



31 March 2016 – Polytechnic University of Valencia

WORKSHOP 1: LAND GRABBING AND LAND CONCENTRATION THE QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION, THE PLAYERS

Translated from French by Maudie and Jean Darvill, Translator Without Border (TWB)

After an initial plenary session on developments in access to land and natural resources in the different continents, the workshop participants were given the opportunity to give their many personal accounts, describe the various forms of land grabbing and concentration, discuss the scope of the processes under way and question whether the tools available to quantify them were adequate. The first four contributions were on the dispossession of lands belonging to the indigenous Qom people of Argentina, the contradictions and problems in Madagascar's land policies, the land-access situation in South Africa and developments in access to land in Romania. The often-cited Land Matrix Database was the topic of the fifth presentation, which highlighted both its value and its limitations¹.

EVALUATION

Access to land is undergoing extremely rapid and profound change in most regions of the world.

The frequently used term "land-grabbing" refers to a specific type of phenomenon which is particularly repellent, but which is far from reflecting all the changes to land access that are taking place worldwide, and also present serious problems. The quantitative evaluations often referred to include only a small proportion of these. It is essential to specify what should be taken into account before attempting to quantify land grabbing and land concentration phenomena, which apply to forestry and fishing resources (see respective workshops²) as well as to the land itself.

Based on the examples presented or discussed, a clear distinction can be made between:

1/ The dispossession of indigenous communities, appropriation by external players of land belonging to indigenous peoples or other populations for the development of large-scale farming activities, mining projects or major forestry operations; to build infrastructures, roads, dams, canals and pipelines; for urban expansion; to create nature reserves, etc. Examples in this first category include indigenous land in Argentina, the development of infrastructures and agrobusiness in Sri Lanka and the advance of "pioneer fronts" (agriculture et stockbreeding) in Brazil as well as forestry concessions in the Central African Republic and the creation of ranches in pastoral areas of Niger or plantations in Senegal.

2/ The concentration of user rights to land and natural resources, carried out through the purchase/sale and leasing of small parcels of land, and also through changes at generational level. Specific examples mentioned during the morning plenary included Romania, many countries in Western Europe, including France, as well as Canada and the United States.

A wide range of players is involved. As well as the obvious actors, namely major national and international businesses and pension funds, states also play a part, either indirectly through their land, trade and investment policies, or directly through expropriations or the allocation of concessions; it is not always the very big companies that accumulate land.

These phenomena are rooted in history, sometimes dating back to ancient times.

Colonial history created fertile ground for these processes of land concentration and dispossession (as in the extreme case of South Africa), which continued long after independence. Land not registered to private owners became "national land" (Latin America), "state-owned land" (as in Madagascar, Tanzania, Senegal, etc.), even when it had been occupied by indigenous populations for a very long time and governed by customary rules. In failing to recognize the user rights of the populations living in these places, the state justifies its power to transfer them via very long leases or by selling them to those it considers best able to "develop" the country.

¹The Land Matrix in no way claims to provide an exhaustive quantitative evaluation of large-scale land transactions. It merely documents and verifies the reported cases which meet its criteria (over 200 ha, since 2000, etc.). It underestimates the transactions carried out between national parties. Consequently, journalists and researchers often misuse it in analysing the nature of the phenomena and players.

²Women's access to land is also addressed in a parallel workshop.

The proposed solution to land insecurity is to deliver land deeds on an individual basis to inhabitants who they can then sell or pledge them. Madagascar's 2005 land reform, which called into question the principle of land ownership by the state and allowed the rights of inhabitants with land certificates to be recognized, did not succeed in achieving sufficiently rapid development; the state continued to hand over large areas of land for agricultural and mining activities to investors, many of them foreign, via emphyteutic leases. As a rule, the intermediate levels of social organization and land and resources management are not recognized. As a result, the use of communities' land, common land, is systematically privatized.

The forced collectivization of countries, carried out under the banner of socialism, was another driver of the accelerated concentration and dispossession of land throughout the twentieth century. As the example of Romania shows, this process is irreversible in the short term. With decollectivization, land was redistributed formally to a large number of beneficiaries who, lacking the resources to work the land, had to let it, often very cheaply. Large-scale operations were very quickly resumed on the best land, as entrepreneurs and investors rented thousands of small parcels of land to set up their operations.

State interventions to rapidly remedy a very unequal distribution of land, and agrarian reforms in particular, remain more relevant than ever, even though such reforms have not always been sufficient to attain the desired results in the long term. During the morning plenary, Vietnam's very positive results were highlighted, as was the impossibility of avoiding a new and very rapid concentration of land in Peru and Chile, following the radical land reforms. Furthermore, the situation of extreme polarisation in South Africa illustrates the predictable failure of the misnamed market-driven land reform promoted by the World Bank, which aimed to achieve a fair redistribution of land through purchase and sale transactions between landowners and landless farmers. In Brazil, despite the presence of powerful social movements in rural areas, and federal policies that included an element of land reform and support for family-based production, the polarisation of agrarian structures has continued to grow. The progress of pioneer fronts since the 1970s has led to an increase of some 100 million hectares in Brazil's agricultural land, mainly benefiting very large operations practising various types of monocropping.

The general liberalisation of the markets on a global scale, the development of agricultural and transport technologies based on the use of fossil fuels and non-renewable resources, and the promotion of exclusive property rights have led to a profound and damaging change in the relationships of human societies to nature. It has also involved a destructuring of these societies and a decline in their ability to regulate their access to land and natural resources. Land is increasingly treated like a commodity. For the first time in human history, the specific characteristics of land and the natural world are being ignored. The consequences are dramatic for the whole of humanity. Communities and peoples are losing control of their territories, their ancestral knowledge and their ability to organise. Having accelerated in the last ten years, these developments are now irreversible in the mid-term. In regions of the world such as the Asian countries, where a major part of the world's rural population is concentrated and access to land is better distributed between the inhabitants of the countryside, the takeover of the cadastres and the over-generalisation of individual property rights are leading to a weakening of the control communities have over their own development, and to a build-up of tensions in the both the countryside and the towns. In Europe and North America the concentration of land use into business profit aims at profitability in the short term only and is destroying the relationships human societies have with nature: the countryside is growing empty, the damage is increasing and the ties between farmers and other citizens are disappearing.

PROPOSITIONS

Today we do not have the tools that would enable us to gauge the combination of the processes of dispossession and concentration in the countries of the world. The emphasis has been on land grabbing which involves the direct violation of the rights of the local inhabitants, and especially on foreign land grabbing, which in turn is prompting the development of a reaction based above all on a respect for human rights. However important, this is not enough. We also need to be able to measure the "step-by-step" concentration, which is no less rapid, taking account of the extent of the geographical area in which it functions. This is a prerequisite for learning about the huge impact this will generate in the long term, and anticipating the situation of future generations, rural and urban alike. We need to create observatories, research institutes and citizens' organisations whose aim is not to cite specific cases, but rather, on the basis of the existing data and partners' judgement, to evaluate the global evolution of the size of production units in countries in order to illustrate trends in the mid-term, even if the statistics we have are incomplete.

New regulations at both national and international level are absolutely essential. Implementing relative autonomy at the intermediate level is the only way of enabling communities and peoples to prevent agricultural policies being instrumentalised against their own interests, and to regain control over what has been lost solely to the law of the market.

INTERVENTIONS

The following list is not exhaustive. We would like to apologise to the contributors and participants at the workshop whose names do not appear in the list and ask them to contact the following address to enable us to update a new version of this summary that includes the complete list: secretariat@landaccessforum.org

Introductory interventions:

ANDREW, Nancy, researcher, France/United States of America

BATAGOIU, Raluca, agricultural development specialist, Romania

DIAZ, Felix, Qarashe (Chief) of the Potae Napocna Navogoh community pertaining to the Qom people, and representative of QOPIWINI, common organization of Qom, Pilagá, Wichí and Nivaclé peoples, Argentina

RABEHERIFARA, Jean-Claude, TANY collective for the protection of Madagascan land, Madagascar

TAYLOR, Michael, Director of the International Land Coalition Secretariat (ILC), Botswana

Interventions of the participants:

ABARCHI, Harouna, Association for the Redynamisation of Animal Husbandry in Niger, AREN, Nigeria

ADEMBA, Frank, Mviwata Kilimandjaro (national smallholder farmers organisation), Tanzania

ANICE DA MOTA PORTO, Cleia, National Federation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), Brazil

BA, Sidy, National Council for Rural Concertation and Cooperation (CNCR), Senegal

BAUMEISTER, Eduardo, researcher, Centre for Latin American studies and development (INCEDES), Nicaragua

BAYLAC, Michel, President of the European Association for Rural Development Institutions (AEIAR), France

BESSAOUD, Omar, researcher, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier (IAMM), France

BOEHM, Terry, farmer, former president of the National Farmers Union (NFU), Canada

BUZZALINO, Mario, Coordination of Family Farms of Mercosur (COPROFAM), Uruguay

KARIYAWASAM MAJUWANA GAMAGE, farmer, Sri Lanka Nature Group, Sri Lanka

KARIYAWASAM MAPALAGAM HEWARUPPAGE, Ravindra, Researcher, Center for Environment and Nature Studies, Sri Lanka

KEMANDA, Bienvenu Florentin, forestry and waterways engineer, House of Pygmy Women and Children (MEFP), Central African Republic

MACZ, Maria Josefa, National coordinator and delegate of the Peasant Unity Committee (CUC), Guatemala,

MOLINA, Javier, liaison officer, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Colombia

MONREAL GAINZA, rural development consultant for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Spain

OBREGÓN, Saúl, Fundación del Río (Rio Foundation), Nicaragua

PALEBELE, Kolyang, President of the National Council for the Concertation of Rural Producers of Chad (CNCPRT), Vice president of The Sub-Regional Platform of Peasant Organizations of Central Africa (PROPAC), Chad

SUAREZ, Victor, National Association of Rural Commercialization Enterprises (ANEC), Mexico

Facilitator:

Michel MERLET, Association to Improve the Governance of Land, Water and Natural Resources (AGTER), France

Reporter:

HURTADO, Laura, Sociologist, ActionAid, Country director, Guatemala