

#### Keywords

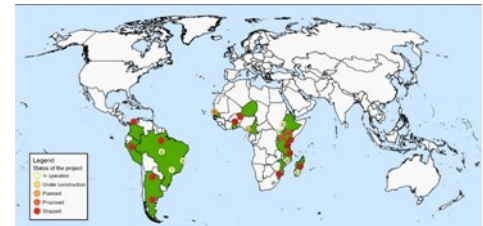
- > Land grabbing
- > Agribusiness
- > Biofuels
- > Food security
- > Food sovereignty
- > Industrial agriculture
- > Community land rights
- > Sustainable agriculture
- > World food price crisis
- > Water grabbing

#### Speculative investments

For the past few years, **investors have been scrambling to take control of farmland in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe.** EU- and US- based companies and financial institutions made **speculative investments**. Gulf State officials were flying around the globe looking for large areas of cultivable land that they could acquire. So were Koreans, Libyans, Chinese, Egyptians and others. In most of these talks, high-level government representatives were directly involved, peddling new packages of political, economic, and financial cooperation, with agricultural land transactions smack in the centre. Governments from Southern countries are under increasing pressure to “develop” and often **decisions do not take into account environmental concerns and local livelihoods.** The **driving forces** behind the rush for land are, **the demand for more biologically productive land** emanating from high-income countries, such as Europe and Japan, and emerging economies, such as Brazil and India, even though they may have more land available per capita than lower-income countries and **the finance industry which now sees land as a profitable commodity to invest in or to speculate with.**

**Speculation and financial markets have fuelled global demand for agricultural land for food and biofuels.** The last decade has witnessed a spectacular increase in speculation in the food commodity markets, sending up food prices everywhere.

With today's global financial and economic crises, speculative capital is searching for safe places to multiply. Food and farmland are such places.



*Map of land grabbing cases*

Source: 'The many faces of land grabbing', EJOLT report No 10

#### Increasing biomass trade

Recent data shows a **trend of increasing biomass trade in the European Union.** Total agricultural imports have grown from 107 million metric tonnes (mmt) around the turn of the millennium to more than 132 mmt in 2008, an increase of 24%. This tonnage is equivalent to a net import of virtual land of 35 million hectares (Mha) (almost equivalent to the size of Germany), an increase of 10 Mha since 2000. At the global level, a comprehensive analysis of 450 crop and livestock products flows and their cropland origins in over 200 nations shows the **escalating spatial disconnect between production and consumption** from 1986 to 2007. In this period, **land for export production grew rapidly** (by about 100 Mha), while **land supplying crops for domestic use remained virtually unchanged.** South America was the fastest growing exporter of crops (cropland area for exports increased from roughly 20 Mha in 1986 to 50 Mha in 2007), and it is conceivable that similar growth is taking place in Africa in the “land rush” period since 2007.

#### Large scale land acquisitions

**Land grabbing**, as these large-scale land acquisitions are now called, consist in the purchase or leasing of large pieces of land in Southern countries by estates, domestic and transnational companies or investment funds.



*Tana River Delta*

Photo credit: Judith Nyunja



*Communities standing up against land grabs*

Photo credit: Grain

## Policy demands

### Stop land grabbing as main principle.

- **To avoid land grabbing, the EU** (and the Global North in general) **must reduce the use of resources (energy and food) to a fair share** of the resource available **within the planetary boundaries**. The EU resource efficiency strategy must be combined with binding targets reflecting this demand.
- **Land grabbing violates basic human rights**, individual and collective, **and should be made illegal for EU based companies** under European law. Where lands have been grabbed they should be returned to the local communities respecting customary rights. Ongoing landgrab projects should be stopped by political intervention.
- **Large scale industrial plantation agriculture cannot be considered as a solution to the world food or energy problem**. Governments and development agencies should support, **promote and further develop food sovereignty and regional food chains instead**. Given the exceeded planetary boundaries for nitrogen and phosphorus, low input agriculture deserves their special support.
- **Europe should prevent that banned agrotoxics/pesticides are commercialized in other countries**: land grabbing is often accompanied with intensive use of agrotoxics/pesticides which are **causing serious impacts to the environment and health of people**, especially rural workers and their families from the Global South.

Characteristics of land grabbing are large-scale displacement of the rural poor without proper compensation and the destruction of the local ecology to make space for industrial agriculture and biofuels. Obtaining water resources is usually critical to growing biomass, so **land grabbing often comes together with an associated trend of water grabbing**. An element of violence is often present: dispossessing and evicting local people, destroying forests, agricultural land and villages with their cultural heritage, cemeteries and other sacred places, but also the existing agriculture systems providing food for local markets.

Compared to large scale monocultures, the latter is much better for local well-being, but also for biodiversity conservation and against climate change.

Biomass conflicts, both among humans and intra-species, present a major threat to areas of high biodiversity. Market prices neglect the impact of biomass production on other than provisioning ecosystem services.

### Feeding the world

**For millennia, peasants have been - and still are - feeding the world.**

Now developmentalists cast them as backward and inefficient. The not-so-subtle message is that peasants should cease to exist. Their role in seed conservation and coevolution is often praised, but despised in modern agriculture. **Their low use of fossil fuels, high energy efficiency and capacity to create lasting jobs in rural areas is recognised by ecologists but neglected by economists and business.**

*"Why 'feed' a car in Europe when hunger at home is still a reality?"*

*Serah Munguti, from Nature Kenya*

## Policy demands

### Land grabbing and financial investments:

- **The EU should take the initiative to amend the OECD DAC guidelines and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises to rule out involvement in or tolerance of land grabbing.** EU and Member State's development cooperation programs, agencies and Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) must set a clear precedent. Their **current policies should be reviewed** and in case of involvement in or support for land grabbing be reversed urgently.
- Private sector investment houses, banks and pension funds should be scrutinised for their landgrabbing activities and governments should take it as a central responsibility to act on them. **Civil society action to boycott banks involved in land grabbing** should be supported by public authorities joining the divestment from such institutions.
- **The EU has taken a first step to limit the use of financial instruments linked to commodities, but the legislation is too weak** to be effective. Loopholes such as national limits instead of an EU limit need to be closed as soon as possible.

### Land grabbing and production of biofuels:

- **The EU should acknowledge that the promotion of biofuels is undermining the right to food** – a necessity under the principle of science- and fact- based policy development.
- **The EU should urgently review its biofuels policy and stop incentivizing biofuels** that have adverse impacts on climate change, biodiversity, on hunger and land use. The need for land based biofuels in the EU is driving the **destruction of vital ecosystems and carbon stores** like forests and peat lands – resulting in many biofuels causing even more greenhouse gas emissions than the fossil fuels they replace. It is hence of paramount that the EU, as a minimum, limit the contribution of those biofuels to the 10% transport target set for 2020 at current consumption levels and scrap those mandates for post 2020.

**Subsistence economies are displaced, while rural jobs become scarce.** Whereas in average 200 ha of land provide a job for about 70 people in tropical countries, it is 20 in palm oil and sugar cane plantations, four in eucalyptus plantations, and one for soy.

### Background

**Biomass extraction conflicts are a main category** of the large geographically-referenced inventory of **ecological conflicts and resistance of the EJOLT project**. The inventory maps and classifies these conflicts revealing the complexity and variety of actors, strategies and actions and also to give insights into the determining factors for different outcomes.

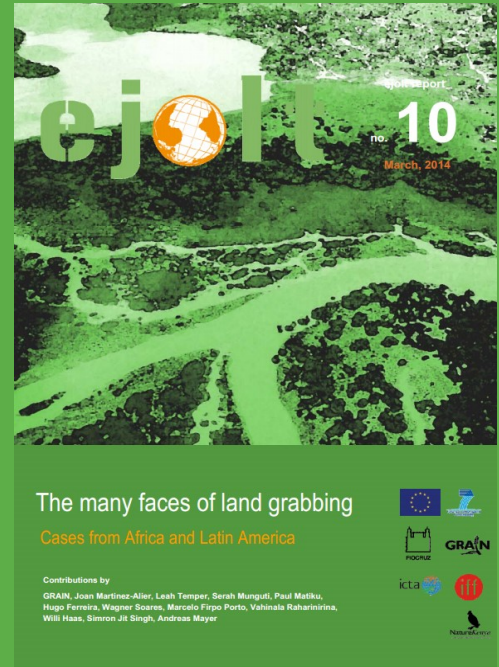
We examine both resistance from “above”, through **trans-national activism against land grabbing (GRAIN and the World Rainforest Movement (WRM)) as well as resistance on the ground** to the implementation of agricultural and forestry projects.

This has allowed the preparation of a comparative study presented in the report **‘The Many Faces of Land Grabbing’**, which includes some **cases of successful resistance** (as in the Tana River Delta), **where the projects were either cancelled or suspended following local mobilizations.**

*This report describes and analyzes specific cases of land grabbing around the world within various socio economical contexts and with diverse social and environmental consequences as well as reporting successful cases of resistance to land grabbing to contribute to a preliminary understanding of the forces and also the conditions (opportunity spaces) for resistance, and the different types of alliances that can be made at different scales.*

*"I'm convinced that farmland is going to be one of the best investments of our time. Eventually, of course, food prices will get high enough that the market probably will be flooded with supply through development of new land or technology or both, and the bull market will end. But that's a long ways away yet."*

*George Soros, June 2009*



This policy brief was developed as a part of the project *Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade* (EJOLT, 2011-2015) (FP7-Science in Society-2010-1).

The project supports the work of Environmental Justice Organisations, uniting scientists, well known activist organisations, think-tanks and policy-makers from the fields of environmental law, environmental health, political ecology, ecological economics, to talk about issues related to Ecological Distribution. EJOLT aims to improve policy responses to and support collaborative research and action on environmental conflicts through capacity building of environmental justice groups around the world. Visit our free resource library and database at [www.ejolt.org](http://www.ejolt.org) and follow [twitter.com/envjustice](https://twitter.com/envjustice) or [www.facebook.com/ejolt](https://www.facebook.com/ejolt) to stay current on latest news and events.

Our recommendations are grounded in the understanding of the forces and conditions (or opportunity spaces) for resistance, and the different types of alliances that can be made at different scales.

Some of the indicators that may be revealing when looking at the response to land grabbing include class affiliation, social heterogeneity, the role of women, the display of nationalism and/or indigeneity, the attribution of sacredness to some spaces, the ecological values and biodiversity richness of the spaces sacrificed, the land tenure and labour relations, population density, governance structure, the degree of democracy or transparency in host and home countries.

At the local level, we present some propositions on how successful resistance may be related to the nature of the biomass commodity or commodities in question (sugar cane, jatropha, eucalyptus, etc.) or the characteristics of the social actors and the strength of their languages of valuation.

### For more information

The many faces of land grabbing  
Cases from Africa and Latin America

EJOLT Report No. 10, available at:  
[www.ejolt.org/reports](http://www.ejolt.org/reports)

Or please contact the report coordinator:

Arnulfo Rojas-Sepúlveda  
Institute of Social Ecology Vienna (SEC)  
[arnulfo.rojas.sepulveda@gmail.com](mailto:arnulfo.rojas.sepulveda@gmail.com)