Land Grabs in Africa:
Economic Growth or Re-Colonization?

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Land investments – the purchase or lease of vast tracts of land from mostly poor, developing countries by wealthier food-insecure nations and private investors for the production and export of food and agrofuel crops – have grown into an international phenomenon. This trend which has come to be popularly known as “land grabbing” has been painted as a development opportunity for developing countries to generate income and employment and draw on private sector initiative to help in transfer of technology and know-how, and investment in economic and social infrastructure.

International aid agencies and multilateral lending institutions have commonly upheld foreign direct investment (FDI) as the only way to eradicate hunger and poverty from Africa, as FDI promises employment, improved infrastructure, and technological inputs to “host” countries. By referring to this surging influx of capital into primarily developing countries' land markets as ‘foreign direct investment’, such institutions imply that these nations are beneficiaries in these deals.

However, these promises of FDI are misleading as land deals often appear to be extractive and exploitive, with investors focusing on countries where fewer barriers to investment and little oversight. This means that deals are often carried out in a non-transparent manner, with consequences to local populations overlooked. Evidence shows that many land deals are not representative of the kind of well-targeted and well-controlled investment that could promote value-adding to local resources and help grow developing economies sustainably. Rather, land grabs are leading to the increased threat to local food security and land rights and while displacing thousands of families from their homes and livelihoods.

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