

(Re)framing Global Land Issues and Struggles in the context of Commercial Pressures on Land

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Broad context: In 2007, for the first time in human history there are now more people who live in urban areas than those in rural areas. But by 2008, still poverty remains rural: 3 out of every 4 poor people are rural poor. By that time, nearly 1 billion live in hunger. Meanwhile, it is now believed that fossil fuel will be exhausted sooner than later.

(1) Landgrab – as a framework of analyzing global land issues and struggles in a crisis conjuncture is politically powerful, concrete and dramatic; captures key issues around the links between the food/fuel crisis and land.

The ‘landgrab framing’ reminds us of the urgency of these issues... It is one of the fastest ways to bring onto the global agendas – official and alternative – the links between the food/fuel crisis and land.

(a)

(2) Development policy practitioners & academics & activists should hold on to the 'landgrab framing' of the links between food/fuel crisis and land – *but broaden and deepen the discussion.*

Landgrab as a framework is very useful & powerful – but it misses a significant portion of the actually existing dynamics around the links between food/fuel/other commercial interests (extractive industries, industrial and tourism business interests) and land.

- Plus: there are major differences in the positions of local & (trans)national agrarian movements (TAMS) and networks:

(a) within and between TAMS -- from 'all out opposition position' to 'mitigating risks while seizing opportunities position'; and

(b) between movements/civil society and *local folks* in the affected villages. (many ordinary farmers in Argentina do not know, and don't care, what is done with their soya, whether as animal feed or biodiesel; many farmers & farmworkers in oil palm plantation in Indonesia also feel the same – is this 'false consciousness'?, 'low consciousness'? Or basic differences in (material interests) between these ordinary people & organized civil society?)

Fantastic diversity in positions not fully captured/do not easily fit in the current dominant radical framework. These have implications for research & theorizing on these issues, and on our policy and political work.

- (3) Reframing the discourse around the links between the food/fuel/other commercial interests and land brings us to three inter-linked analytical arenas:
 - (a) land use change**
 - (b) land property relations change**
 - (c) shifting dynamics of and terrain in state-society interaction**

LAND USE CHANGE

Figure 1: direction of land use change – focusing on the food/biofuels – land links, but analytical schema can be used for the broader ‘global commercial pressure on land’ issue

Type A Food to Food	Type B Food to Biofuels
Type C Nonfood to food	Type D Nonfood to Biofuels

- Key points:
- The dominant argument is around the protest against conversion of food production for subsistence/local exchange = (a) to food production for export and/or biofuels for export, in addition to (b) conversion of forest lands to biofuel production for export.
- The '*global landgrab framing*' is able to capture the former; radical '*environmental justice framing*' contributes to fully capturing the latter.
- What we urgently need is to broaden our frame in order to capture other settings and processes *outside* the dominant framing in order to get a more comprehensive mapping of land issues, research gaps, mapping of arenas of political struggles and challenges to 'democratic land governance'.

Types A & B

- **Type A: Food to Food land use change**
- (A1) Food for consumption to food for local exchange
- (A2) Food for consumption/local exchange to food for export
- **Type B: Food to Biofuels land use change**
- (B1) Food for consumption/domestic exchange/export to biofuels for domestic use
- (B2) Food for consumption/domestic exchange/export to biofuels for export

Types C & D

- **Type C: Nonfood to Food land use change** (remember all the debates about 'marginal' and 'idle' lands!)
- (C1) Nonfood/Forest to food for consumption/local exchange land use
- (C2) Nonfood/Forest to food for export land use
- (C3) Nonfood/Nonforest to food for consumption/domestic exchange land use
- (C4) Nonfood/Nonforest to food for export land use

- **Type D: Nonfood to Biofuels land use change**
- (D1) Nonfood/forest to biofuels for domestic use/exchange land use
- (D2) Nonfood/forest to biofuels for export land use
- (D3) Nonfood/nonforest to biofuels for domestic use/exchange land use
- (D4) Nonfood/nonforest to biofuels for export land use

Initial and tentative Notes on Land use change

- (i) Greater & more systematic empirical research needed based on the broad typology here. Subsequent theorizing is an imperative.
- (ii) The landgrab framing plus dominant radical discourse around links between food/fuel crisis and land are centred on **Types A2, B2, C2 and D2** (those in 'red') ...

But how do we capture and explain the political-economic dynamics of other settings/scenarios? They exist, and they need explanation (and action).

- Analytical exploration, political experimentation on alternatives, e.g. 'energy sovereignty' and 'food sovereignty' are around **C3 and D3**.
- And how about other settings, like D4? , etc. etc.
- (iv) Political struggles *against dispossession* are around: **A2, B2, C2, D2**; difficult challenges for 'democratic land governance'
- Key is to carry out **inter-linked** empirical/theoretical understanding of 'land use change' dynamics within a broad framework. That could inform our policy & political work

land use change
&
land property relations change:
... links...?

LAND PROPERTY RELATIONS CHANGE

Land policies have varying implications on the (re)distribution of land-based wealth & power, or absence of it, in a society:

It is critical to know the direction/flow of the transfer of the **effective control** over land-based wealth and power caused by a land policy (or absence of it).

One critical area to inquire into: food/fuel/commercial interests crisis/issues + recent advocacy by several int'l development institutions for broadly market-oriented land policies; privatization-formalization of individual land rights worldwide... Any role of these land policies in the (facilitation or prevention) of ongoing global landgrab? Sensitive & controversial issue, but we need to address this issue, rather than evade it.

- **Key points:**

- Crisis conjuncture: expedited and expanded already emerging policy and political tendencies **towards** Types **D & C (re/distributive reforms)**, and clear trends **against** Types **A & B (non-redistributive reforms & towards reconcentration)**.
- Landgrab framework can explain much Type **D**, **but not much to say about Types A, B, and C.**
- Organized political struggles are currently focused on Type D (resistance against possible dispossession) and relatively thin/scattered struggles for Type A.
- Organized political struggles need to cover all types *simultaneously*. Difficult but not impossible. **International support has to focus on this broad front of struggle, grassroots-led movements/struggles.** Any major initiative to confront the global landgrab & other pressing land issues should have the rural poor and their movements at the forefront: '***not about us without us***', as a popular social movement/civil society slogan says.

Land Property Relations Change

Figure 2: flow of land-based wealth & power

Type A Redistribution	Type B Distribution
Type C Non-(re)distribution	Type D (re)concentration

- Type A: Redistribution
- The defining principle for this type is that the land-based wealth and power are transferred from the monopoly control of either private landed classes or the state to landless and near-landless working poor (poor peasants and rural labourers). It changes the relative shares of groups in society. It is a 'zero-sum' reform process
- Agrarian struggles concentrated around here. Lowest priorities among national governments and overseas development assistance (ODA)

- Type B: Distribution
- The basic defining character of this type of reform is that the landless and near-landless working poor are the recipients of land-based wealth and power transferred to them. However the original source of wealth and power can either be the state or community (or a private entity that has been fully compensated by the state). In many settings, this type of reform would mean affirming and protecting pre-existing land access and occupancy by poor peasants but whose tenure are insecure, as in many countries in Africa. It is a 'positive sum' reform process. It does not take resources from one group in society to redistribute to another. In fact, often such a policy is passed precisely to avoid having to resort to redistributive policies.
- Agrarian struggles relatively low around here. Low priority among national governments and ODA.

- Type C: Non-(re)distribution
- The defining nature of this category is the maintenance of the status quo, where the latter is a condition that is marked by inequity and exclusion in land-based social relations. Here, the most typical land policy is 'no land policy'. Having no land policy is effectively the policy framework at play. In settings where there are vast inequities and exclusion in land-based social relations, a 'no land policy policy' effectively advocates for non-redistribution of land-based wealth and power. In many other settings, a similar effect is created by having a land policy, even a pro-poor land policy such as land reform, but then keeping this dormant.
- (C1) *Formalization of inequality*
- (C2) *Restitution without redistribution*
- (C3) *Counter-reform*
- Agrarian struggles relatively low. Dominant policy position by national governments.

- Type D: (Re)concentration
- The defining character of this type is that while land-based wealth and power transfers do occur, access to and control over the land resource actually gets (re)concentrated in the hands of the non-poor: private landed classes, corporate entities, state or other elite community groups. This kind of change can occur in private or public lands. The organization of control over land resources can be through individual, corporate, state or community group institutional arrangements in property rights. The transfer may involve full land ownership or not. Different variations are possible, but the bottom line is the same: the recipients of land-based wealth and power transfers are landed classes and other non-poor entities or the state. There are at least three broad trajectories within this category.
 - (D1) *Reverse redistribution*
 - (D2) *Perverse redistribution*
 - (D3) *Lopsided distribution*
- Agrarian struggles relatively high here (against dispossession). Landgrab framing captures this. Popular among national governments. Facilitative role played by ODA?

By focusing our analysis on the direction of effective control over land-based wealth and power transfers, we can actually follow the dynamics of what is more substantive – in the midst of a maze of land policies and mechanisms beyond forms of ‘bundle of rights’:

land purchase, land lease, 99yr lease or 25 yr lease, physical dislocation of people, incorporation of peasants into contracts, export-oriented family farms, or large scale industrial farming, private land, public land, large scale or small scale, etc. Situations vary from one setting to the next.

The key is to establish the principle of what is ‘pro-poor’, among others. And so, the typology of 4 broad directions of land-based wealth and power transfers offered here. Towards the notion of ‘bundle of powers’ (Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

STATE-SOCIETY INTERACTION

State-centred perspectives

Society-centred perspectives

(civil society-, or community-, or market-centred; or combination of these)

State-society interactive approach = offers fuller and better analytical handle (politicizing the notion of 'land governance')

IMPLICATIONS & CHALLENGES

- (a) Specifically, land use change as an item in the dominant discourse around the food/fuel-land links is important but not sufficient. Land property relations change is equally important. The link between these two are critical, and needs further empirical research and theorizing.

- (b) Redistributive land reform as a demand has become even more important, but is narrow and is unable to capture the range of 'reforms' necessary in the complex of land use and land property relations dynamics currently unfolding. A notion of '**land sovereignty**' (= 'effective control by people' [bundle of powers]; democratizing land access/control, ownership) may be more inclusive of the various land access/control arrangements and is more politically useful.

d) Political struggles around food/fuel-land interconnected issues remain confined to specific types of issues (landgrab by TNCs and foreign companies, conversion of forest/food lands to biofuels for export), tend to be scattered, speculative and unconnected. A comprehensive mapping of key issues within a broader analytical framework will offer a fuller view of the entire terrain that demands urgent scientific research and political struggles that could feed into policy reforms.

(e) Finally: a systematic political economy framework, bringing '**class**' (class analysis, class agency, class dynamics) back in, will be extremely relevant. It should ask four key questions:

(i) who owns what?

(ii) who does what?

(iii) who gets what?

(iv) what do they do with the surplus wealth created

(Henry Bernstein 2007)

'local people', 'local community' may include: local elites: chiefs, kulaks, petty landlords, local bosses/caciques

Rural poor and rural poor interests: diverse and plural (labourer, poor peasants, middle farmer, kulaks, regular workers, seasonal workers, and so on) = they have different and often competing class interests in relation to the land use change/land property relations change.

(f) Finally = questioning the dominant model of development...?