AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT



Rising Global Interest in Farmland

CAN IT YIELD SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE BENEFITS?

Klaus Deininger and Derek Byerlee with Jonathan Lindsay, Andrew Norton, Harris Selod, and Mercedes Stickler



THE WORLD BANK

RISING GLOBAL INTEREST IN FARMLAND

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PREFACE

Interest in farmland is rising. And, given commodity price volatility, growing human and environmental pressures, and worries about food security, this interest will increase, especially in the developing world.

Many countries have suitable land available that is either not cultivated or produces well below its potential. This was a development challenge even before the food price rise of 2008. Seventy-five percent of the world's poor are rural, and most are engaged in farming. The need for more and better investment in agriculture to reduce poverty, increase economic growth, and promote environmental sustainability was already clear when there were "only" 830 million hungry people before the food price rise. The case is even clearer today when, for the first time in human history, over a billion people go to bed hungry each night.

One of the highest development priorities in the world must be to improve smallholder agricultural productivity, especially in Africa. Smallholder productivity is essential for reducing poverty and hunger, and more and better investment in agricultural technology, infrastructure, and market access for poor farmers is urgently needed. When done right, larger-scale farming systems can also have a place as one of many tools to promote sustainable agricultural and rural development, and can directly support smallholder productivity, for example, through outgrower programs. However, recent press and other reports about actual or proposed large farmland acquisition by big investors have raised serious concerns about the danger of neglecting local rights and other problems. They have also raised questions about the extent to which such transactions can provide long-term benefits to local populations and contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Although these reports are worrying, the lack of reliable information has made it difficult to understand what has been actually happening. Against this backdrop, the World Bank, under the leadership of Managing Director Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, along with other development partners, has highlighted the need for good empirical evidence to inform decision makers, especially in developing countries. One result is this report, *Rising Global Interest in Farmland: Can It Yield Sustainable and Equitable Benefits?* To prepare the report, a multidisciplinary team was tasked with carrying out a multicountry study on large-scale agricultural land acquisition and investment. While this task proved to be less straightforward than originally anticipated, the effort has produced some striking results.

First, the demand for land has been enormous. Compared to an average annual expansion of global agricultural land of less than 4 million hectares before 2008, approximately 56 million hectares worth of large-scale farmland deals were announced even before the end of 2009. More than 70 percent of such demand has been in Africa; countries such as Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Sudan have transferred millions of hectares to investors in recent years.

At the same time, in many cases the announced deals have never been implemented. Risks are often large. Plans are scaled back due to a variety of reasons including unrealistic objectives, price changes, and inadequate infrastructure, technology, and institutions. For example, we found that actual farming has so far only started on 21 percent of the announced deals. Moreover, case studies demonstrate that even some of the profitable projects do not generate satisfactory local benefits, while, of course, none of the unprofitable or nonoperational ones do.

Institutional gaps at the country level can be immense. Too often, they have included a lack of documented rights claimed by local people and weak consultation processes that have led to uncompensated loss of land rights, especially by vulnerable groups; a limited capacity to assess a proposed project's technical and economic viability; and a limited capacity to assess or enforce environmental and social safeguards.

Such problems are not due to a lack of potential. For example, although deforestation associated with the expansion of the agricultural frontier has been a serious problem (and one of the world's largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions), our analysis shows that the projected increase in the demand for agricultural commodities over the next decade could be met, without cutting down forests, by increasing productivity and farmland expansion in nonforested areas. In particular, none of the Sub-Saharan African countries of most interest to investors is now achieving more than 30 percent of the potential yield on currently cultivated areas. So, increasing productivity on existing farmland would have a much bigger impact than simply expanding the land area at current yields.

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There is also considerable scope for a South-South exchange of good practice. Again, when done right, larger-scale farming can provide opportunities for poor countries with large agricultural sectors and ample endowments of land. To make the most of these opportunities, however, countries will need to better secure local land rights and improve land governance. Adopting an open and proactive approach to dealing with investors is also needed to ensure that investment contributes to broader development objectives. Experience in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean can provide lessons for Sub-Saharan African countries that have confronted these issues more recently.

A major conclusion of the report is that access to a basic set of good information is essential for all stakeholders. Good public information can help governments formulate policies, identify gaps in implementation, and perform essential regulatory functions. Good public information can help civil society educate local communities about their rights and the potential uses and value of their land, assist in specific negotiations, and monitor agreements so they are indeed adhered to. And good public information can help investors effectively design and implement projects that respect local rights, are profitable, and generate local benefits.

Helping countries reduce poverty and hunger by increasing agricultural productivity is at the core of the World Bank's agenda. In collaboration with partners, the World Bank is ready to contribute to this important agenda by providing information and analysis, helping countries build their institutional and regulatory capacity, and supporting more and better investment in agriculture, especially smallholder agriculture, so that the rising global interest in farmland contributes to results that are sustainable and equitable.

Juergen Voegele Director Agriculture and Rural Development Department The World Bank

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Derek Byerlee is a Member of the Science Council of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and a consultant and adviser to a number of international organizations. Formerly he was Rural Strategy Adviser of the World Bank and Co-Director of the 2008 *World Development Report: Agriculture for Development*. Before joining the World Bank, he was Director of Economics at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center, Mexico, and Associate Professor, Michigan State University. For most of his career, he worked in several postings in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, conducting field research on agricultural technological change and food policy. He has published widely in several fields of agricultural development.

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Andrew Norton is Director of Research at the Overseas Development Institute in London. A social anthropologist by training, he carried out his doctoral fieldwork in a farming community in Mali and has since worked extensively on issues of poverty, vulnerability, social protection, citizen participation, political economy analysis, aid effectiveness, natural resource management, and social policy. From 2005 to 2010, he was a Lead Social Development Specialist at the World Bank, where he was responsible for oversight of strategy, social and political analysis, gender, and special initiatives within the Social Development Department, managing a major multidonor work program on Poverty and Social Impact Analysis and leading a number of studies, including on social dimensions of climate change and social guarantees. Before joining the World Bank, he was the Head of Profession for Social Development at the UK Department for International Development.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEZ	agro-ecological zoning
CGE	computable general equilibrium
DUAT	direito de uso e aproveitamento da terra (land use right)
EIA	environmental impact assessment
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (of the United Nations)
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GALDC	Government Agricultural Land Disposition Committee
GPS	global positioning system
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IIASA	International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis
LEV	land expectation value
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NPV	net present value
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACRO	Patents and Companies Registration Office
PLIAF	policy, legal, and institutional framework
PROFEPA	Procuraduría Federal para la Protección al Ambiente
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
	in Developing Countries
RSB	Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels

R&D	research and development
RSPO	Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
ZDA	Zambia Development Agency

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ABBREVIATIONS