OpenLearn

The Open University

‘Land grab’: an environmental issue?



This item contains selected online content. It is for use alongside, not as a replacement for the module website, which is the primary study format and contains activities and resources that cannot be replicated in the printed versions.

About this free course

This free course is an adapted extract from the Open University course DST206 *Environment: sharing a dynamic planet* www.open.ac.uk/courses/modules/dst206.

This version of the content may include video, images and interactive content that may not be optimised for your device.

You can experience this free course as it was originally designed on OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University –

www.open.edu/openlearn/nature-environment/land-grab-environmental-issue/content-section-0

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

Copyright © 2017 The Open University

Intellectual property

Unless otherwise stated, this resource is released under the terms of the Creative Commons Licence v4.0 http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en_GB. Within that The Open University interprets this licence in the following way: www.open.edu/openlearn/about-openlearn/frequently-asked-questions-on-openlearn. Copyright and rights falling outside the terms of the Creative Commons Licence are retained or controlled by The Open University. Please read the full text before using any of the content.

We believe the primary barrier to accessing high-quality educational experiences is cost, which is why we aim to publish as much free content as possible under an open licence. If it proves difficult to release content under our preferred Creative Commons licence (e.g. because we can't afford or gain the clearances or find suitable alternatives), we will still release the materials for free under a personal end-user licence.

This is because the learning experience will always be the same high quality offering and that should always be seen as positive – even if at times the licensing is different to Creative Commons.

When using the content you must attribute us (The Open University) (the OU) and any identified author in accordance with the terms of the Creative Commons Licence.

The Acknowledgements section is used to list, amongst other things, third party (Proprietary), licensed content which is not subject to Creative Commons licensing. Proprietary content must be used (retained) intact and in context to the content at all times.

The Acknowledgements section is also used to bring to your attention any other Special Restrictions which may apply to the content. For example there may be times when the Creative Commons Non-Commercial Sharealike licence does not apply to any of the content even if owned by us (The Open University). In these instances, unless stated otherwise, the content may be used for personal and non-commercial use.

We have also identified as Proprietary other material included in the content which is not subject to Creative Commons Licence. These are OU logos, trading names and may extend to certain photographic and video images and sound recordings and any other material as may be brought to your attention.

Unauthorised use of any of the content may constitute a breach of the terms and conditions and/or intellectual property laws.

We reserve the right to alter, amend or bring to an end any terms and conditions provided here without notice.

All rights falling outside the terms of the Creative Commons licence are retained or controlled by The Open University.

Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

Contents

Introduction 4
Learning outcomes 5
1 Analytical concepts used in this course 6
2 Securing food, sharing land 7
2.1 The global demand for agricultural land 9
2.2 Land acquisitions in Africa 11
3 Senegal and land acquisition/land grab 13
4 Power, agency and property rights 17
4.1 Pressures on the land 17
5 Discourses and land grabs 19
5.1 Land acquisition or land grab? 19
Conclusion 24
Images 25
References 26

Introduction

The issue of wealthy investors taking control over land farmed by poor farmers clearly has political and economic implications. It is also an issue of justice. It is, perhaps, less obvious how it is an environmental issue. But, as you will discover, some of the main forces driving up farmland prices are tied to environmental challenges such as climate change, food insecurity, water shortages and the wish to diversify energy sources away from fossil fuels to biofuels.

Land acquisition, or 'land grab' as it is often called, offers important lessons about the way that environmental problems are entangled with economic and political issues at an increasingly global scale. The issue illustrates how everyday issues such as food prices are caught up in complex connections that link different places, different people and their livelihoods across the globe.

This free course, *'Land grab': an environmental issue?*, aims firstly to explore the ways in which land acquisition, or 'land grab' should be understood as environmental issues. Secondly, the readings, films and activities will help you to evaluate the land acquisition/land grab debate. More specifically, you will:

1. explore the relationship between land acquisition, access to food and broader processes in the global economy
2. consider the relationship between economic uncertainty and environmental change
3. examine how social groups may respond to environmental change and uncertainty
4. appreciate how analytical concepts can be useful in making sense of the complexity of environmental issues; in this case the issues of right to land and food prices.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course DST206 *Environment: sharing a dynamic planet*.

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand why land acquisition can be considered an environmental issue and the particular environmental challenges that it presents
- recognise the need for an interdisciplinary approach to interpret and explain environmental issues
- discuss the relationship between economic uncertainty and environmental change
- appreciate the work that analytical concepts can do to make sense of complex environmental issues such as the issues of rights to land and food prices.

1 Analytical concepts used in this course

In this course you will touch on how three sets of analytical concepts – first, time and space; second, risk and uncertainty; and third, values, power, and agency – can help you focus on different aspects of the environmental implications of land acquisition. The box below offers brief definitions of each of these sets of concepts.

Box 1 Analytical concepts: definitions

- Geographers and Environmental Studies researchers use the concepts of time and space to think both about the fact that environmental change always touches down in particular places and at particular moments, *and* the fact that to understand the full impact of these changes we often need to look further afield.
- Geographers and Environmental Studies researchers use the concepts of risk and uncertainty to draw attention to the fact that decisions about environmental issues are almost always taken in light of imperfect, incomplete or unclear information.
- Geographers and Environmental Studies researchers use the concepts of values, power and agency to help understand key factors shaping environmental issues:
    - Values refer to what is of worth, merit, or importance. They include the principles, beliefs, and ethical standpoints of the various individuals and groups involved in environmental issues.
    - Power is difficult to define but can include the material resources that a given person or group can deploy in pursuit of their objectives, *and* the ability of individuals and groups to shape the discourses that people use when they communicate (and thus set agendas that others involved may accept as legitimate, fair and authoritative). A discourse in this sense may include a powerful idea or set of ideas, shared values and certain understandings that people come to accept.
    - Agency is the difference that a social actor – individual or group – makes to the world and is shaped both by power (what actors can achieve) and by values (what actors want to achieve).

2 Securing food, sharing land

Who should own land and how may land be legitimately acquired? The video below, *Land Prices in East Anglia*, starts to answer these questions by visiting East Anglia.

Activity 1 Land prices in East Anglia

Allow 1 hour 40 minutes for this activity

First, read the short article 'Agricultural land prices hit record high' (The Guardian, 2011) for some background information on land prices.

Then watch the video *Land Prices in East Anglia* and, as you watch, think about the questions below and note your answers in text boxes provided.

Video content is not available in this format.
Land Prices in East Anglia



1. How much did the price of arable land increase between 2005 and 2012?

Provide your answer...

Answer

In 2005, an acre of arable land in East Anglia cost £3000. In 2012, arable land cost about £8000 an acre.

2. What percentage of farmland in East Anglia has been bought by investment funds and large institutional investors?

Provide your answer...

Answer

About 20 per cent of farmland in East Anglia has been bought by investment funds and large institutional investors.

3. Why do institutional investors see agricultural land as an asset today?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Agricultural land offers better returns than equities; rising food prices and increased food demands put pressure on agricultural land around the world; agricultural land is relatively cheap compared with development land and other assets.

4. Why does having a portfolio of land in different countries spread risk?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Buying land in different countries protects against regional uncertainties such as pestilence, political unrest and weather variations.

5. Why is the UK an attractive investment opportunity for farmland?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The UK does not suffer from extreme climatic variations so harvests are generally reliable and the country is politically stable. It therefore offers good value for investors. However, this situation could change as climate change worsens.

6. How has institutional investment changed farming practices in East Anglia?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Farming has become more efficient through industrial mechanisation, larger fields and the amalgamation of small farms. Large farming businesses are taking over the running of farms with a more commercial rather than pastoral approach to farming.

The film suggests that in the wake of the food price crisis of 2007–08, there is growing insecurity over food supply. International investors are concerned to hedge risk by diversifying their investment portfolio. The result of both these processes is increased demand for farmland in East Anglia.

2.1 The global demand for agricultural land

The practice of buying up farmland is not confined to East Anglia: it is a global phenomenon. Rather than rely on volatile food markets for the supply of food through trade, many food wholesalers are now taking control of food production by buying the land. Gaining access to agricultural land in other countries is one way of managing environmental insecurity for countries such as China and the states of the Persian Gulf; countries that are vulnerable to the effects of hotter – and in some cases, drier – weather than temperate countries.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1 Fertile and agriculturally productive land is in demand from agricultural businesses. These images show (a) a combine harvester harvesting a wheat field in Washington, USA; (b) an orchard in Kent, England

There are a number of other related reasons for the increase of land acquisitions:

- Climate change and more extreme weather conditions mean harvests can fail, forcing up commodity prices because of diminished supply.
- The growing global human population, which is predicted to reach 10 billion by 2100, means more people to feed.

- Changing diets in fast-developing, populous countries such as China, where the consumption of traditional grains is falling as wealthier Chinese prefer meat and dairy products. Livestock farming requires large quantities of harvested feed, which in turn requires more land.
- The global financial crisis of 2008 led international companies to look to diversify their assets away from volatile and risky assets, e.g. with shares into more tangible assets such as land.
- Biofuel production needs land. Biofuels can help tackle climate change: they are made from plant mass, absorbing carbon dioxide as they grow and releasing it when the derived fuel is burned for energy. Biofuels, therefore, can be carbon neutral. They can contribute to energy security for countries by reducing dependence on fossil fuels – oil, gas and coal – which may otherwise have to be imported from another country.

The degree of economic uncertainty under which food and agricultural businesses operate in the global economy has thus heightened, along with the environmental risks resulting from climate change. This level of uncertainty requires a new and different approach to food production. Land acquisition appears to be central to this new approach.

2.2 Land acquisitions in Africa

While land acquisition is taking place in many parts of the world (New Zealand, China, across Latin America), the greatest volume of transactions is happening in Africa. This move to take control of farmland on a large scale is referred to as ‘land grab’ in many places, particularly in Africa.

Activity 2 Land grab in Africa

Allow 30 minutes for this activity

Read the article ‘Analysis: Land grab or development opportunity?’ (BBC News, 2012), which gives an overview of the situation in Africa. Then answer the following questions.

1. How might you distinguish between a legitimate land deal and a land grab?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The local context of the deal is very important, particularly the investor’s track record and the terms of the lease. Another important point is whether local landholders have been consulted and have had the opportunity to give their consent freely, and whether they have been offered any compensation for loss of land.

2. Why are many land deals seen as land grabs?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The power imbalances between the international companies, host government and local landholders do not always encourage transparency and full consultation. This has led to accusations of land grab. Local farmers often have insecure titles to the land, which is a further issue leading to dispute. Where the land legally belongs to the government, local landholders may have no rights under the law, hence no legal recourse. But local communities may feel a sense of profound injustice at being evicted from land, especially when generations of the same families have lived on the land.

3. Are there ways that local farmers can be supported and enabled to stay on the land?

Provide your answer...

Answer

International companies can support local farmers through the creation of cooperatives to boost productivity and improve access to markets. The government can also support family farms through public policies and investment in infrastructure.

3 Senegal and land acquisition/land grab

Natural capital may be defined as those features of the natural environment that people rely on for food, livelihood and quality of life. Natural capital includes arable and grazing land, forests, water, fisheries and minerals. Natural capital is one of the most important productive assets in developing countries as it provides livelihoods for many of the poor as well as a foundation for economic development.

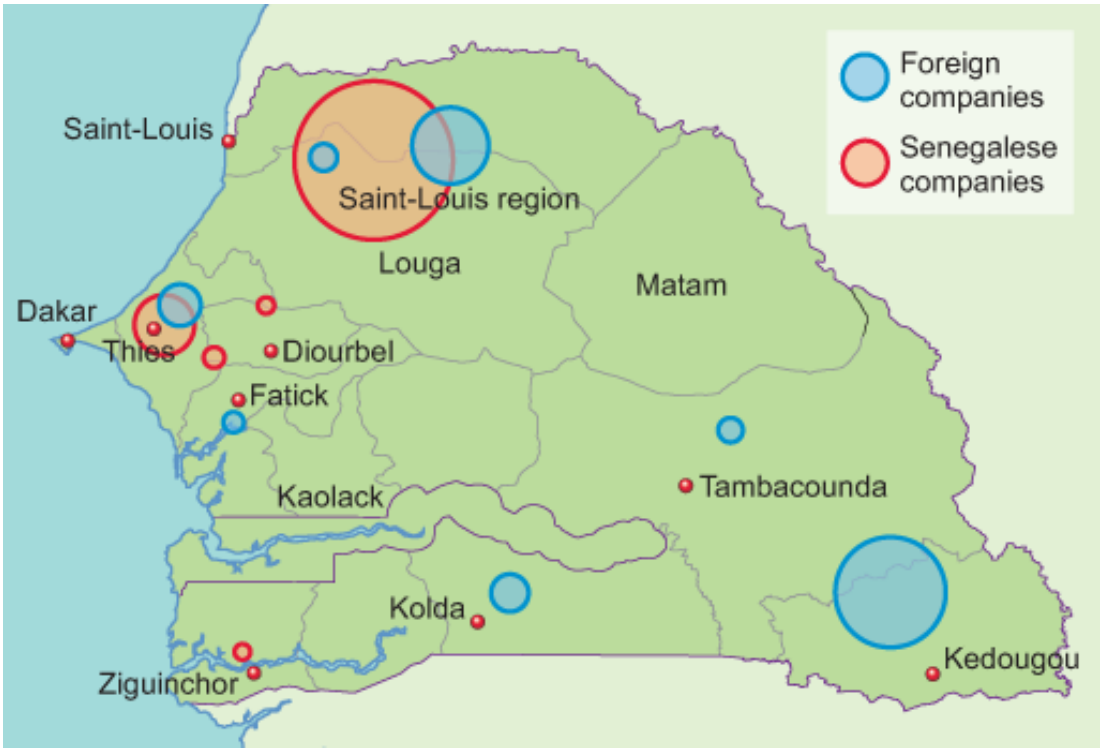


Figure 2 Land grab in Senegal, by company ownership

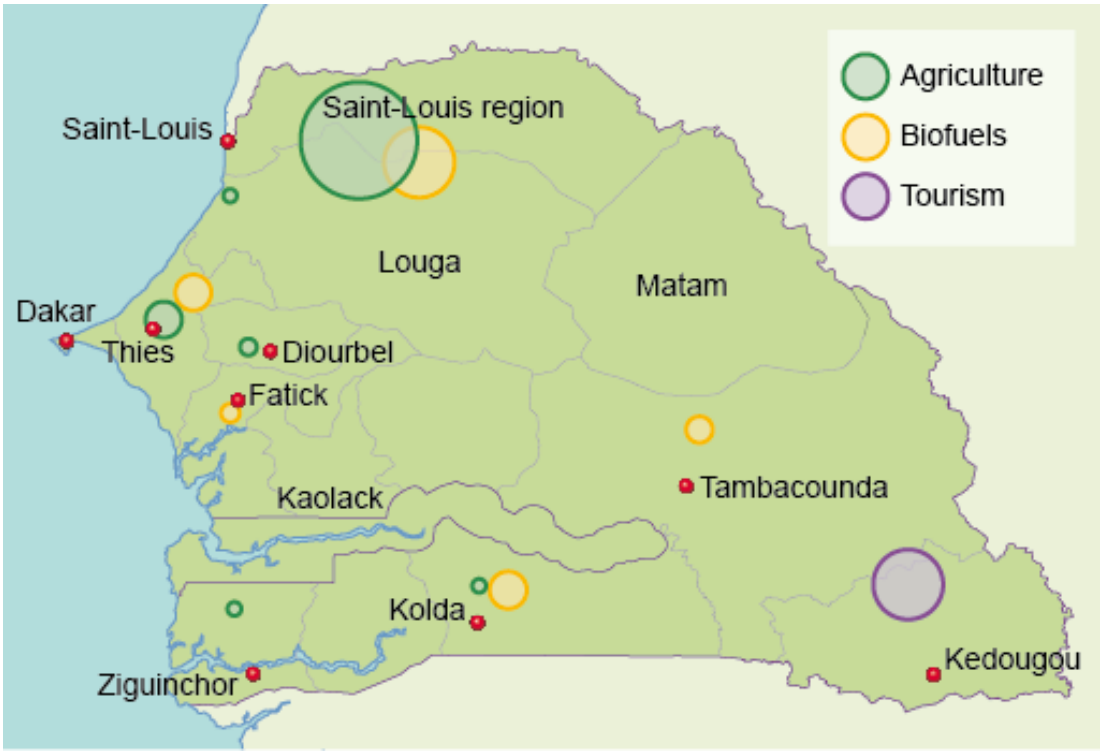


Figure 3 Land grab in Senegal, by sector

Activity 3 Watching *Land Grab in Senegal*

Allow 1 hour 30 minutes for this activity

Watch the following video, *Land Grab in Senegal*, which lets you look at this in the context of Senegal. Keep the questions below in mind when watching the film and answer them accordingly.

Note that at the beginning of the film (time 00:52) Professor Sidy Seck of Gaston Berger University near Saint-Louis holds up two maps. These maps are reproduced as Figures 2 and 3 above.

Video content is not available in this format.
Land Grab in Senegal



Answer the following questions relating to the *Land Grab in Senegal* film.

1. What percentage of the population is involved in farming in Senegal?

Provide your answer...

Answer

About 60 per cent of the Senegalese population is involved in farming.

2. What are the three purposes for which leased land is used?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Leased land is used for agriculture, biofuels and tourism.

3. Which countries are most involved in land acquisition in Senegal?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Saudi Arabia, France, Italy and Spain are the countries most involved in land acquisition in Senegal.

4. When villagers have been consulted by a rural council and foreign buyers in the use of land, what have they asked for?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Villagers have asked for the area of land leased to foreign interests to be reduced. They have also asked for jobs, schools and health clinics.

5. What evidence is there that rural councils are not an effective institution?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Rural councils do not always consult villagers. Furthermore, a rural council may allocate a particular area of land but the foreign investor seizes a different area of land which is not subsequently challenged by the rural council.

6. How are villagers contesting their land being seized?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Villagers are contesting the seizure of land by taking down fences put up by foreign investors and organising protests.

4 Power, agency and property rights

Two types of property rights underlie many land rights conflicts in Senegal: customary land rights and private property rights.

Individuals, households, kinship groups, tribes, villages and communities claim customary land rights, which are based on tradition going back many generations in some cases. Historically, in many parts of Africa much land is held under customary tenure. Although there are many types of customary tenure this basically means that people claim a right to a piece of land because their families and ancestors have traditionally used it. Such communities and families rarely have a legal title or deed that says they own the land, so they cannot sell it. But nonetheless, because of their longstanding association with the land, the community feels a physical, emotional and spiritual attachment to it. Customary rights often come into conflict with the notion of property rights of the state. When African countries were granted independence from the colonial powers, any land not under private ownership was considered as belonging to the newly independent state, including land that communities considered to be their customary land. As well as farmland, customary land includes common resources such as forests and rivers.

Private property rights give legal title to a piece of land, which means it is owned by the actor holding that title and the law will protect the owner's exclusive right to that land. The concept of private property rights developed alongside capitalism. Property rights apply to goods and services as well as land. These rights allow entrepreneurs to keep any profits deriving from a business. Private property rights, therefore, act as a stimulus to business and economic growth.

In Senegal, the government addressed the twin system of customary rights and modern land ownership through the 1964 National Domain Law. This law created elected rural councils to manage and allocate land. This law has periodically brought the Senegalese central and local governments into conflict with local communities. These conflicts have increased as the state has seized customary land to lease to foreign companies, leading to the eviction of local communities claiming customary rights. The capacity of the state and its allies to appropriate land from customary occupiers can be seen as an expression of uneven power relations.

At the end of the film you saw how, with help from civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), villagers are contesting land grabs. Despite the uneven power relations between villagers and the national government and foreign companies, villagers are exercising their agency by contesting land grabs.

4.1 Pressures on the land

In the next activity you will deepen your understanding of land rights conflicts in Senegal and other countries and consider the growing social resistance to the appropriation of land.

Activity 4 Exploring the pressures

Allow 1 hour for this activity

Read the following articles that explore the land pressures in Senegal and other countries and consider how villagers and farmers around the world are building a social movement to contest the loss of their lands. Then answer the questions that follow.

'Biofuels boost land-grab conflict in Senegal' (RFI, 2011)
'A global alliance emerges in West Africa' (Food crisis and the global land grab, 2011)
'Peasant agriculture: a real solution to climate change' (La Via Campesina, 2011)

1. Why are violent protests occurring in Senegal?

Provide your answer...

Answer

In 2007–08, violent protests occurred in Senegal because the price of imported rice increased, making it unaffordable for many. In 2011, riots occurred because of land leases for biofuel production.

2. How can social movements mobilise in the face of uneven economic and power relationships?

Provide your answer...

Answer

Social movements and grassroots groups seek to redress power inequities by pooling their power capabilities and working together. Working with each other, they pool their knowledge on land grabs and agree a shared strategy for resistance.

3. What does the Nyéléni Declaration of 2011 defend and call for?

Provide your answer...

Answer

The Nyéléni Declaration of 2011 defends food sovereignty, the commons and the rights of small-scale food producers to natural resources. It calls for better organisation so that communities and movements can reclaim and defend their rights. The declaration also advocates using the law to defend the rights of landholders and small-scale farmers, to put pressure on national governments and international institutions and to publicise the plight of those dispossessed of their land.

5 Discourses and land grabs

Discourses play a role in shaping the ideas that actors use to communicate and legitimise power relations. For example, the phrase ‘land grab’ (as opposed to ‘land acquisition’) contains certain assumptions. A ‘grab’ implies something that is done in haste and is inappropriate and unfair. The phrase ‘land grab’ is more likely to be used by those who regard the change of ownership of land in Senegal and elsewhere as wrong and unjust. Those actors who uphold the customary rights of communities are demonstrating resistance merely by using the term ‘land grab’. They wish the phrase to become well established in everyday vocabulary as it expresses understandings with which they agree. However, those who support the right of the state to enclose customary land and sell it to businesses will favour the phrase ‘land acquisition’, which implies a transfer of land ownership that is legal, orderly and reasonable.

The phrases ‘land grab’ and ‘land acquisition’ thus embody different values and understandings. They tend to be used by different actors with different interests. In short, the two phrases belong to different discourses. As you have seen, the first Forum on Food Sovereignty held in Nyéléni, Mali in 2011 played an important role in organising resistance against what it terms ‘land grab’. But the alternative discourse of ‘land acquisition’ argues that much African land is underutilised in agricultural terms. Supporters contend that, with mechanisation and inputs of fertilisers, the land could become more productive agriculturally.

So who is right? Is land grab/land acquisition necessarily a bad thing? It is necessary to be more critical and deepen your investigation.



Figure 4 Who should have rights to the land? Local communities may claim that they have customary rights, but national governments may argue that they have legal rights. This image shows a village scene in Kyenjojo, Uganda

5.1 Land acquisition or land grab?

The final activity in this course will help you to evaluate the land acquisition/land grab debate.

Activity 5 Land grab or land acquisition? Researching the debate

Allow 2 hours 30 minutes for this activity

In this activity you will carry out some online research, reach your own conclusion and consider the following question:

Is what is happening in Africa land acquisition or land grab? Why do you think this?

This is quite a testing question. Do not worry if the question seems difficult at first. The process of carrying out some online research will help to clarify your thinking on the question.

This question asks you to consider which of the two discourses – land acquisition or land grab – you are most persuaded by, and why. You might be guided in your answer by considering whether the characteristics of land grab identified by the charity organisation Oxfam apply. In Oxfam's definition, land grab:

- violates human rights, and particularly the equal rights of women
- flouts the principle of free, prior and informed consent of the affected land users, particularly indigenous peoples
- ignores the impacts on social, economic and gender relations, and on the environment
- avoids transparent contracts with clear and binding commitments on employment and benefit sharing
- eschews democratic planning, independent oversight, and meaningful participation (Oxfam, 2011).

By contrast, and as you have seen, the phrase 'land acquisition' implies a transfer of land ownership that is legal, orderly and reasonable.

As you undertake your research try to consider the question by thinking through the analytical concepts to which you were introduced at the beginning of the course. Here is a reminder:

- Use time and space to think about the history of land conflicts and where the various actors involved today are located
- Use risk and uncertainty to think about how the different actors involved are exposed to different kinds of risks and uncertainties
- Use values, power and agency to think about the different ways actors value the lands involved and the reasons for this; the power differentials between those actors; and how both values and power shape who has agency in these disputes.

Working with these concepts will help you to move from description of the problem to understanding.

Resources

We have suggested a few carefully selected resources for your research below. You are not restricted to these resources. Indeed, you may wish to do a little independent research. Regardless, be careful not to spend too much time on this, though, as the whole activity is only meant to take 2 hours 30 minutes. So you need to concentrate on finding what you consider to be the most relevant information and arguments. Here is an overview of the resources we have selected for you:

- ‘Land deals in Africa: what is in the contracts?’ (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2011). Chapters 3, 4, 5 and the discussion (pp. 16–46).

There are many references to particular contracts that form the basis of this study. The details do not need to concern you. What you are looking for is a selection of key points that speak to the question you are addressing, not exhaustive notes. Make no more than two pages of notes for this document as your brief is quite specific.

- ‘Land and power: the growing scandal surrounding the new wave of investments in land’ (Oxfam, 2011). Introduction, summary, chapters 1, 2 and 3 (pp. 2, 3, 5–29).

Skip the discussion of Indonesia, Honduras and Guatemala, as our focus is on Africa. As above, allow the concepts of time and space, risk and uncertainty, and values, power and agency to drive your note-taking.

- ‘David Hallam on FDI in agriculture’ (FAO, 2009).

Watch the film by David Hallam, Deputy Director of FAO’s Trade and Market Division. FDI stands for foreign direct investment. It is an investment made by an actor in one country directly into a business in another country. Hallam argues that foreign direct investments in land could be good news if the interests of land purchasers are reconciled with the investment needs of developing countries.

Make notes as you carry out your research. Then reach a conclusion to the question posed at the start of the activity:

Is what is happening in Africa land acquisition or land grab? Why do you think this?

Provide some reasoning on why you have reached your conclusion. Some points you may like to consider are:

- whether the changes of ownership in land in Africa are legal
- whether there is consultation with local people
- whether there are benefits for the economy of the country
- whether environmental protection is enhanced.

Discussion

Discussion using the three sets of analytical concepts defined at the beginning of this course.

Time and space

Contemporary land acquisitions in Africa involve a range of actors, processes and commodities that stretch across spatial boundaries. Examples include land leased in Senegal by Saudi Arabia to grow rice to feed Saudi Arabian citizens and farming communities forging their own connections across spatial boundaries to contest land grabs.

Conflicts around land ownership stretch back to colonial times when the process began of overriding customary land rights to serve foreign interests. The terms of some land leases in Africa are 100 years. Such leases will have inter-generational consequences, impacting upon successive generations of farmers.

Risk and uncertainty

In the wake of the food crises of 2007–08 and 2010–11, many wealthy countries with land and water constraints grew concerned about food security because of the risks and uncertainty of relying on world food markets to satisfy domestic food needs. They sought to mitigate these risks by purchasing or leasing agricultural land in developing countries to grow food.

Similarly, many African governments whose populations have suffered as a result of food price rises leading to riots needed agricultural investment to boost productivity. Foreign investment through land deals offered the possibility of meeting this need and mitigating the risk of further food riots. However, and as Oxfam has argued, land grabs may introduce greater risk and uncertainty for local communities whose land has been taken, leading to food insecurity.

Different actors, therefore, face very different risks and uncertainties.

Values, power and agency

Different actors may have different values depending on where they live, their lifestyle and their beliefs. Land can be valued in different ways. Farmers in Africa have invested time and energy in the land for many generations. Specific areas of land may be important to the culture of some communities, which is why it has emotional and spiritual value beyond its use value. Government ministers may value land because of its potential for economic growth. Agricultural businesses may desire land because of the contribution it can make to profits and to increasing shareholder value.

There are power differentials between the foreign companies, the host government and local communities. Foreign companies have the economic resources to secure physical assets, for instance land and water access, in developing countries such as Senegal. They also have the power to frame the issue of land acquisition using a discourse of land deals rather than land grab.

Both host governments and foreign investors have power resources that they can bring to bear during negotiations on land. Each has something that the other wants: host governments are eager to encourage foreign direct investment in agriculture because of the potential development opportunities for the country, while investors need land. The IIED report *Land Deals in Africa: What is in the Contracts?* considers the benefits for host states of land contracts, and finds some contracts are worryingly short and vague. The 100-year term of most contracts seems to have been decided by investors. This suggests that investors tend to hold more power than host governments. Oxfam is concerned that some African countries are locked in a ‘race to the bottom’ where they are competing to attract foreign investors, which pushes down prices further and further. However, some countries such as Liberia have negotiated sophisticated and complex deals that are more likely to benefit the host government (IIED, 2011).

Other power differentials you might have noticed relate to land rental fees, infrastructure development, jobs, tax and independent auditing.

The actors with the least power are the local landholders or farmers. They often have to move off the land thus losing their livelihood, which undermines their food security. There is often no legal requirement to gain informed consent from the local landholders. Compensation can be paid, although not for the loss of land, because this is deemed to be the legal property of the state. Where international investors follow ethical practice, the compensation payments can be more generous than those required by local laws (IIED, 2011). However, references to environmental standards in many contracts are weak.

Conclusion

In this free course, *'Land grab': an environmental issue?*, you have seen how global economic forces impact on local people's lives and livelihoods. You have examined changes of land ownership and use in East Anglia and Senegal. You have considered the tensions between customary land rights, the property rights of the state and private property rights where traditional and modern systems are in competition. You have also seen how people can mobilise in the face of uneven economic and power relationships. Finally, you carried out a piece of independent resource-led research to arrive at your own viewpoint on the land acquisition/land grab issue.

Contemporary land acquisition/land grab involves a range of actors, processes and commodities across spatial boundaries. By considering the complex dynamics of land acquisition/land grab using the analytical concepts of time and space, risk and uncertainty, and values, power and agency, you have seen how a complex problem can be divided up into more readily understood aspects. You can now go on to think about how these three sets of concepts can be applied to understanding other environmental issues. By using these concepts flexibly, you will be able to move from environmental issues you are familiar with into new fields of environmental contention.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course DST206 *Environment: sharing a dynamic planet*.

Images

Except for third party materials and otherwise stated (see terms and conditions), this content is made available under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 Licence.

The material acknowledged below is Proprietary and used under licence (not subject to Creative Commons Licence). Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources for permission to reproduce material in this free course:

Course image © Tobias Helbig/ iStockphoto

Figure 1 (a): © Curved Light USA/Alamy

Figure 1 (b): © Skyscan Photolibrary/Alamy

Figure 4: © Jake Lyell/Alamy

Activity 1: © The Open University and its licensor (BBC)

Activity 3: © The Open University

Every effort has been made to contact copyright owners. If any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

Don't miss out

If reading this text has inspired you to learn more, you may be interested in joining the millions of people who discover our free learning resources and qualifications by visiting The Open University – www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses.

References

allAfrica (2011) *Senegal: Biofuels boost land-grab conflict in country* [Online]. Available at http://allafrica.com/stories/201110281172.html (Accessed 22 November 2012).

BBC News (2012) *Analysis: Land grab or development opportunity?* [Online]. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17099348 (Accessed 22 November 2012).

Cotula, L. (2011) *Land deals in Africa: what is in the contracts?*, London, International Institute for Environment and Development; also available online at http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/12568IIED.pdf (Accessed 22 November 2012).

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2009) *Video: David Hallam on FDI in agriculture* [Online]. Available at http://www.fao.org/economic/es-policybriefs/multimedia0/videodavidhallamonfdiinag/en/ (Accessed 22 November 2012).

Food crisis and the global land grab (2011) *A global alliance emerges in West Africa* [Online]. Available at http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/19682 (Accessed 22 November 2012).

The Guardian (2011) *Agricultural land prices hit record high* [Online]. Available at http://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/apr/18/agricultural-land-prices-increase (Accessed 17 January 2017).

La Via Campesina (International Peasant's Movement) (2011) *Peasant agriculture: a real solution to climate change* [Online]. Available at http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1154:stop-land-grabbing-now&catid=23:agrarian-reform&Itemid=36 (Accessed 22 November 2012).

Oxfam (2011) *Land and power: the growing scandal surrounding the new wave of investments in land* [Online]. Available at http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp151-land-power-rights-acquisitions-220911-en.pdf (Accessed 22 November 2012).