

DPRN expert seminar:
“Commercial pressures on land; Rethinking policies and practice for development”
Input for panel 3: The role of the international community
By Gine Zwart, Oxfam Novib
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Thank you. I will not give a power point presentation, I realise the PP overkill today and yesterday, I will just make sure you listen to me.

As you probably know, Oxfam Novib is part of Oxfam International a co-federation of 14 like minded organizations with a shared annual budget of 900 million Euros supporting over 1000 civil society organization world wide.

We broadly share the same mission as the previous speakers: eradicate poverty, pro-poor policies, a rights-based approach. All music in my NGO ears.

However, we think we are different and even opposed to some of the thinking and practices of the institutions of the previous speakers. I will elaborate on this.

Oxfam Novib has been funding land, and the access to it as well as the related rural development programmes for over 50 years. In the nineties in South Africa more than half of Oxfam Novib’s annual South Africa budget was going to partners working on land and related issues.

The justification for this funding has been, and still is, based on three different premises:

- the historically unequal distribution of land and the lack of access to it for certain groups, in short: *fairness and equity*
- access to land as *a basic human right*, and
- land as an *important asset* for economic, social, cultural and spiritual means.

Based on these principles we fund and support partners in their struggles to ensure people’s rights are protected and they can use their assets to the full. You have been able to engage with a few of those partners present here and heard them in het various panels. At the same time we try to influence international debate and policy and practices of governments, international bodies like those represented here and multinational companies.

This is where we are different, as announced earlier. First of all we are a *Non Governmental Organisation* and the term already indicates it, we are non governmental, we are a civil society organisation or in other words work in areas that governments and inter-governmental bodies might work too, but from a different perspective. We work from the perspective of those that are usually *excluded* or *exploited* by current systems.

And that is why we are heavily involved in the issues that are being debated here today.

Land tenure and land security is a crucial asset for the poor. Here we agree. However the issue is more about the use of land, the return on labour and not so much land as an *individual’s property*. It is not the insecurity of tenure that make poor people not invest or not having financial services but it is rather that financial services are not available And a matter of rational decisions in what will potentially give the highest return on investment: the children, leaving little left of the meagre resources to invest in the land. It is the possibility to use the land that is of importance rather than the title. However when others come in, like foreign investors, with other legal frameworks, these farmers suddenly would need titles under the premises of it being good for their development, their access to financial services and their investments..

Economic growth is a means to the end of wealth creation; I guess again we agree here. But when looking at some of the value systems in the countries we are talking about at the moment and specifically in Africa, we see that these value systems are very much based on re-distribution of wealth and not so much on growth. These value systems are based on deriving rights, and explaining ones existence, from *relationships* and not from property. This is quite a fundamental difference from where we are coming from where individual property and individual ownership is the highest achievable. Us not understanding communal and village rights and calling these systems complex and difficult and not secure, surely should not be the problem of people living in poverty.

Dominant economic models are based on the theory that social dependencies and relations can be replaced by market relations, and that this is also desirable and essential. This is where things go wrong. A lot of this replacing mutual dependency with market relations might not be desirable at all. The current economic crisis is blatantly showing us that. This calls for a different way of looking at development in general and exploit the existing non-western value systems to a much larger extent.

In development paradigm protecting livelihoods is not done. So there is a whole discourse on the poor being entrepreneurs, being bankable etc. Only in the case of humanitarian crises it is permitted to offer protection, although even then people are expected to participate in public works. But in a lot of cases these crises are predictable and permanent. Protecting vulnerable livelihoods should not been seen as lost money; but as a redistribution of existing wealth. The crises we will be facing if the commercialisation of land continues in the speed it is going now, too are *predictable* and arguably, *permanent*.

International evidence suggests a strong and positive association between economic growth, living standards and an equitable distribution of land. At the same time unresolved equity issues can plunge a country into long periods of civil unrest and economic crisis. We all to well know current examples of that too. Then how come common wisdom is that large scale commercial agriculture will be good for economic growth?

The land debate is not new, it has been said before. Still it is urgent. And new is, that it has become a global issue of importance to us all. It is urgent and at the same time needs time.

In 2002 Joseph Hanlon in an article on the land debate in Mozambique asked the question who will develop Mozambique¹? Commercial farmers, the urban elite, advanced peasants, family farmers or foreign investors? He raised that the key question is how to encourage both small and large investment *without also aiding land grabs*.

I think the presentation of the World Bank of mr Deininger gave him some answers. And it is interested to hear that Mozambique has put a moratorium on foreign investment because applications for land by foreign investors have come to amount to more than twice the total area of land cultivated in Mozambique!

In that same year, more than 7 years ago now, we at OxNo tried to develop a policy on land for our Southern Africa portfolio. We had invited a number of academicians and key people from the region to help us think this trough. I asked one of the participants, Elsbeth, after she returned to South Africa what she thought of the meeting. This is what she answered:

¹ Joseph Hanlon: The land debate in Mozambique: will foreign investors, the urban elite, advanced peasants or family farmers drive rural development? Research paper commissioned by Oxfam GB - Regional Management Centre for Southern Africa, July 2002

“I was born at the foot of anthills that cast suspicion on the silent threat of mountains. I grew up in a mining town in Namaqualand. My parents grew up in so called coloured reserves. Their parents lived on missionary land. These were places with rules that men with see through skin and black holy books defined punitively - blacks will not own land. ...”

I will not read her whole passage, you can read it elsewhere. I understood this e-mail as trying to tell me that we had it wrong if we were seeing land as an economic asset only, as only a means to ensure sustainable livelihoods and that we should take history into account which is a system of unspeakable injustice.

In trying to convince the World Bank land policy advisor at that time, of the point that land should be seen in terms of equity and justice too and not narrow-minded as an economic asset that needs individual property rights, I forwarded this e-mail to him as a way to stress my point. Only to my surprise to find the whole e-mail passage back later, in a leading World Bank paper on land reform issues in sub Saharan Africa.²

Besides this being a blatant example of No Free and Prior Informed Consent.....had the World Bank listened, had it understood Elsbeth’s point?

Ha-Joon Chang, the author of the out of the ordinary book *Kicking away the ladder*, in a new very interesting article on rethinking public policy in agriculture³, talks about the New Conventional Wisdom or NCW that dominates present practice of large institutions and governments as opposed to history and current evidence. He argues that despite scientific evidence, pilots and even good policy papers, practice is not led by that.

A good example of Ha-Joon’s argument is the IAASTD⁴ report of 2008. This report is, together with the WDR of 2008 of the World Bank, arguably the most recent and comprehensive assessment of agriculture to date. It concluded that the world has to shift to more sustainable approaches in agriculture. This report is produced by more than 400 scientists worldwide during a 5 year period, under the auspices of the World Bank and FAO, and with a wide consultation process including many representatives of civil society. It is however widely being ignored by the world’s leaders including our own minister of agriculture.

A number of success stories have been mentioned by the World Bank, IFAD, FAO and others here today and in previous meetings, for example the village land act in Tanzania and others. The process to get the village rights right took over 3 years. So what? These processes are time-consuming and costly and we better get used to that. My question is: what is the World Bank doing to ensure these success stories do not remain to be isolated great practices with nice pictures in a power point presentation? We can not really say the World Bank has a history of developing tailor made products. They are rather known for their “one size fits all” policies and practices, while the examples given show the opposite is needed: tailor made with *slow* and sometimes cumbersome multi-stakeholder processes.

Voluntary mechanisms have been mentioned a lot today and yesterday as a way to address the current trends. But what does that mean for an average Masaai, Papua or Indian? How can they hold an investor accountable, when the investor is assured its rights are taken care of formally under bilateral investment agreements? Is it fair to assume they will take their obligations serious within a voluntary framework add-on? Why are we using empty words

² Consensus, confusion and controversy; selected land reform issues in sub Saharan Africa, World bank working paper no. 71

³ Ha-Joon Chang: “Rethinking Public Policy in Agriculture, lessons from history, distant and recent; faculty of economics university of Cambridge.

⁴ International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology (IAASTD)

like win-win, creating opportunities for the poor, etc. when history can easily predict who the winners and the losers will be. Whose side are we on when we use the fancy words of pro-poor policies and rights based approaches?

In the European Union we have set our targets for bio-fuels at such a level that it is obvious we can not produce that within the boundaries of Europe. We need to import and will claim valuable land outside Europe for that. Whose problem is that? Surely not that of the average poor African woman who is breaking her back daily tilling the soils of her small plot.

Nobody told us it will be easy. Land grabbing is illegal by definition and should be dealt with at that level. However the large scale land transactions which we are talking about are not and have many negative effects besides those of displacing people. These do not necessarily take place on the farm, within the enterprise or plantation or within the relation employee-employer or buyer-client and can often not be attributed to one actor, crop or industry, which makes it difficult to address. It needs time, patience and many voices to be heard.

My right to a sustainable livelihood is at the same time my obligation to ensure I take care of this livelihood. My right to speak is my obligation to listen.

Thank you for listening.