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Up for Grabs: The Impact of Large-Scale Land Acquisitions on Women

Wednesday, January 25, 2012

10:45 am – 12:15 pm

Session Organizers:

- Maitri Moraji, Program Officer, Wellspring Advisors
- Terry Odendahl, Executive Director, Global Greengrants Fund

Facilitator:

- Peter Kostishack, Director of Programs, Global Greengrants Fund

Panelists:

- Ruth Meinzen-Dick, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute
- Miriam Miranda, General Coordinator, OFRANEH (National Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras)
- Fred Nelson, Executive Director, Maliasili Initiatives

Sponsors:

- Wellspring Advisors
 - Global Greengrants Fund
 - IHRFG Environment and Human Rights Working Group
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This session explored the implications, especially for women, of land and resources being concentrated in the hands of a few.

Ruth Meinzen-Dick explained that there is a lot of debate over the potential benefits and threats of land acquisitions.

- Talking about 41 million hectares (101,313,206 acres); a lot of land purchased or leased is in Africa
- Threats- uneven playing field in negotiations; evictions; environmental problems of large-scale agriculture; questionable productivity gains
- A lot of developers evict and then sit on land and wait for land values to appreciate
- A lot of talk is about unused land, but often this land is the commons that people use
 - A lot of investment is going into common lands and common property
 - Gender dimension serious concern- women have less secure land tenure than men. Only recognized land holdings brought to table in negotiations. If local community at table, male elites

There is need for:

- Research to document what is going on
- Pressure on governments to monitor and enforce rights
- Media to bring attention to voices
- Engage with investors

Fred Nelson continued by providing a specific example from Tanzania.

- In the 1990s there was a major land reform process. In 1999, laws considered one of most progressive land reforms in sub-Saharan Africa
 - Laws recognized customary rights of occupancy to land and made equivalent to titled rights to land (before customary was given 2nd class status)
 - Enabling framework for rights to commons
 - Counterargument- rule of law remains weak

Economic growth puts pressure on the agricultural sector. Increasing value of natural assets across the African continent is fueling land grabs. Weak accountability within society in combination with a surge of foreign investment and interest enables land grabs.

Case study: Loliondo, along Kenyan border

- Residents are Masai pastoralist communities. There is a long history of land conflict (adjacent to national parks). It is very productive for livestock. Tourism now is \$1billion/yr in Tanzania and this is increasing pressure on Masai lands. Trophy hunting is popular.
- In 1992, Loliondo was granted to Otela Business Corp (owned by an influential owner from Dubai) as a hunting area without community engagement. In July 2009 tensions erupted, as Otela wanted to evict the community from their lands for better hunting. This happened and property was lost, beatings occurred, and there were allegations of sexual assault. In 2010, the government consulted the affected communities in pursuit of a resolution.
- Result: growth of Masai civil society. Now there is a new film on YouTube and notable in video:
 - Women speaking and playing role in meetings. This isn't in line with traditional Masai culture, but now women's groups have strong influence and have organized.
 - Local agency, use of sophisticated strategies.

Miriam Miranda: leader of Garifuna people in Honduras

- Garinagu arrived in Honduras in 1797. Afro-indigenous people grew up on coast of Venezuela. Culturally they are indigenous, and live on the Atlantic Caribbean coast (mostly in Honduras but also Guatemala and Belize).
- Traditionally, women practice agriculture while men fish. That's changing because of international fishing fleets over-fishing the waters
- Matrilineal culture. When banana companies arrived in early 1900s loss of territory began. The state didn't ask for taxes because they brought jobs. In 1980s elite began developing tourist projects and communities forced to give up land.

- Megaproject, 18 hole golf course in protected area, highly biological diverse, reproduction areas for tortoises
- Brought case to Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
- In 1990s government began converting land into protected areas and expelling communities, violates people's right to fish, right to food, why taking to inter American commission
- African palm cultivation, 600,000 Honduran families without land
- 30% of Garifuna communities have African palm cultivations on them. Plan to do away with sustenance food production
- Aguan Valley is time bomb: organized crime and palm "lords" dominate area
- More than 50 farmers have been murdered since the 2009 coup
- Working locally and internationally → Panel of the World Bank in 2006 ruled in favor of community, an achievement that stopped the project in these communities.
- Without recognition of Garifuna territorial rights, one of greatest threats to indigenous peoples is REDD
- Worried by lack of solutions, not making any decisions to stop uncontrolled exploitation of biodiversity

In summary, the session highlighted the debate over the pros and cons of land investments. The vulnerability of common property is leading to women having less secure land tenure and resulting in displacement.

Q: How have funders helped with these issues?

- Oxfam is very engaged with land grabs issues, in addition to the Ford Foundation, which has funded many important pilot initiatives. Ford has pledged \$85 million to land and resources over the next few years.
- There is Swiss-funded research on the gender impacts of land grabbing, in attempt to build a credible evidence base.

Peter shared thoughts on effective strategies:

- Ability to combine pressure on political and economic drivers with strengthening of local organizations
- Strengthen recognition of communal land rights, supporting policy research.
- Strengthen policies regarding consultative rights and conduct advocacy with all actors. Get local voices involved in policy work and get information back to community level.
- Support organizations reforming established rules for investment. IFC, private banks. Look at foundation investments, shareholder negotiations.
- Work on demand side as well (demand for fuel, food). Educate consumers.
- Need to strengthen community organizations! They can't exercise rights if don't have structure in place to facilitate and encourage this.
- Organize women.
- Strengthen networks of affected communities. Information at local level. Monitoring and documenting. Legal support.

Q: What successful strategies can we apply from the HR field to ensure protection to populations facing these situations?

Sara:

- Divestment- Oakland institute looking into land grabs.
 - Funders as a collective agree to divest in anything related to land grabs.
- Support organizations taking a stand against REDD. Support courage.

Important to support women's participation in community tribunals on land.

Land Research Action Network work with Via Campesina. Two examples: campaign against World Bank policy on land; impact of expansion of mono cropping– increasing price of land and food globally

Example from Semillas:

- Supported leadership of indigenous women in ten different states, it is helpful if funder is knowledgeable about local laws, know that women can inherit land (which is often against tradition).
- Strategy with community leaders how to work with human rights framework to change community norms to ensure equal rights.
- False debate between individualism and community. You can be part of a community but also have rights as a woman.

Example from Disability Rights Fund:

- One organization in Uganda only offers legal aid clinic in Africa, run by people with disabilities for people for disabilities.
- Majority of the cases are about land rights → Families take away inheritance rights from people with disabilities

Example from Appleton Foundation:

- Fund organization in Colombia, Grupo Semillas; research advocacy and capacity building and linked Appleton to network of indigenous groups on north coast.
 - Training in using GPS tech to define territorial lands.
- Strengthening social movements to raise visibility of violations can have big impact

Nonviolent Peace Force:

- Protection strategies (1st nations of North America) one-on-one protection or community protection

GRAVIS:

- Special economic zones – take people's land on pretext of economic growth.
- India considered unsafe country for foreign investment (on international index) because people resist land grabs