a critical step towards securing access to different resources.

Developing African capacities

It is evident that the current land grabbing in Africa is happening in a policy environment that has not been sufficiently developed or that does not exist at all. As such, many national governments are 'muddling through' with little guidance on how best to respond, given the complexities of investment (technical) language, with which local bureaucratic institutions may be unfamiliar. The lack of clarity on land negotiations calls for action and research to build a knowledge base of the many dimensions of land grabbing and agro-investments. There is growing consensus within Africa on the need for alternative development frameworks, as well as on the need to develop poverty-reduction and food security-enhancing strategies. This is underpinned by renewed and increased interest in addressing Africa's land tenure and agrarian reform questions. This is coupled with an increasing recognition, both outside and inside Africa, of the importance of agriculture to rural livelihoods and broad-based national and global economic development. However, this recognition has yet to be turned into firm policy programmes to guide land deals in Africa. In fact, agriculture, as a sub-sector, remains underfinanced, while land tenure reform programmes are not yet coherently formulated or are framed with major problems in their implementation.

In the chapters of this book, we have demonstrated that land deals have been negotiated with governments. However, there has only been muted response from African-based institutions and intellectuals. The media globally only picked up on the issue when the food and energy crisis went global in 2007/08. In Africa, where the land deals are being made, it was only in 2009 that the African Union started to talk of a code of conduct for land deals. The capacity for engaging in these matters in Africa is weak and is further compromised by the lack of platforms and opportunities on which to engage on issues. Furthermore, it has become the norm that inventions and technological solutions, such as those related to biofuels, are made in the developed countries, with little regard for the circumstances and rights of the Africans.

In terms of capacity, the economic decline that characterizes present-day Africa has translated into limited research opportunities, thereby impacting negatively on the development of an African body of knowledge. It is important that such a body of knowledge should command a technological grasp of African socio-cultural contexts; it should also understand the conditions and the potential of biofuel production. The problems have been compounded by the 'brain drain' from the South to the North, which has left African public institutions lacking capacity and unable to contribute to national policy development. Ironically, the environment shaping livelihoods has undergone considerable strain and has changed significantly, so this requires deeper knowledge. New theoretical constructs have been developed, which could enhance understanding of the processes of rural change. However, theoretical and methodological approaches, though they have become more comprehensive, are still largely disconnected and fragmented. Using the case of African land grabbing, we have demonstrated the complex connections of livelihoods, natural resource tenure, governance and environmental sustainability.

There is clearly a need for further enquiry into land grabbing, because awareness of the full impact is only in its infancy. There need to be technical inquiries; research projects need to be commissioned; and policy-making and implementation need to be monitored as agro-investments go ahead. At the same time, there is a need to develop a questioning voice from within Africa, so that the deals secure sustainable benefits for the broader African societies. The issue is about identifying what works and then scaling it up in such a way that it works better for the people of Africa. This requires knowledge about the impact of land grabbing to be pooled and shared as packages of options for Africa's smallholder development. Africa will need to identify actions to spread the benefits as wide as possible, particularly among the poor and marginalized. Supporting positive change, therefore, requires more targeted approaches to research, focusing on learning from successful experiments and experiences on the ground, particularly in relation to critical success factors, including institutional innovations.

Take-away message

The major concern of our book has been to provide the background and the stories and the narratives on how foreign investments connected with land grabbing affect smallholder farmers, now and potentially in the future, and to explain why such processes require a precautionary approach. Most of the chapters have addressed the positive and negative impacts of biofuels on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, and they have also reflected on policy implications for the production of biofuels at the global, the national and the local levels. The authors have re-examined critical issues that affect smallholder farmers across Africa, as the continent moves towards being a 'bio-economy' characterized by the use of nature to prop up global economies and lifestyles. These issues have been analysed in light of economic, social and political justice, where biofuel seems to have compromised the food security of present and future African generations. Suggestions are made for improvements, and solutions incline towards the establishment of a more level playing field in relationships between developing and developed nations, and also within countries. We hope the suggestions will contribute to the setting of a new agenda for Africa that contains genuine win-win situations and that avoids a zero sum game at the world, the national and the local levels.

The combination of higher and more volatile commodity and oil prices, population growth and urbanization, globalization and climate change is likely to imply that biofuel demand and investments will be of even greater importance in the future. The issues of land grabbing for biofuels, for food and for other strategic reasons in Africa raise political and economic questions about global relations. Clearly, the conditions (economic, political, social and ecological) in Africa differ. Precise local knowledge needs to be developed on the meaning and impact of this 'new' phenomenon. This is because land grabbing affects local people's livelihoods, their food and their assets. It would seem that foreign private international companies, backed by their governments, are coming into Africa to make land deals with host governments that render it easier for them to venture into large-scale commercial production of agro-crops. Apparently, in many countries (such as Zimbabwe, Ethiopia or Tanzania) the shortage of agricultural land will, in the coming decades, prove an obstacle to the launching of ambitious programmes of land grabbing in Africa. However, for strategic and security reasons, developed nations and transition economies such as China, India and Brazil will push strongly to gain control of natural resources and land in the South.

In seeking a more level playing field, much will depend on the pace and direction of technological progress in the agricultural production of food, biofuels and industrial crops. Even more will depend on the ability to design integrated food-production systems that imitate natural ecosystems, instead of imposing monocultures. The main difficulties are likely to arise in the realms

of land tenure, of access to land for small farmers, and of devising production functions and organizations that are knowledge- and labour-intensive (and at the same time eliminate hard manual work) and that are also capable of economizing on capital and resources. These are the issues that researchers and activists will need to address as land grabbing escalates across the African continent and elsewhere.