

Call for proposals

Transforming International Land Deals into a Vehicle for Rural Development and International Cooperation

In the wake of global problems such as growing water scarcity, increasing demand for food and climate change affecting arable land and its productivity, private companies and governmental institutions around the world are purchasing land in developing countries. The boom in the acquisition of arable land in Africa by foreign, private as well as public institutions has sparked an international debate by international institutions, non-governmental groups and independent development experts.

Much of the land transferred to foreign buyers is meant for offshore food production. Of course, in some countries a large share of land under investor claim is allocated to bio-fuels production. Only in 2008, millions of hectares of land have been leased for bio-fuel and agricultural production by countries such as Ghana, Ethiopia, Mali, Tanzania Kenya and Sudan. Export-oriented production dominates bio-fuel investments, but it also accounts for a relative share of food projects. This practice, also called by critics as “land grab”, is resulting in buying of arable land in other countries to meet the food demand back home. It even seems like the land grab trend is hard to stop. South Korea has bought around 700,000 hectares in Sudan; and Saudi Arabia 500,000 hectares in Tanzania, and large tracts of land in Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Senegal and Mozambique. China has acquired 10,000 hectares of land in Nigeria and is eyeing 2 million hectares in Zambia.

At present, there is an ongoing debate on whether the transfer of land from local farmers to foreign investors presents the continent an opportunity for development or an agrarian colonialism. The global initiative is being taken in this regard and the World Bank and the United Nations are developing codes of conduct for foreign land acquisition. Also the African Union’s draft “Framework and guidelines on land policy in Africa” was adopted in July 2009.

Nonetheless, there are few studies made on the nature and magnitude of land acquisitions. The scale and consequences of land acquisition remain largely unknown since quantitative and qualitative analyses are still lacking. It is therefore important to document and analyse the actors and modalities of land deals, and to examine the challenges and opportunities of land deals. It is also important to identify informed strategies that make “land grab” a win-win agreement for both the land buying and selling countries and a vehicle for social, political and economic development of the latter. This is the central issue that OSSREA will address with this research project. The following are the key objectives:

- To analyze the role of the different actors, key trends and drivers in land acquisitions, the contractual arrangements and the negotiations underpinning existing foreign direct investment (FDI) for land acquisitions in Eastern and Southern Africa;
- To examine the opportunities and challenges of land acquisition for economic development, poverty reduction (food security, social cohesion, land access for rural people), and environment sustainability in Eastern and Southern Africa;

- To suggest policies and strategies to ensure that what has been termed the “land grab” becomes a vehicle for rural development, taking into account the interests of the host countries, local communities, and international cooperation, rather than a new form of “agrarian colonialism” and a source of social instability.

OSSREA would like to invite researchers to submit proposals and provide research grant to successful applicants to conduct studies on the aforementioned and related issues.

Eligibility Criteria:

- Applicants should be nationals of countries of Eastern and Southern Africa and should be based in a research and higher learning institution.
- Applicants must hold at least a Masters degree in the social sciences from an accredited institution.
- Applicants from Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique and Sudan are highly encouraged as these are the countries where land deals with foreign firms are observed.

Application documents:

- A synopsis of the proposed research including: (a) Title, (b) Background, (c) Problem statement, (d) Study objectives, (e) Study significance and scope, (f) Conceptual framework, (g) Literature review, (h) Methodology, (i) Bibliography, (j) Work plan, and (k) Detailed break-down of the budget required to accomplish the proposed research, both in local currency and its equivalent in US Dollars;
- Current curriculum vitae of the applicant(s);
- A letter of endorsement from the institution of affiliation;
- Co-authored proposals are accepted provided that researchers fulfil the eligibility criteria indicated above; and
- The size of the proposal should be limited to a maximum of 15 pages with 1.5" line-spacing.

Budget:

- The budget for the proposed research should not exceed US\$ 10,000 and may be used to cover actual research costs (e.g., local travel and subsistence, supplies, acquisition of documents, photocopying, etc.) and honorarium for the researcher(s). Researchers should provide break-down of the budget in local currency and US dollars (describe each item and indicate how it is related to the research project):
- Costs for purchase of computer and its accessories, camera, video recorder and its accessories are not accepted;
- 35% of the fund will be released at the time of signing the contract, 15% will be released upon submission of the first draft and 50% after submitting an acceptable final manuscript.

Other Conditions:

- Successful applicants will be expected to take up their research immediately after the date of signing the agreement with OSSREA. Normally the award will be good for a period no longer than 12 months.
- Successful applicants will be required to submit to OSSREA one hard copy and soft copy; and deposit copies of the published reports with the relevant university library,

sponsoring academic department or the national archives in the country where the research was conducted;

- Successful applicants will be required to present their draft or final papers at policy - research workshop that will be organized by OSSREA to deliberate on the findings.

Deadlines:

- Applications and proposals should be submitted to OSSREA by e-mail by 30th, July, 2011.
- Draft report and final reports should be submitted on dates agreed between OSSREA and the Researcher.

Contact Address:

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