

Research Project in collaboration between the Institute of Social Anthropology and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Berne, Switzerland

Ethnography of „Land Deals“ (2013-2014)

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Introduction

Since the food, finance and fuel crisis – called the Tripple-F-crisis - starting in 2005 (Toulmin 2008) scholars in agrarian, development and ecological studies from Geography, Anthropology, Development and Agrarian Research hint to the fact that the interest in land has massively increased. External international investors not just only from Europe and the USA but as well China and several economically up-moving countries such as India, Brazil, South Africa etc as well as middle eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait etc) invest large sums of money in buying or leasing land, especially, but not exclusively, in Africa. There land seems to be cheap and abundant, much of it lying idle or underuse by economically underdeveloped people. The reasons for this investments are several: In the literature justifications are labelled as the need to extend food production to increase food security, adapt to stock fluctuations by looking for secure harbour for capital or in order to respond to the expected growing market for green production of energy in the form of bio fuels. This phenomenon leads to a so called “land rush” and to anticipated negative effects on local people due to the loss of land and production facilities as well as negative environment impacts due to large scale agrobusiness investments and infrastructure. As more than half of reported large scale land investments are in Africa, often on good land and within communities living at the margin of their livelihoods. Land Deals in such contexts tends to undermines the ability and resilience to secure livelihoods in the global south.

A literature review made evident that there is gap, which this project would like to fill: Very little is known about concrete land deal processes and the way they have been discussed and implemented from a local people’s heterogeneous perspectives. Despite an incredible output in literature and research activity in the last three years on the topic in the Journal of Peasant Studies and other journals and despite work done by anthropologists on the issue, we lack ethnographic fieldwork data and human geography based long-term field study in order to do a ethnography of land deals. Such a study however is important because we are ignorant what regards many aspects of such deals. From a New Institutionalism perspective in Anthropology we are already able to set the scene by showing which external factors shaped the changes in relative process for land, water and conservation areas as well as mining that constitute a major context for what is happening in a specific context. However, how “land grab”, “rush for land” or “investment” really hits on a local context with its specific historical and political economy and bargaining power setting is often not analysed. Ensminger (1992) proposes to analyze local interactions influenced by changes in relative prices by analysing actors with their bargaining power, the way they organize and the institutions they shape and strive for. There is however an intersecting and important element is shaping the process. In the New Institutionalism Theory there is a major focus on ideology as a source of legitimacy of the institutional choice that is important, having a look at the way discourses and narratives shape resources for legitimacy in order to

increase bargaining power of actors and the institutions that they are then choosing, which are the ones from which they profit most. This then influences the process of distribution and of use of a resource.

Research plan

First, in order to operationalise these issues, we would like to know how exactly a local deal was proposed to a local community on which ground by which actors having, which bargaining power and using what type of ideology to legitimate their request to get access to land. Then it is important to get the narratives not just about this initial stage but as well in order to understand how local actors narrate what happened in the beginning of the project and how it has been performing in the last years (major changes, events etc) with regard to compensation and other issues for example. It will then be of importance to record the emic narratives of the social and environmental impact and of the conflicts that might have happened. This is what we call the *horizontal level of research* being able to get first hand information on how the local heterogeneous actors (age, class gender, wealth etc) have perceived this process. This research will also help to pay attention on how local people deal in practice with such a project and how they react to the companies and government strategies, which also needs to be studied. This task would be in the hands of Social Anthropologists in this project.

Second, there is another side of the study: We know very little how such a deal was made possible on a *vertical level*, meaning how did the company in case decide for a country and how was then the deal with a local community enabled passing through several levels of state, provincial and district levels with the help of agents acting as brokers/translators/ facilitators of the process. Here again it is interesting to understand the process and the ideologies used for legitimacy on several levels. This is then the task of human geography students, who would in addition address the issue of impact on the social-ecological system from a sustainable development perspective together with the social anthropologists in the field.

In addition to these main topics additional data has to be gathered based on the research of both disciplines in all the teams:

- Study of the formal institutional and economic historic changes in the area (major changes in relative prices since colonial times, showing the change in value of an area and its resources)
- Study of the common pool resources used and the common property institutions as well as land tenure institutions and changes in these institutions since post colonial times (including gender dimensions)
- Study of food production and livelihood systems and its resilience (subsistence systems (including gender dimensions)
- Data on the political system (based on political economy and ecology frameworks, heterogeneity of interests)
- Strategies and events of resistance (open or hidden, see Scott) and of repertoires of domination (Poteete and Ribot)
- Main focus on aspects of ideology and resources of legitimacy (discourses and narratives of land use, tenure, efficiency, development etc)
- Participatory approaches and information in the context as viewed by different actors

- Impact of ecosystems and impact on resilience of local households (health and poverty, linking to access to water, basic other products such as wood, water, hunting and veldt products, pastures, fisheries etc) AND its framing in the local context
- Evolution of current governance structure and formal institutions and how these influence the local setting.

Therefore for each site there will be at least a team of two (a social anthropologist and a human geography student). The combination of these two levels (horizontal and vertical) will make research teams of two necessary (ideally one social anthropology, one human geography student). We therefore have now selected four cases, two in Africa (Sierra Leone and Kenya) and one in Asia (India) and one in Latin America (Peru) in which MA-students in pairs will do the research together. While the social anthropologists students will be in the field for 4 to 6 month, the human geography students will remain only 3 month in the field and then do the up-scaling of the project in order to follow the path of decision making up to the company involved.

The regions, companies/research partners and researchers involved are listed in the table below:

Table 1: Overview of MA Research Projects with area, company/NGO, MA-students and time frame

Region/Country/ District	Company/ research partners	MA Researchers/Supervisors	Time frame research
AFRICA Sierra Leone	ADDAX/ SiLNoRF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fabian Käser (Anthropology; Prof. Haller) - Franziska Marfurt (Anthropology; Prof. Haller) - Samuel Lustenberger (Geography; Prof. Rist) 	June-September 2013 August-October 2013 August-October 2013
AFRICA Kenya	Dominion Farms/Saya District/CETRAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anna von Sury (Anthropology; Prof. Haller) - Elisabeth Schubiger (Anthropology; Prof. Haller) 	March-June 2014 March-June 2014
INDIA Rajasthan	To be determined in field with NGO Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Romy Scheidegger (Anthropology; Prof. Haller) - Leonie Pock (Anthropology; Prof. Haller) 	August-October 2013 August-October 2013
PERU	Coastal areas in collaboration with <u>Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales</u> (CEPES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daniel Wyss (Anthropology; Prof. Haller) - Laura Tejada (PhD candidate Prof. Rist) 	January-April 2014

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