

# Helpdesk Report: Large-scale Land Acquisitions and Food Security



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## Acronyms & Abbreviations

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DFID	Department For International Development
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessments
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FLA	Foreign Land Acquisition
GIGA	German Institute of Global and Area Studies
LSA	Large Scale Land Acquisitions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation



## Report Summary

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DFID are looking to propose that the UK supports a package of measures to strengthen land transparency and ultimately governance. This work is of a high priority for DFID and the wider UK Government. Following further research on the evidence and internal discussions, DFID have identified a gap relating to two specific questions:

- What are the impacts of large-scale land acquisitions (LSA) on local food insecurity and malnutrition levels?
- Is there a difference in impacts whether investments are international or local?

This report presents a **brief assessment** of the available literature which attempts to answer these questions. There is an ample and high quality debate being conducted about the impact of LSAs on livelihoods and food security, both in the academic world and between the protagonists either side of the LSA debate. However, **the assessment finds very little direct analysis of food security and malnutrition using scientific means such as nutritional and anthropometric surveys.**

Looking at food security and LSA from a wider ‘complexity theory’ perspective, the review also brings in governance and related questions, including the relevance and potential pitfalls of recent guidelines produced by the World Bank and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).


There is virtually no work identified that answers the second question above. It might be possible to infer that international investments would have a less harmful impact as investors are concerned about their corporate image and social accountability, but in fact there is little to suggest that this is the case.

A clear need is identified to carry out more research on the gender dimension of the food security impact and whole LSA issue in general. A need is also identified to improve the way that Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) are carried out, including baseline studies and full assessments of food security and nutritional status, and mitigating measures and activities to be integrated into LSA investments.

Some new and on-going research activities offer prospects for beginning to fill in some of the gaps, and for providing a more nuanced understanding of how households are affected by and respond to LSAs on their doorsteps. In all cases, existing and new research proposals should include some analysis of nutritional status and food security, if possible to allow a ‘before and after’ assessment of LSA impact.

## Recommendations

The food security impact of large-scale land acquisitions must be analysed against a backdrop of complexity and multiple causes and effects. A more simplistic narrative can hide many truths that those who have strong positions for and against may not want to see, and which are important for making the correct policy choices in specific contexts.



In this context more care should be taken when researching the actual and predicted impact of LSAs, including as assessment of how secure livelihoods and food security were before a new LSA materialises. It is essential to 'construct the right narrative', to get all the facts into place based on solid evidence before making potentially misleading conclusions.

All studies that look at LSAs impact on local livelihoods and nutrition must take greater care to assess food security and nutrition against established scientific criteria.

To this end it is recommended that existing or planned *new studies* of LSA impact include some analysis of food security and nutritional data that will allow a 'before and after' assessment (either through new anthropometric surveys and/or collecting data from existing health system and other archives).

To address the present and identified knowledge gap in this area, DFID should consider funding a series of new studies to develop the methodologies and establish new reference points which fully take into account real nutritional and food security status, including the collecting of anthropometric and other relevant data.

In the case of *new LSA projects*, it is proposed that all Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) carried out by firms or governments before implementation should include a full food security audit and baseline survey of nutritional status, perhaps with a focus on the nutritional status of local children as a sensitive indicator to changes in food availability and the reliability over time of entitlements.


Given the importance of gender for food security, and the very likely case that impacts are differentiated between men and women (with consequent impacts for household children), it is essential that more studies are done of the gender dimension of gender and LSAs; and that any and all data collected are disaggregated by gender and analysed separately.

Turning now to the issue of the LSA projects themselves:

- measures could be built into contracts with investors that trigger compensatory mechanisms or even penalties if assumed *positive* social impacts are not achieved
- activities and implementation should be designed and managed together with the local population to ensure that local food needs are not compromised, either by a) setting aside land for food production, b) ensuring that some of the food produced stays locally, or c) finding new ways to maintain entitlements to food through other means
- donors should initiate a discussion of what White and his colleagues call the 'options and workable alternatives to corporate land accumulation', which may not discount the 'large scale' approach but which bring communities into the process as actors, stakeholders and beneficiaries in a more direct and more substantial way (the story of a half-bag of rice as compensation underlines the point).

The role of governments in this whole process needs to be looked at closely and reviewed. The various guidelines and principles (World Bank, FAO etc.) all have their merits, but care should be taken to avoid them becoming De Schutter's 'checklist of how to destroy the peasantry responsibly'. In this context governments:

- should work proactively with local people (i.e. their citizens) to ensure that new LSAs fully take into social and food security impact, and involve local people as *partners and stakeholders*, not just as potential source of labour

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- should fully recognise the legitimacy and extent (even over ‘empty land’) of local rights over land and resources, and take steps to provide more than just abstract legal recognition of the fact (some form of collective registration or delimitation or support for individual titles (for women as well as men) where appropriate
  - should accept that consequent right of those who live on the land to be closely involved in how it is disposed of, to benefit from the process at a level that reflects the real value of the resources being given up (the value of the proposed investment might be a good proxy indicator), and to take part in deciding the terms of the arrangement (assuming of course that a LSA proposal is indeed the best option)
  - should provide or facilitate the provision of legal and other capacity building support for communities confronted by LSA proposals, so that they are able to a) fully assess and either accept or reject the proposal; and b) negotiate robust and worthwhile agreements that form the basis of longer term food security in one form or another
  - should upgrade labour laws and ensure that working conditions are at an acceptable level, paying due attention to the issue of equal treatment for men and women, and including provisions to prevent the use of child labour

Donors and others should also promote the idea that at least a part of all revenues generated by new LSAs is reinvested in local food security and livelihoods support, with the full involvement of communities themselves. Ideally this should be agreed and developed *before the investment begins and as part of its design process*, and not as a reactive response to problems.

Finally, and perhaps in collaboration with support to health sector programmes, it is important to begin developing far more decentralised databases on nutritional well-being as a matter of course. Over a period of time indicators such as the infant mortality rate and rates of child malnutrition will indicate in a global sense, the overall ‘health’ of the local agrarian economy and the impact of the different projects that are implemented.





## Introduction

DFID are looking to propose that the UK supports a package of measures to strengthen land transparency and ultimately governance. This work is of a high priority for DFID and the wider UK Government. Following further research on the evidence and internal discussions, DFID have identified a gap relating to two specific questions:

- What are the impacts of large-scale land acquisitions (LSA) on local food insecurity and malnutrition levels?
- Is there a difference in impacts whether investments are international or local?

DFID recognise that this gap may be because the right sources of information have not been found or because there isn't a lot of information available. This report presents the results of a rapid review of available research on these questions, and identifies if and where further research is needed.

## Methodology

While many papers, presentations and publications were looked at, the report is not intended to be a thorough review of the available literature. Instead the approach adopted has been to look for themes that seem to be coming through the material taken together, and to determine if enough information is available to answer the two questions posed above. While DFID have not explicitly asked for additional comments and recommendations regarding LSA activities, the review also offered the chance to draw some general conclusions about how they might be better implemented for the benefit of all involved.

The author has drawn upon his own experience as the leader of development projects which have set the stage for securing local rights and facilitating the negotiated access to local land by entrepreneurs and others. This has included pilot activities to find alternative ways for communities and investors to work together which allow communities to retain their land and participate as stakeholders and beneficiaries in new large scale agricultural activities.

The analysis tries to be as objective as possible, being fully aware of the strong views on all sides of the LSA debate and the need to chart a course that can bring opposing interests together. There are also certain to be research activities and LSAs out there which were not unearthed during the short time spent on the exercise. Comments and discussion on items related to content and opinion should be addressed to the author or DFID, via [enquiries@evidenceondemand.org](mailto:enquiries@evidenceondemand.org).





## Land and Food Security – An Overview

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It is widely accepted that secure land rights can strengthen food and nutrition security. Even the poorest rural households need to make investment decisions with the meagre resources at their disposal, and if the land they use is not secure, they are unlikely to invest in improvements that might raise yields on existing activities, or try new activities that might require a significant period of time to bear fruit.

It is also equally well accepted that food security for rural farming households is not just a question of access to and control over land. Access to food not produced on the farm, especially between harvests or at times of drought or other hardships, depends upon a range of other activities – employment, remittances, kinship and other safety nets and so on.

Even where farm income might be the main source of food security, land use and the rights that go with it can be more complex than they seem. In many parts of the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, ‘farming’ involves much more than growing crops or raising animals. Hunting, grazing in communal areas or over long distances, collecting fuel and medicines from forests, can all be part of the food security equation. Rivers – whether full or virtually dry – offer different opportunities at different times of the year, and water sources are a critical resource whatever area is occupied or ‘owned’ by a family. Large areas of apparently unused land may look unoccupied, but can be the basis of fallow systems with cycles of a decade or more; or they may just be kept in reserve for future generations as population grows.

Food needs and food security also change over time. Someone arriving today might see a household with apparently enough food, but not realize that last month the death of a child restored a precarious balance between food needs and availability. As households develop, their labour endowment also changes, allowing them to take on more land and shift from food insecure to secure and maybe, when more children arrive, back towards insecurity (Tanner 1987). Within households too, some may be ‘food secure’ by virtue of their position in the family, such as a male household head, while others – women, their children - go without.

Seen from this perspective food security depends upon a maze of changing relationships both within households and between them and the outside world. Extended family and patronage, employers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and development projects, investors, and the State are all part of the picture. Cultural norms and practices are also an essential backdrop, defining not just the resilience or weakness of these relationships, but also what it means to have access to land, to be a landowner or sharecropper, to have free choice - or not - over how ‘your’ land is used.

This brief overview does not do justice to the rich vein of work dealing with farms systems, land access and food security, but it does underline the complexity surrounding food security today. It is important to be careful when making bold statements about how phenomena like Large Scale Acquisitions (LSA) impact upon it, and instead seek ‘a more subtle understanding....in the present era of globalisation’ (Walby 2003:17).



## A Short Literature Review

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### Large scale land acquisitions and food security

A quick review of the available evidence presents a dramatic picture of land rights being lost in many parts of the world. A useful place to start is the collection of papers presented at the 2011 International Conference on Land Grabbing<sup>1</sup>.

These papers touch on most of the multiple facets of food security referred to above, and the consequences of meddling with one of its major variables, land access. A wide range of countries is covered, including Indonesia (Ginting and Pye 2011), Guatemala (Alonso-Fradejas 2011), and Ethiopia (Guillozet and Bliss 2011, Shete 2011) to name just a few. A similar global picture of the progress and impact of LSAs is provided by presentations made to the International Workshop on Large-Scale Land Acquisitions at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg in May 2012. De Schutter however introduces another and often overlooked dimension that should form the backdrop to all these papers: 'we have forgotten the cultural significance of land, and we reduce land to its productive elements – we treat it as a commodity, when it means social status and a lifeline for the poorest rural households' (De Schutter 2011:274).

Much attention is paid to the way in which LSAs will impact on livelihoods by undermining or even destroying the land use systems of rural communities. However it is not just LSAs that can undermine strategies. Climate and population growth can also weaken apparently robust livelihoods and food security strategies. For example, focus group interviews during land tenure and food security work in Nigeria revealed that average fallow periods had shortened from 10-20 years some 20 years ago, to just 1 year now (Bamire 2010:5/18), with this reduction attributed to 'the use of agricultural land for other national development programmes such as road construction'. The interviews confirmed that 'shortened fallow periods had... affected the soil fertility...and reduced crop yields and household income and expenditure levels' (ibid:7/18).

There is also some evidence in the literature that where LSA investments are focusing on producing food for external markets, they are not ensuring that at least some of this food remains behind for local use. Where some food is held back however, this can raise concerns over its impact on any local production that might be surviving, as the 'LSA food' is likely to be cheaper than that from local farms.

Though rare, there are some accounts that document improvements in local livelihoods and efforts to maintain and improve local food production, due to relatively enlightened investors who make an effort to work with local people and ensure that their food needs are taken into account.

Boamah (2011) presents such a case in Northern Ghana, where 'income sources increased indirectly through the [biofuel] project...and other residents also invested in farming [hiring company tractors, buying improved seeds, hiring in labour]'. In addition, he analyses weak points in the 'for and against' narratives used by opponents and supporters of the project (see Box 1).

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<sup>1</sup> International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, organised by the Land Deals Politics Initiative (LDPI) in collaboration with the [Journal of Peasant Studies](#), and hosted by the Future Agricultures Consortium at the [Institute of Development Studies](#), University of Sussex, 6-8 April 2011

### **BOX 1 Case Study: Unpacking the Narrative – Biofuel projects in Northern Ghana (Festus Boamah 2011)**

This study analyses the two very different narratives about a biofuel project, used by those who oppose it and those who support it. It then ‘unpacks’ each of these and discovers a series of more complete truths behind the discourse used by both camps.

For example, closer analysis of the ‘anti’ narrative revealed that in fact *jatropha* did not exclude food crops, with maize being intercropped with the newcomer; nor did it cause deforestation, which was underway before the project. ‘Displaced’ farmers also remarked that ‘relocation was compatible with the usual bush fallowing system practised’, and in any case were given the choice to relocate or stay.

Closer analysis of the ‘pro’ narrative revealed that the livelihoods improvements created by the project were not sustainable after it failed. Its failure was also only partly due to the impact of the ‘anti’ lobby – more important was the effect of the global economic crisis.

The analysis underlines the importance of being both thorough and objective when complex processes and their perceived impacts are being assessed.

This very useful exercise underlines how careful one must be when assessing much of the material that is said and written about the various impacts that are linked with LSAs in different places. Protagonists on both sides of the argument hold strong views and will bend the narrative to suit their case. Boamah shows how important it is to get at the real facts before making conclusions, and to understand the dynamics between the two positions and their impact on different policy makers and donor programmes.

Several papers and presentations also underline the possible synergies between large scale investments in land and efforts to improve the lot of local people (e.g. Holden 2012). Contract farming is often mentioned as a positive way to combine the advantages of large scale production with ensuring benefits for local people, who retain


control over their farms. Even where they start out with good intentions however, LSAs can go wrong as negotiations with local leaders exclude villages in the affected areas, and those put in charge of implementation fail to respect key elements of agreements to compensate for loss of land (Åkesson et al 2009).

## **Governance issues**

Governments have sovereign powers and can dictate how investors, especially foreign ones, come into their countries and deal with local people. The literature reveals several examples of states where governments abandon this principle - if indeed they ever had it - in a rush to promote investment and generate growth through the imputed results of often very poorly conceived large scale farming investments. The case of Ethiopia is a clear example of this, where perceived national interest overrides concerns for the rights of people on the ground.

However there are also examples of States where legal frameworks are in place to ensure that this does not happen, at least in principle. In Mozambique for example, the 1997 Land Law lays out clear provisions for mandatory ‘community consultations’ when an investor wants to access local land. If the land is occupied – and it nearly always is if the prevailing production system is analysed in detail – then the investor must negotiate terms with the community before the land right is then re-allocated to him or her by the government. More recently, and in recognition of the potential negative impacts of LSAs, new provision have been approved that require investors who want more than 10,000 hectares to ‘lay out the terms of the partnerships with present land title holders’ (communities with rights acquired by customary occupation) in their applications to government (GoM 2008).

Assuming that the political will exists to put people first and recognise the reality *and implications* of local communities and citizens with real rights over even State-owned land,



we have a situation where instead of wholesale opposition to LSAs on the grounds of their impact on local people, land governance and a stronger role for the state emerge as ways to ensure a positive outcome from LSAs.

One result of this new way forward being seized upon by policy makers and international agencies is the ‘the furious search by international institutions for ‘guidelines’, ‘best practices’...and ‘win-win’ situations’ where LSAs are involved (Matondi et al 2011). In this context the World Bank has recently asserted that ‘it is more important than ever for governments and the international community to protect local land rights’, not so much to ward off investors but because ‘Strong and clear land rights make it more likely for existing owners to directly negotiate with investors, obtain higher payments for land transfers and make sure investments benefit the public and the local economy’ (World Bank 2010 and News link 30/1/2013).

These remarks hint at the possibility of obtaining income and other benefits through a proactive engagement with LSAs that can improve the livelihoods of the affected communities. To do this the ‘seven principles’ developed by the World Bank and other recent documents such as the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests lay out measures to improve land governance and include local people in the planning and implementation of investments that require large areas of land, and in the benefits that flow from them.

To quote one recent study of the LSA phenomenon in Africa, ‘there is need to strengthen the institutional framework through sound legal and procedural measures that will protect local rights and *take into account the aspirations of land owners* during negotiations for land acquisition. The assessment of social and environmental impacts as well as transparency in decision-making and compensation of displaced land users is also fundamental’ (Osabuohien et al 2011:1, emphasis added).

De Schutter provides a salutary reminder however, of the hidden dangers in this approach, when he characterises it as ‘providing policymakers with a checklist of how to destroy the peasantry responsibly’ (2012:275). In this context it is encouraging to also see in the literature evidence of a growing capacity of communities to resist what is happening to them, or to demand more from the investment process. White et al for example cite a case in Kenya where ‘land acquisition by powerful state-linked actors...can be stalled by local residents’ (2012:642, citing Smalley and Corberra (2012)). To build upon this momentum it is doubly important to strengthen the hand of those most affected by LSAs, through legal support and community capacity building programmes like those in Sierra Leone and Mozambique (Sierra Express Media 2012; Serra and Tanner 2008).





# The Impact of LSA on Food Security and Nutrition

In many of the papers looked at for this short review, the impact – real or potential – of LSAs on food security is inferred from an analysis of the prevailing local production system, and what will happen to it if a new large scale investment were to occupy some or all of the land which supports it. It is equally clear however that local livelihoods are in crisis in many areas where LSAs are being implemented, or are predicted to be at risk once investments take off. What is not so clear is the extent to which it is the LSA that is triggering this crisis, and if it was already present (i.e. households were already food insecure) *before* the LSA.

Very few if any of the papers in the extensive and growing literature include hard data on the real food security impact of LSAs or for that matter, any other form of development (thinking back to the ‘road construction’ referred to by Bamire).

It is difficult to find material in the literature which includes nutritional data for example, which is cross-referenced with land access variables to demonstrate the food security or otherwise of rural households. Old studies do exist where nutritional assessments are linked to patterns of household land use and food security, or to cropping systems and access to new economic opportunities for farm households (Tanner 1987; Huss-Ashmore and Curry 1989), but the literature for this report did not produce any new papers where nutritional assessments are included in analyses of the impact of LSAs on food security.


## Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA)

Given the importance of the getting this right for future policy development, it is essential to be objective and to base assertions about impact on clear evidence. Most important of all in this context is to have a clear assessment of the ‘before and after situation, which is also lacking in most of the work looked at so far.

The ESIA carried out before most major investment projects could be a useful vehicle for assessing food security issues under the ‘social’ element of the procedure. Havnevik and Haaland analyse ESIA in their study of the SEKAB Bioenergy Tanzania Ltd project in Tanzania, saying that they can be ‘a policy instrument, a tool for planning, or a way of ensuring public involvement’ (2011). They cite Wood (2003) who concludes however that most EISAs undertaken in developing countries fall ‘far below’ the quality of assessments in developed countries.

The convention also seems to be that these assessments are carried out by teams hired by the firm implementing the project, and that they are undertaken after a considerable amount of preparatory work has already established the nature of the project. Apart from the obvious implications of this lack of autonomy, Havnevik and Haaland observe that ‘the lack of research-oriented reviews or critical analyses of the process means that few lessons have been learned as to how ESIA are carried and how they can be improved (2011). The methodology for these assessments is clear enough: establish Terms of Reference, carry out baseline studies, assess the impacts, and recommend mitigating measures if impacts are predicted to be negative.

There are ample opportunities here to include food security issues in ESIA, and address a whole range of issues including the feasibility of the investment, the involvement of local people, the mitigating effect of aspects such as proposed employment levels and wages, and the need to ensure that either local food producers are not threatened or that some of



the food produced (in the case of food exporting LSAs) remains in-country and if possible in the area of the LSA itself. It is possible that there are other examples where such ESAs have been carried out, but at this point it certainly does not seem to be the norm.

## National versus International Investors

According to Cotula et al (2011), international investors still dominate the LSA picture overall, but ‘domestic investors are also playing a major role’. Moreover, this aspect of LSAs has ‘received far less international attention so far’ (2009:99). Many large scale investments also involve partnerships between international and national interests, but it would seem that in most of these cases, ‘there is limited evidence of...anything approaching an equal partnership in relations between external and domestic investors’, with domestic investors usually holding a tiny proportion of the equity and in fact serving as a kind of Trojan horse, ‘paving the way for access to the major sources of the investment – land and labour’ (Matombi et al 2011).


As far as the food security impact of different LSAs is concerned, there is no evidence in any of the papers so far reviewed, that there is a difference between international and national investors. Some of the data suggest – and this is said guardedly – that international investors may be paying more attention to the need to work with local people and to ensure some trade-off with benefits in exchange for their giving up their land. Large firms are often very aware of their public images, and the current trend to stress corporate responsibility is a reflection of this. The tie up with national investors – often no more than a national partner who might already have gained access to the land in question – is an issue that merits further investigation as well. Do these relationships have any kind of mitigating effect on the possible negative consequences of either the international, or the national investment being proposed? For the moment however there is just not enough information to draw any firm conclusions.

## Gender, LSAs and food security

To quote from a recent paper on gender and LSAs, ‘A gender perspective is critical to truly understanding the impact of large-scale land deals because women and men have different social roles, rights and opportunities and will be differentially affected by any major change in tenurial regimes, especially land transfers to extralocal investors’ (Behrman et al 2012:51). Given the already weak position of women in many countries, without secure access to land in their own name, lacking access to even basic inputs and often excluded from extension and other development projects, ‘it stands to reason that large-scale land deals may exacerbate poor conditions of women’s land access and ownership or further limit poor rural women’s opportunities for income generation’ (ibid 2012:51).

In many countries women are also the principal labour force on family farms, and also manage their own fields. In customary contexts this gives them some control over how the food or cash crops they produce are used in the household economy. Deprived of access to this land by a LSA or through a switch to out-grown cash-cropping which is then overseen by the male household head, women can lose control of the food supply or the cash from sales which they use to meet household needs. And as they are primarily responsible for ensuring that household children have enough to eat, the impact of the overall LSA process can be serious.

The literature quoted by Behrman and others presents many examples where women are often marginalised by the arrival of a new LSA, and are excluded from ‘mitigation activities’ such as extension support, cash crop opportunities and so on. They may have some access to temporary or seasonal jobs, but the evidence suggests that they rarely get the few



permanent jobs that are created. As with food security impacts in general, there is in fact very little real data to deepen understanding of what is happening, why it is happening, and how it can be addressed. Julia Behrman herself, using the expression 'it stands to reason', underlines her own point that 'Of utmost importance is the current lack of empirical evidence on the differential effect that large-scale land deals have on men and women' (2012:72).

## New research

A lot more research is evidently needed on the whole question of accurately assessing the impact of LSAs on food security and nutrition. While there are almost certainly new studies being planned or already underway, the present review identified several which should begin to fill in the knowledge gap that surrounds this issue and feeds the often extreme positions of the opposing sides of the LSA debate.

The first of these is a study being launched now by a team from the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden (Box 2). This study will attempt to assess changes in food security before and after a switch in land use from food production by local households, to commercial production of biofuels. One element that appears to be missing still however is an assessment of nutritional status of the target population, including collecting anthropometric either from scratch, or by referencing available health system databases. In spite of this the study promises to offer interesting insights and a more nuanced view of the impact of LSAs that that which is commonly found in the press and some academic literature to date.

**BOX 2 New Research: Large scale agro investments in Tanzania – impacts on smallholder land access and food security** ( Kjell Havnevik, and Linda Engström, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden)

The research aims to identify a possible conflict between using land for energy or household agricultural/food production and how this conflict plays out in terms of changes in household food security.

Research will focus (i) on exclusions for smallholders' and village land access, local food production, nutrition levels and food prices and (ii) the extent to which increased rural wage and contract employment (inclusion) related to the investments may offset the exclusionary effects.

*The combined measure of these effects are defined as food security, i.e. changes in food production may be set against other food entitlements gained through wages and contractual incomes, with consequent negative or positive impacts on nutrition and livelihoods.*

The research will also include village livelihoods analysis and look at the impacts of land investments on key livelihood assets, capabilities and activities. It will also measure the impacts on different village economic strata (poor, middle and higher income) and women and men in order to capture the dynamics of socio/economic changes.


See: <http://www.nai.uu.se/research/areas/large-scale-agro-investme/>

A second study is being carried out by Evans Osabuohien in Nigeria (2013). This case study of foreign land acquisition (FLA) in Shonga, Kwara State, Nigeria aims to:

- Provide further empirical analysis on FLA;
- Understand the institutional/political framework of FLA;
- Examine ways in which households can adjust.
- Investigate why some households do better than others in renegotiating their livelihood options.

The study is interesting in that it will examine the different ways in which an LSA investment is affecting different households, and why. Furthermore it offers the chance of assessing impact after some time has passed, as the Shonga Farm was offered to foreign investors in 2005.





This is an area of some 13,000 ha and 28 communities are affected by the LSA process, with compensation being paid for loss of land. The preliminary work for the study has found that to date about US\$58,000 has been paid to 1990 household heads out of a total of 2771 (about US\$29 per household). As Osabuohien observes, ‘this can only afford a half-bag of rice (the staple food)’. His main argument, to be supported by his research results, is that compensation should involve more than cash, including support to adjusting livelihood options; and that this should be part of the contract/negotiating process with the LSA investor and the government.

Once again however, while livelihoods are the focus of this study, no mention is made of collecting nutritional and anthropometric data to strengthen the analysis and show concrete impacts on food security. Given the time since the LSA was established, it would be interesting to try and find these data from the pre-2005 period and compare it with similar data from the present time.

**BOX 3 On-going research: Well-being and Ill-being Dynamics in Ethiopia – WIDE 1, 2 and 3** (Mokoro Ltd, Oxford)

The WIDE research began in 1994 when 15 village studies were launched in communities selected for an Ethiopian Rural Household Survey. Each was chosen as exemplars of the rural livelihood systems found in the four main regions of Ethiopia. A second round of studies (WIDE2) was carried out in 2003, when three new sites were added to represent new agricultural livelihood systems, as well as two pastoralist sites

Since 2009, a MOKORO team has been revisiting the 20 villages (WIDE3). Using a rigorous case-based approach, this cross-sectoral research looks at the broad modernisation processes and outcomes in each community and documents how government and donor development interventions have interacted with these.

The research draws on complexity social science approaches to study both long-term continuities and rapid change processes (MOKORO 2013).

A third research exercise (Box 3) is highlighted here not because it specifically addresses food security *per se*, but because its methodology offers an excellent approach to look at all aspects of the food security impact of LSAs through the lens of complexity theory.

The WIDE focus on ‘Well-being and Ill-being Dynamics’ in the context of multiple processes affecting household development offers a useful approach to looking at the wider and equally complex context of food security. Initiating similar longer term study with a focus on nutrition would usefully begin with a collection of nutritional and health system data, and track the way in which different households respond to a new LSA over a similar period of 15-

20 years. Evidently this requires a significant commitment from both research organisation and funders, but the MOKORO example clearly illustrates that this can indeed be done.



## Conclusions

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The available literature points to a worldwide catalogue of large land acquisitions that are creating hardship and suffering for many people. Livelihoods are being disrupted or totally compromised, communities are losing long standing relationships with their land and instead becoming dependent upon the new land holders for wages and other benefits that may or may not improve food security in a post-LSA context.

Worst case scenarios are of abandonment of the area altogether and migration to a city where life may be even more precarious. Not-so-bad cases involve some form of labour-based dependency or becoming part of an outgrower scheme, for example. Even where some positive impact on food security is claimed however, the social and cultural cost can be enormous. The most critical change is in the status of the individual household and of those living in it. Firstly, ceding your land or having it taken away fundamentally changes your relationship with the world. And if others around you also lose their land, and perhaps leave, your traditional safety nets in times of crisis are also gone. Independence, albeit precarious and even illusory, is lost, and replaced by dependency on strangers, for a job, for safety net support.

The literature also shows how changes occur inside households, affecting women in particular. It is likely that any permanent employment created by a LSA often goes to the men, women lose access to the fields they used to grow food for the children, and the children become food insecure while their father uses his wages for other things.


Such changes fundamentally alter how you see yourself as a citizen. Being a landowner or even sharecropper with a contract backed by a range of locally respected cultural norms makes you a 'stakeholder'; once that is gone, the right to engage or participate also disappears, or is replaced by other forms of engagement – conflict, collective resistance, and so on.

The positive side of the community consultation in Mozambique referred to earlier is indeed that investors and the State have been obliged by law to recognise that local rights exist, that peasants *are* stakeholders. Once the land is given up however, the less recognised consequence is that the status of the ex-occupant of the land changes, usually for the worst. The community has played its trump card and has no more aces to play – they then become merely a potential pool of labour.

Thus even progressive new legal frameworks can be used to create a false impression of legitimate engagement and dialogue, providing a cosmetic glow to the land acquisition process (Tanner 2010).

This review also underlines the complexity of the LSA and food security question. Things are far more nuanced than the protagonists on either side of the LSA argument would have everyone believe. As White et al observe, 'there is also a need to look for deeper understandings of the phenomenon and its longer-term implications for agricultural and rural futures...to disentangle the immediate and more fundamental dynamics at work' (2012:620). And the insights provided by Festus Boamah also underline the need to get all the facts lined up before making firm conclusions about impact.

With regard to the food security impact of LSAs, to date this seems to be mostly inferred from analyses of previous or existing livelihoods, and predicted and observed subjectively



rather than supported by solid evidence of nutritional status and other indicators of well- or ill-being. Such approaches look at what has been lost – food and farm income – and what is gained – employment etc. The detailed research being undertaken by the Uppsala team will prove to be very interesting in this context, as it takes this kind of analysis to a more detailed level which might allow for a ‘before and after’ assessment, and it includes disaggregating results by gender. Once again it would be useful if it included a scientifically-based nutritional assessment of the affected population, using health records and perhaps an anthropometric survey.

Anthropometric data can be taken through sample surveys, especially of household children who will be the most sensitive to any change in food security status. Simple measurements such as the upper arm circumference are quick to do and give a good indicator of relatively immediate changes as food supply goes up or down. Such data is also often available through health posts and specific nutrition projects in the area where a LSA is proposed, allowing the pre-LSA situation to be assessed with greater accuracy, and some form of longitudinal assessment of impact to be carried out.


No recent studies were found that included any kind of meaningful nutritional analysis. Given that ESIA's are often a requirement for most large scale investments, it seems sensible to consider including concrete and scientifically sound nutritional and food security assessments as part of this process. This would provide a) a baseline from which to measure the real impact of the LSA and related investment after it is implemented; and b) proposals for mitigating measure should the impact be predicted to be negative.

Even if such assessments are carried out however, care must be taken to infer that any change is due to the LSA as such (i.e. to the loss of land, excluding other factors). Very few studies look at food security beyond the 'land produces household food' context, and bring in other food security variables such as access to clean water, health care, employment, etc., all of which can be improved in ways that both offer new livelihoods choices and can impact positively on nutritional status indicators. But beyond these well-known non-food determinants of food security, a host of other factors and processes impinge upon households that are dealing with the consequences of a LSA on their doorsteps.

In this context the kind of analysis offered by the Mokoro WIDE study might be very useful, to consider the question of whether the land acquisition *per se* is the problem, or whether it is far more nuanced than that. Issues such as the extent to which the community was informed and shown how to negotiate, what kind of support they had, how the new LSA and related activities have been implemented, what wages and working conditions are offered, and how the government has overseen the process, are all important in this wider assessment of ‘LSA impact’ on food security.

More fundamentally however, it is important to ask how communities and their constituent households can make more use of the potential of their own unused land, perhaps through a mixed package of private investment and community-based activities. One aspect of the drive to develop large scale agricultural schemes to take advantage of new local and world markets and benefit from whatever economies of scale there are, is the possibility that communities themselves might implement such schemes, or at least be partners in them.

It is interesting to note that this idea does not appear in any of the documents consulted for this report. The World Bank position does stress the need for secure rights, but this is seen more as creating a level playing field ahead of negotiations to get the best deal possible from investors. Even if successful, a more productive negotiation will still however leave the community without its land, and households without many options in an era when countries are not engaged in massive industrialization to absorb displaced peasants and their families.



Even where outgrowing schemes are the outcome, it is not that clear that being locked into a dependent relationship with a new processing factory is that great a deal.

At the end of the day investors want land that belongs to someone else, and even where governments themselves do not fully accept this reality and insist that the State is the ultimate landowner, this puts the current occupants in quite a strong position. The World Bank is correct to suggest negotiating for the best deal, but perhaps it is time for governments and others to really respect local rights, not just over land, but also to participate as equal partners and as 'owners' of the resources that others want.

To this end, more attention is also needed on legal empowerment and organisational strengthening measures at community level, so that cases like the Tina Delta 'resistance' become the rule rather than the exception. And people are motivated by far more than just their food security. Paralegal and local capacity building programmes linked to measures to secure local land rights can, in an enabling environment created *and supported by governments*, turn the tables and make LSA investments something that is people-focused, within a wider context of looking for 'options...and workable alternatives to corporate land accumulation and large-scale industrial farming' (White et al 2012:642). As De Schutter says, we need ...a vision that goes beyond disciplining land deals [in which] investment must be investment that benefits the poor in the South [and] truly reduces hunger and malnutrition' (2012:275). Yet it should not be overlooked that even this vision requires accurate data to assess its impact on food security and nutrition.

## Recommendations

The food security impact of large-scale land acquisitions (LSA) must be analysed against a backdrop of complexity and multiple causes and effects. A more simplistic narrative can hide many truths than those who have strong positions for and against may not want to see, and which are important for making the correct policy choices in specific contexts.

In this context more care should be taken when researching the actual and predicted impact of LSAs, including as assessment of how secure livelihoods and food security were before a new LSA materialises. It is essential to 'construct the right narrative', to get all the facts into place based on solid evidence before making potentially misleading conclusions.


All studies that look at LSAs impact on local livelihoods and nutrition must take greater care to assess food security and nutrition against established scientific criteria.

To this end it is recommended that existing or planned *new studies* of LSA impact include some analysis of food security and nutritional data that will allow a 'before and after' assessment (either through new anthropometric surveys and/or collecting data from existing health system and other archives).

To address the present and identified knowledge gap in this area, it is also recommended that DFID promotes and supports new studies to develop the methodologies and establish new reference points which fully take into account real nutritional and food security status, including the collecting of anthropometric and other relevant data.

In the case of *new LSAs*, it is proposed that all ESIA's carried out by firms or governments before implementation should include a full food security audit and baseline survey of nutritional status, perhaps with a focus on the nutritional status of local children as a sensitive indicator to changes in food availability and the reliability over time of entitlements.





Given the importance of gender for food security, and the very likely case that impacts are differentiated between men and women (with consequent impacts for household children), it is essential that more studies are done of the gender dimension of gender and LSAs; and that any and all data collected are disaggregated by gender and analysed separately.


Turning now to the issue of the LSA investments themselves:

- measures could be built into contracts with investors that trigger compensatory mechanisms or even penalties if assumed *positive* social impacts are not achieved
- activities and implementation should be designed and managed together with the local population to ensure that local food needs are not compromised, either by a) setting aside land for food production, b) ensuring that some of the food produced stays locally, or c) finding new ways to maintain entitlements to food through other means
- donors should initiate a discussion of what White and his colleagues call the ‘options and workable alternatives to corporate land accumulation’, which may not exclude the ‘large scale’ approach but which bring communities into the process as actors, stakeholders and beneficiaries in a more direct and more substantial way (the story of a half-bag of rice as compensation underlines the point).

The role of governments in this whole process needs to be looked at closely and reviewed. The various guidelines and principles (World Bank, FAO etc.) all have their merits, but care should be taken to avoid them becoming De Schutter’s ‘checklist of how to destroy the peasantry responsibly’. In this context governments:

- should work proactively with local people (i.e. their citizens) to ensure that new LSAs fully take into social and food security impact, and involve local people as *partners and stakeholders*, not just as potential source of labour
- should fully recognise the legitimacy and extent (even over ‘empty land’) of local rights over land and resources, and take steps to provide more than just abstract legal recognition of the fact (some form of collective registration or delimitation or support for individual titles (for women as well as men) where appropriate
- should accept that consequent right of those who live on the land to be closely involved in how it is disposed of, to benefit from the process at a level that reflects the real value of the resources being given up (the value of the proposed investment might be a good proxy indicator), and to take part in deciding the terms of the arrangement (assuming of course that a LSA proposal is indeed the best option)
- should provide or facilitate the provision of legal and other capacity building support for communities confronted by LSA proposals, so that they are able to a) fully assess and either accept or reject the proposal; and b) negotiate robust and worthwhile agreements that form the basis of longer term food security in one form or another
- should upgrade labour laws and ensure that working conditions are at an acceptable level, paying due attention to the issue of equal treatment for men and women, and including provisions to prevent the use of child labour

Donors and others should also promote the idea that at least a part of all revenues generated by new LSAs is reinvested in local food security and livelihoods support, with the full involvement of communities themselves. Ideally this should be agreed and developed



*before the investment begins and as part of its design process, and not as a reactive response to problems.*

Finally, and perhaps in collaboration with support to health sector programmes, it is important to begin developing far more decentralised databases on nutritional well-being as a matter of course. Over a period of time indicators such as the infant mortality rate and rates of child malnutrition will indicate in a global sense, the overall 'health' of the local agrarian economy and the impact of the different investments that are implemented.



# Annex

## Bibliography

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There is a large literature on the issues discussed in this report, and the Bibliography presented here necessarily only includes documents and publications cited in the text. Readers are recommended to go to the website for the International Conference on Land Grabbing held at Sussex University in April 2011 ([http://www.future-agricultures.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=1547&Itemid=978](http://www.future-agricultures.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=1547&Itemid=978)) where 88 papers are available and downloadable; also the more recent GIGA Workshop in Germany provides a good selection of recent papers and information about new research into the implementation and consequences of LSAs in many parts of the world ([http://www.landgrab.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=62:giga-workshop&catid=65&Itemid=97](http://www.landgrab.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62:giga-workshop&catid=65&Itemid=97)).

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