



Invitation for international workshop:

Land brokers, farmers and financiers:

Investigating the trajectories of land deals

24 November 2017, International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)

Over the past decade, land deals became a hot topic in development research, particularly through what has alternatively been labelled as global 'land grab', or global 'land investment'. Numerous studies have investigated the implications for, and responses by, the local population. A smaller group of researchers have studied the drivers on the investor's side.

Overall, within the literature there has been tendency to depict land deals somewhat schematically as a confrontation between global, large-scale investors' on the one hand, and villagers (and NGOs) on the other. While the general drivers/causes of the land rush and the impacts of land deals for local villagers have been studied in detail, the process of how land deals take place on the ground, and the actors involved often remain obscure. Studies on land grabs for instance frequently note that 'local elites' play an important role in such deals, but a systematic analysis of these actors, their interests and strategies is still absent to date.

This workshop aims to take a close-up look at land deals through putting the spotlight on the chain of actors involved in making land acquisitions happen and the web of actors enabling the financing of such deals. We aim to go beyond seeing the land investments as one-off land deals. We approach the investment as a trajectory of consecutive deal-makings, possible obstructions and re-negotiations between investors and a variety of parties. These can include for instance informal local land brokers, real estate firms, notaries, consultants, local authorities, violent entrepreneurs and other deal makers and fixers.

We invite papers the above-mentioned topic, and particularly one or more of the sub-themes below;

- **New theoretical angles to investigate land deals.** We are interested in contributions that bring new theoretical angles (and well as methodological approaches) to study the trajectory of land deals more close-up. We are interested, amongst others, in insights from studies in urban land markets, from land deals related to other natural resources (e.g. forestry, sub-soil resources), or from middlemen in

agricultural food chains. We particularly invite contributions that draw on theory on brokers/middlemen/intermediaries, or have a historical approach.

- **The flows of finance enabling land deals.** There is a need to go beyond the concept of “the investor”, and tease out the web or chain of financial actors and intermediaries involved in channeling money into farmland. How are global hubs of capital like stock exchanges, or headquarters of financial companies linked to acquisition of land plots in remote rural settings? What actors are the strategically placed, and who profit most from land deals?

- **Technologies and discourses enabling land deals.** With the proliferation of academic and media attention on the global land rush in the past decade, we might forget that land acquisitions by outsiders and financial players, were quite rare before. Agriculture and farmland were seen as unattractive sectors, which constitute a difficult ground for generating profitable financial ventures. Which technologies (in terms of mapping, construction of investment indices, and other devices) and legitimating discourses are enabling the reshaping of farmland into a financial asset, and what are the ‘obstacles’? How do such technologies and discourses vary according to the place in the investment chain, or political context?

- **Land deals and (il)legality.** In many countries land deals take place in the grey zones of the legal system or occur in outright illegal or violent ways. We are particularly, interested in the interplay of legal and illegal and/or violent strategies in land deals. In what case do investors or middlemen resort to illegal and violent strategies? Which part of the trajectory of a land deal is illegal, and which is legal? What are the actors involved in such deals? To what extent, and how, do (international) investment procedures and voluntary codes of conduct affect the nature of land deals?

- **Failed land investment and their trajectories.** Research so far has predominantly focused on deals that actually took place. However, there is growing evidence that many land deals have been abolished, downsized, or suddenly re-launched after an apparent ‘death’. What are the factors that cause land deals to be abolished or in contrast to be speed up after ‘stagnation’? What are the social-economic or environmental implications of stalled land investments?

The workshop is co-organized by the University of Amsterdam, International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), the Eurasian Agrofood & Land initiative (EURAL), the TIRAM Project (funded by IDLO), CESTRAD, logistically supported by LANDac and co-funded by European Research Council grant 313781 (PI O. Visser) and the Dept. of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam. The workshop will take place on Friday 24 November 2017, at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Kortenaerkade 12, in The Hague. An informal meet up for those arriving early, is planned on Thursday evening.

The workshop will function to bring together a mix of senior and young researchers (and some practitioners) working on the subject from different angles. The workshop will be an intensive workshop, with contributions representing different geographical (North-America, Europe, Africa, Asia, L-America) and thematic angles and some 25-35 people overall. Confirmed speakers include; Nikita Sud (U. of Oxford) who publishes on land brokers and land grabbing in India, prof. Annette Desmarais (Canadian research Chair, U. of Manitoba) who publishes on farmland investment in the

Canadian prairies, and Michael Levien (John Hopkins University) who publishes on land deals in special economic zones.

Next to building new fruitful exchanges, we aim to publish a selection of the papers as a special issue in an international journal. We expect that for many interested participants, the workshop topic is figuring in their (field) research, but mostly hasn't yet been a central focus in terms of analysis and papers. This 'downside' has also its benefits, as we expect that it will invite a fresh look or new angle on existing data, and allows for presentations that are still quite open to debate and further analysis. As a sizeable number of presentations will probably not yet be based on papers, we aim for the submission of draft papers for the special issue only by mid-June. If you are interested to participate in the workshop, but are not sure whether you can contribute to the special issue, do contact us.

Contributions can be either 15 minute presentations, or in the form of a round table contribution of a few minutes (especially non-academics are invited for this format). Other original formats for a presentation can be discussed. Advance submission of papers (which can be tentative and brief) are very welcome, but not obligatory. Papers can also later be submitted (for the special issue deadline). For accepted presentations by foreign guests, we can cover the flight/train costs and hotel costs.

Please hand in a brief an abstract of some 250/300 words, with your affiliation, e-mail and a brief 100 word bio. Please hand this in before 5 November. Abstracts are to be send to both Laurens Bakker (l.g.h.bakker@uva.nl) and Oane Visser (visser@iss.nl).

Laurens Bakker (assistant prof. dept. of Anthropology, University of Amsterdam)

Oane Visser (associate professor, International Institute of Social Studies (The Hague) of Erasmus University Rotterdam)