

Conservation and Land Grabbing: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?

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Organised by:

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Background & Rationale

During the past several years, the pace of global land acquisition has dramatically increased due to changes in commodity markets, agricultural investment strategies, land prices, and a range of other policy and market forces. This surge in 'land grabbing'¹ is widespread, but particularly pronounced in a) countries with relatively weak governance and protection of customary land rights; b) in the global 'commons' i.e. lands which are customarily used collectively at the local scale, including forests, rangelands, and wetlands. These landscapes support the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people. They are also central to global conservation objectives, housing a large proportion of world's biodiversity. Land grabbing therefore presents a threat not just to local livelihoods but also to conservation.

At the same time, a growing body of research has drawn attention to the phenomenon of 'green grabbing', which constitutes land grabs which are linked to either conservation pursuits, or markets related to 'green' enterprises such as forestry (for timber, carbon offsetting, or other products) and ecotourism.

The relationship between land grabbing and conservation is therefore a multi-faceted and evolving one which merits further exploration. On the one hand, green markets or conservation targets may be a driver of land grabs. The CBD target of 17% of land area to be under protected area coverage by 2020 is one example of a possible driver. At the same time, though, land grabbing for agriculture and so on can

¹ For the purposes of this symposium we use the definition of land grabbing in the international Land Coalition's Tirana Declaration (<http://www.landcoalition.org/about-us/aom2011/tirana-declaration>): '*acquisitions or concessions that are one or more of the following: (i) in violation of human rights, particularly the equal rights of women; (ii) not based on free, prior and informed consent of the affected land-users; (iii) not based on a thorough assessment, or are in disregard of social, economic and environmental impacts, including the way they are gendered; (iv) not based on transparent contracts that specify clear and binding commitments about activities, employment and benefits sharing, and; (v) not based on effective democratic planning, independent oversight and meaningful participation.*

dramatically reduce biodiversity, and is a major and growing source of landscape transformation in ways that undermine both local livelihoods and conservation objectives. Consequently, many conservation efforts around the world, from indigenous lands in Latin America, to pastoralist rangelands in East Africa, to indigenous communities in Australia and Canada, are working to secure local land tenure as a foundation for sustainable use of natural resources.

Going forward and in light of current global market and institutional developments, it is therefore an important time to examine the complex and varied interactions between conservation efforts and land grabbing, and land rights more broadly, and to ask if conservation is part of the problem or part of the solution, and to examine opportunities for greater convergence and synergy between conservation and community land rights movements.

Meeting Objective and Coverage

Overall Objective: To examine the varied interactions between conservation and land rights/land grabbing in a variety of global contexts; to encourage more strategic engagement by the conservation movement in land rights and tenure concerns, highlighting different models that can be used to secure or strengthen local land rights, and the potential role of conservation in combatting land grabbing thus benefitting both conservation and development.

Key Themes:

1. **Key trends in land grabbing in general, and specifically 'green grabbing' and land acquisitions for conservation since 2000** - including variations between countries and regions. What forms do they take? What are the key drivers? Is this a new phenomenon or a continuation of an historical process? Is it escalating? Who owns the land and who is acquiring it and for what purpose?
2. **Conservation as a source and victim of land grabs** – Conservation may be one of the drivers of land grabs - to increase protected area coverage, to exploit valuable tourism or hunting opportunities etc. At the same time, in some locations, land previously set aside for conservation is being converted to other uses – agriculture, biofuels, etc.
3. **Conservation strategies for securing community land rights**- what models exist for securing or strengthening local land rights that could work for both conservation and local livelihoods? What are the opportunities for a) scaling these up and b) integrating them within wider efforts to address land acquisition, landscape transformations, and community land rights.
4. **Towards greater safeguards and synergies** - are there underexploited opportunities for conservation interests e.g. under the CBD, and efforts to address land grabbing e.g. through the FAO Voluntary Guidelines, to better link up through shared concerns and common interventions?

Structure: The first day of the symposium will focus on establishing the wider context for land grabs and conservation's role therein, discuss important drivers of these trends and policy developments such as the CBD Aichi Targets and FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, and present a number of case studies focusing on these interactions and impacts in different parts of the world. In light of the context established in day one, the second day of the symposium will explore different models that can be employed to strengthen local land rights and community-based conservation efforts and will focus on potential strategic responses and policy options for conservation to engage with the land grabs agenda.

Outputs: A policy brief focusing on the role of conservation in the “global land rush” will be prepared for publication in the IIED Briefing Papers series. An issues paper and briefing paper on strengthening local land rights through conservation will also be prepared under the ILC rangelands learning initiative. Outputs will be disseminated through the workshop partners various networks and websites. We will also explore the possibility of producing the symposium papers in an edited book or other compilation volume.

For more details or to suggest a paper please contact: dilys.roe@iied.org

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