

Ethnography of Land Deals

Since the food, finance and fuel crisis, which started in 2005, interest in land has massively increased in countries where land seems to be cheap and abundant. Large-scale land acquisitions became a widely discussed topic. Whereas some expect these land investments to provide desperately sought opportunities for rural development, others warn that land grabs rather exacerbate the already challenging situation of rural people.

Despite increasing scientific interest, little is known about what happens on the ground when land deals take place. Our research project addresses this research gap. For our Master Thesis we conducted comparative in-depth qualitative research on how specific land deals were implemented and how they affect people living there.



Ethnography of a Land Deal: Local **Perceptions and Vertical Perspectives of a** Large Scale Land Acquisition Project in Northern Sierra Leone Franziska Marfurt, Fabian Käser & Samuel Lustenberger

In 2008 Addax Bioenergy leased approximately 50'000 ha land in northern Sierra Leone to produce bio-fuel. The company complies with a range of international standards. Thus, it aimed at considering local land rights for the implementation of the project. However, in practice, local land rights were considered only partially and people with user rights, also greatly affected by the project, were neither consulted nor compensated.

Common findings

In all three cases, some of the previous resource users lost access to land, pasture or other land-related resources without being adequatley compensated therefor. This can be explained by an inadequate consideration of the local context with its complex property and user right structures by the investors. However, different actors also develop strategies to deal with the new situation. Nevertheless, even projects that are labelled as best practice example – complying with a range of international standards – can cause considerable difficulties for several groups of people affected by such land deals.

Presentations: • ECPR Glasgow 3-6 September 2014 • SGAS Bern 17-18 October 2014 • Ethnosymposium Halle 14-17 May 2015 • ECAS Paris 8-10 July 2015

Publications:

Marfurt, Käser, Lustenberger 2015: Local Perceptions and Vertical Perspectives of a Large Scale Land Acquisition Project in Northern Sierra Leone. Submitted to: *Homo Oeconomicus*

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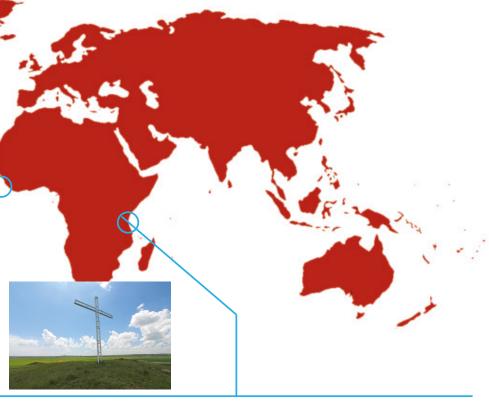
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Institut für Sozialanthropologie, Universität Bern Ethnography of «Land Deals»

Forschungsprojekt von Prof. Dr. Tobial Haller, Fabian Käser, Franziska Marfurt, Elisabeth Schubiger, Anna von Sury







Growing Rice or Grabbing Swampy Lands? **Contested Views on the Dominion Farm** Investment in West Kenya Anna von Sury & Elisabeth Schubiger In 2003 Dominion Farms Ltd. leased 6'900 ha of the Yala Swamp in order to grow rice based on the discourse to ensure food security in the region. The implementation process was amongst others characterised by religious motives of the investor and hopes for development by the local population. The cultural insensitivity during the implementation process on the investor side led to a disregard of local patterns of use of the Yala Swamp and has led to ongoing conflicts between various stakeholders on different levels

Commons in a global world Examples of struggles over land and common-pool resources in Kenya and Sierra Leone

Box 12: Bioenergy project fails to deliver promised benefits

Addax Bioenergy Ltd (Case #1798) is a Swiss-based company producing sugar cane in Sierra Leone on about 10,000 hectares of land leased from the Temne ethnic group. An interdisciplinary group of researchers from the Institute of Social Anthropology and the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), both at the University of Bern, and the National Research Programme (NRP 68) investigated how this project has changed access to nd and natural resources and the effects this has had on mificant financial contributions of national and multilateral evelopment agencies, the project established by Addax Bioenergy Sierra Leone (ABSL) had to comply with a series of vestment standards, including those of the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB), and is therefore considered by

ne main findings of the research team were as follows. The project's large-scale monoculture has destroyed a highly diverse cultural landscape, significantly changing the quality of and access to land, water and veldt products, especially for more marginal groups i.e. women, youth, tenants and migrants. Many land users have been excluded from accessing common pool resources, losing previous access rights based on common property institutions. Overall, on average the amount of land used per family for agriculture in the project area is 73% smaller than outside the project area (2.53 hectares compared with 9.16 hectares). Those -50%).

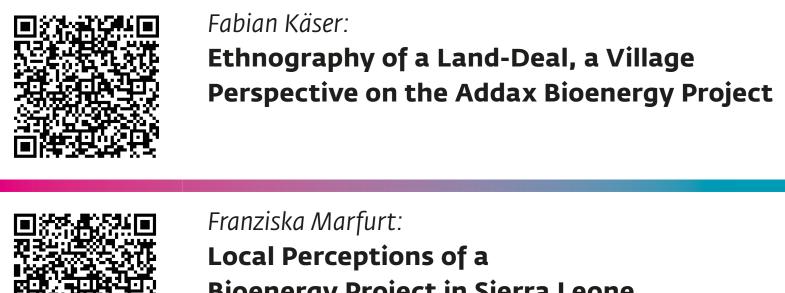
made only to land-owners, who make up about 50% of disadvantaged. the people living from agriculture. This compensation has exacerbated existing tendencies towards elite capture of the project's economic benefits, further intensifying tensions and conflicts among different groups within Temne society.

Box 13: Rice project falls short of development potential

Thirteen years after it was first implemented, the impacts of a arge-scale land investment can be observed in the Yala Swamp n Kenya, a wetland region of more than 200 sq km (Case #1374). Kenya's underlying legal pluralism, dating back to colonial times, provided a legal basis for a US investor, Dominion Farms Ltd, to lease 6,900 hectares of swampland, primarily to produce rice. The lease was agreed with local county councils in the name of development, and as such was welcomed by political leaders. However, discussions about how best to implement the project have been stifled by arguments associated with ethnicity, with groups such as the Kikuya being accused of preventing Luo groups in the region from achieving industrial development and nodernity

our major issues have arisen from this development: Reclamation of the swampland has had an impact on the resilience of local communities. This becomes evident when comparing the population who benefited directly from the swamp's resources (15,000–35,000 people) with those who benefit directly from employment created by the investment strategies is limited.

An area of 450 acres of land was allocated as compensation investment. for the loss of resources. However, after Dominion Farms drained the land, local institutions were ignored and no further steps were taken to distribute the land to local Social Anthropology, University of Bern).



Bioenergy Project in Sierra Leone, expectations of Modernity, Gendered **Impacts and Coping Strategies**

Fotal monetary income in the project area is only 18% highe han outside the project area. Meanwhile, expenditure or: food in the investigated area has risen by 16% compared with the area outside, meaning that practically all of the additional income in the project area must be used to pay for increased expenditure on food

As a consequence, families in the region studied are more susceptible to the effects of fluctuation and crises outside already been experienced twice in quick succession by people living in the study area: first the Ebola epidemic, and then the cessation of ethanol production following ABSL's decision to sell its project

In the beginning, local people welcomed the project as they to the area. As these expectations failed to materialise as expected, different responses were triggered. Local elites as well as the younger generation have activated both old and new ways of resistance, resorting to old institutions of resistance (secret societies) and to a combination of old and new tenure institutions and international legal rights with the aid of a local NGO to win back control over the commons. During the implementation phase Addax created over 2,500

mostly part-time jobs, but the bulk of these have been phased out since it ended operations in August 2015.

with no land of their own are more seriously affected by this Even though this project has provided some economic benefits, reduction in land than land-owners (-70% compared with it has also caused severe negative impacts and the pre-existing local context has led to an unequal distribution of these Payments for the leasing of land are low and have been negative impacts, mainly affecting groups that were already

> Sources: Botazzi et al. (2016); Käser (2014); Lustenberger (2015); Marfurt (2016); Marfurt et al. (2016); Rist et al. (2016). Box provided by Tobias Haller, Stephan Rist, Fabian Käser, Franziska Marfurt (all University of Bern).

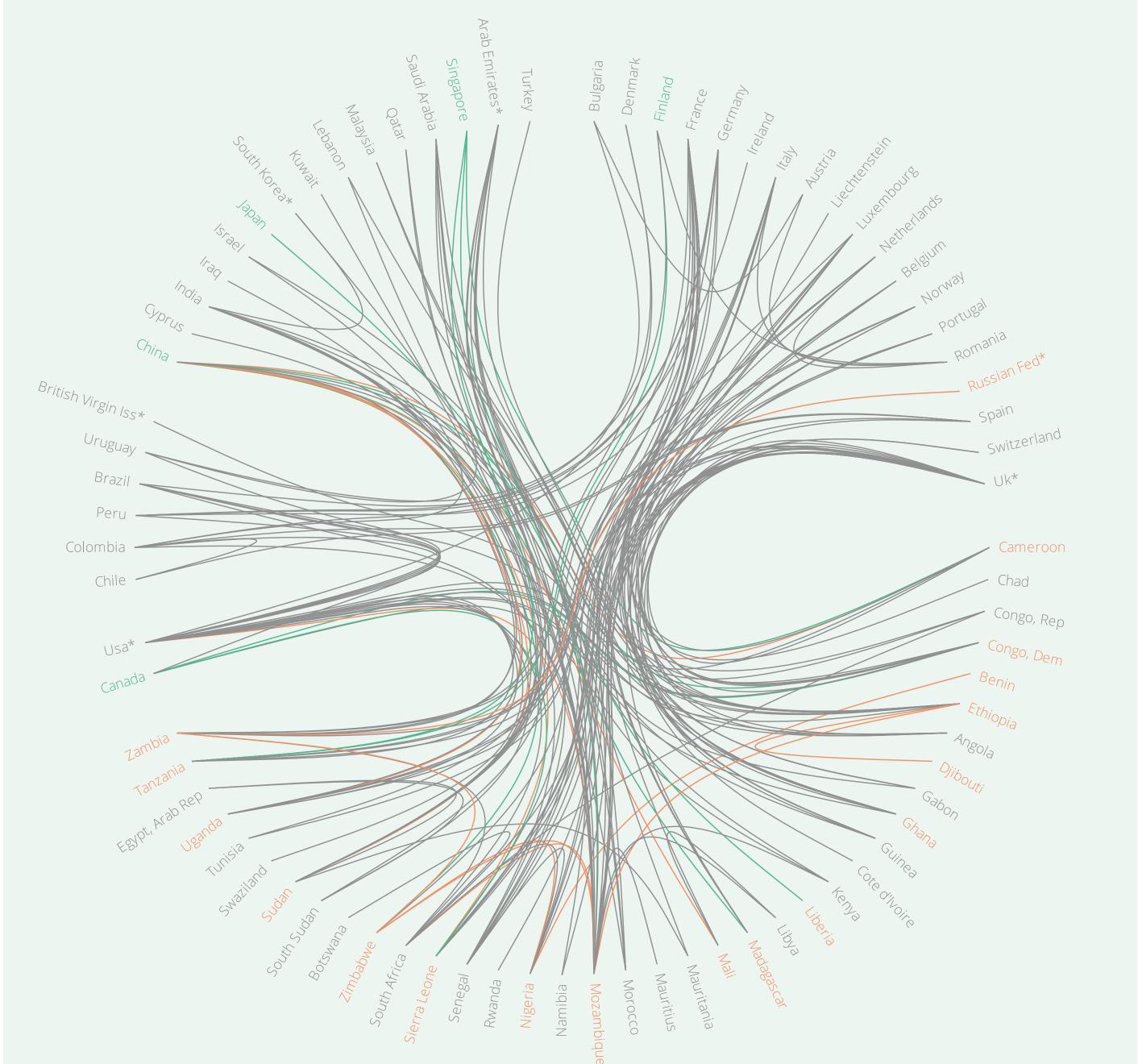
people. Consequently, some wealthy community members, using paid labour, rushed to clear this land in order to lease it themselves. Vulnerable people, including elderly women and poorer peasant farmers, were unable to continue using the land as they had before.

3. Of the 6,900 hectares leased by Dominion Farms, only 40% has so far been put into use. The remaining 60% still lies fallow and to some part has been appropriated by local people for grazing and cultivation. This has resulted in the investor criminalising local people by calling in police to evict them.

4. Dominion Farms has increasingly been collaborating with local NGOs working for environmental protection of the Yala Swamp. However, as these projects largely fail to take into account the views of local stakeholders, the people affected fear losing more land as a result of conservation efforts and wildlife protection measures.

Considering these issues and the fact that the rice produced by Dominion Farms is not consumed locally, this project appears (200 permanent jobs, 400 casuals). The loss of a major to have had a number of negative effects. Local people want livelihood source, combined with a lack of employment more labour opportunities and stronger integration of local opportunities, means that the diversification of livelihood stakeholders, including the community's knowledge, experience and way of living, in order for more people to benefit from the

> Source: Based on field research in Kenya, 2014. Box provided by Elisabeth Schubinger and Anna von Sury (both Institute of



International Land Deals for Agriculture The e-print version is available at:www.landmatrix.org







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Samuel M. Lustenberger: Addax Bioenergy Sierra Leone: Analysis of the implementation process of a large scale land acquisition project from the perspective of assemblage theory