

“It is neither just nor sustainable for farmland to be taken away from communities in this way nor for food to be exported when there is hunger on the doorstep. Local people will not stand for this abuse – and neither should we.”

—Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, referring to the findings of OI reports, June, 2011

November 2011

Dear friend,

A lot has happened in just a few months.

In June the Oakland Institute (OI) went public with the first three reports and eight briefs on land investment deals in seven African countries as part of its project, Understanding Land Investment Deals in Africa. Our research revealed a disturbing pattern of a lack of transparency, fairness, and accountability and – for the first time – we put a spotlight on the surprising players behind these investments. We also examined the impact of land deals on local communities, their displacement and loss, and documented the important role small farmers play in preserving biodiversity, sustainability, and economic growth.

The dynamic relationship between research, advocacy, and press has resulted in an amazing string of successes and organizing in the US and abroad. We are happy to share the results (so far) of our work with you.

South Sudan: Success at Halting the Largest Foreign Land Deal

The combined force of OI’s research and advocacy on African land deals and local, democratic activism has effectively stalled plans for the largest land deal in South Sudan.

OI’s brief on the land investment deal of Nile Trading & Development, Inc. (NTD) in South Sudan exposed the largest land deal in the country and made the contract available on our website. Negotiated in March 2008 between the Texas-based NTD and Mukaya Payam Cooperative, the 49-year land lease of 600,000 hectares (with a possibility of 400,000 more) for USD 25,000 includes unencumbered rights to exploit all natural resources in the leased land.

The community of Mukaya Payam in Lainya County, Central Equatoria State (CES), became aware of the deal from the OI brief and resulting media coverage. In response, traditional and senior government leaders (including county authorities) launched a joint protest in July 2011, rejecting the lease of the land to American investors. In early August, a committee comprised of the Payam Parliamentarians in the CES Legislative Assembly, Payam Chiefs, and senior government officials at the state level traveled to Juba to voice their concerns to the state governor and the President of the Republic of South Sudan, H.E Salva Kiir. Their message: “We the Chiefs, elders, religious leaders, and the youth of Mukaya Payam unanimously with strong terms condemn, disavow, or deny the land lease agreement reached on 11 March 2008 between the two parties.”

President Kiir’s response: “This issue has to be addressed according to your [the Mukaya Payam people’s] will. You are the government and you have powers.”

Tanzania: Mobilization of Civil Society, Journalists, Refugee Activists, and International Supporters

OI's brief on the giant agricultural enterprise being developed in Tanzania by the Iowa-based Summit Group and Global Agriculture Fund of the Pharos Financial Group, (in partnership with AgriSol Energy LLC and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University) informed civil society groups and media about this land investment.

This project, if it were to go forward, would force evacuation of over 160,000 refugees – current inhabitants of the lease areas, which have served as refugee resettlement areas since 1972. The project is also contingent upon the Tanzanian government's acceptance of creating a regulatory framework for the use of genetically modified crops, as well as providing strategic investor status to Agirsol – i.e. expansive tax holidays, etc.

Knowledge of this deal, secretly negotiated between US investors and the Tanzanian Prime Minister, has mobilized civil society groups. One result has been the execution of a fact-finding mission by local NGOs and journalists to the proposed sites, which confirmed OI's findings.

More importantly, OI's brief put a spotlight on the struggles of Burundian refugees (who have resided in the land lease agreement areas for almost 40 years), who have been refusing displacement from their homes but were unaware of why they were being moved. Uncovering the deal has sparked a new legitimacy to their struggles and has inspired more international solidarity supporting their plight.

The matter is being debated intensely in Parliament. Halima Mdee (MP Kawe, Chadema), speaking on the controversial land agreement in the Parliament, declared that the contract was an example of “the worst case of land grabbing in the country.”

Ethiopia: Bringing International Attention to Policy and Helping the Rights of Indigenous Groups

Our report on Ethiopia was released at the inception of a new food crisis in the country. Media from OI's report has led directly to international attention and scrutiny over Ethiopia's foreign land investment policies, which are ignoring the effects of mostly export-based agriculture on domestic food security. The displacement of small-holder farmers hinders and prevents local people from providing food for themselves and their communities. This process continues to occur while the number of hungry people dependent on aid swells.

Additionally, OI's report, which among other things highlights how foreign land deals have caused the displacement and mistreatment of indigenous groups, is being utilized by the Ethiopian diaspora to assist in their organizing efforts against political oppression and to help advocate for the rights of indigenous groups in the country.

We also recently released a new brief as an emergency call to action on behalf of the indigenous communities currently experiencing human rights abuses due to the rapid land and water grabs associated with state-run sugar plantations in the Omo Valley. To download the brief please visit <http://media.oaklandinstitute.org/land-deal-brief-ethiopia-lower-omo>.

Sierra Leone: National and International Coverage Sparks Debate and Local Organizing

As reported by our partner group, Green Scenery, the release of OI's Sierra Leone report and accompanying briefs on Quifel and Addax Bioenergy has resulted in “a national public debate on agricultural policy along with demands for transparency and strong legal and environmental frameworks for agricultural investors.”

The findings of the report have alarmed the public, policymakers, governmental agencies, donor agencies, and civil society organizations. At the local level, impacted communities are hard at work organizing. They are



demanding copies of lease agreements, holding community meetings with stakeholders, and forming grievance committees. At the same time, Paramount Chiefs are becoming more aware of the risks involved in large-scale land acquisitions.

OI is assisting Green Scenery in the launch and execution of a radio program that will amplify the findings of the report, in a rights-based approach and frame. The goal is to make the findings of the report accessible to all concerned, especially farmers and Paramount Chiefs. The program is translated into Krio, Temne, and Mende and is being distributed to community radio stations in the North, East, and South, and to the regional stations of SLBC.

Media: Worldwide Coverage

The simultaneous release of OI reports along with a number of previously unseen materials, such as lease documents, maps, and investors' business plans, resulted in widespread coverage in a broad array of media and outlets – including the *Guardian*, *CNN*, *CBS*, *BBC*, *Forbes*, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *International Business Times*, *Democracy Now!*, *Huffington Post*, and more. These outlets reached millions of readers and – most importantly – reached decision makers around the world. Policymakers and opinion leaders are looking into deals that threaten people's lives in Africa and food security around the world. In addition, stories in the African news media reached key groups, such as the community of Mukaya Payam in South Sudan (see above for more information on this important success story), which resulted in halting the largest land investment deal in the area.

The media coverage on OI's findings has played a huge role in amplifying and legitimizing concerns we share with partner organizations and people on the ground in Africa. OI's success at exposing the many problems of harmful land investment deals changed the dynamic of the near-secrecy in which they occur and, in the case of South Sudan, has stopped the deal from moving forward.

Lawsuit Threats: Investors Exposed

In response to the release of our investigative reports and briefs, several investors and funds that are unhappy at the exposure have threatened the Oakland Institute with legal action. They have also threatened media outlets who have covered our reports with lawsuits, and have demanded that our reports be removed from the web.

Undaunted by these threats and confident of the accuracy of our findings, we have rejected their demands and will continue to share our findings in every available avenue. Widespread secrecy around these deals needs to be stopped. False promises of job creation, economic development, and food security for Africa through land investments should continue to be made visible and accessible.

University Involvement: Campus Activists Mobilize

OI's investigative reports and briefs exposed unlikely investors in African Land deals: well-respected US universities. Driven by the primary motivation of high returns for their endowments, US universities such as Harvard, Spelman, and Vanderbilt, are investing in private equity and hedge funds active in agricultural land deal investments in Africa

Our revelation that Harvard was a cornerstone investor in Emergent Asset Management (which had been maintained secret), might have led them to pull out of Emergent's Africa Agriland Fund: An article on Forbes.com, a few weeks after the release, quoted a spokesperson for Emergent confirming the fact that "Harvard's endowment is not currently an investor."



In the meanwhile, campus activists have been in touch with OI with requests for information and assistance in their organizing efforts. In particular, Vanderbilt is “gearing up for a divestment campaign regarding Emergent Asset Management.” We look forward to more involvement in this growing and important component of activism in the US to stop continued university investment in African agricultural lands.

Coalition Building, Reports, and Briefs

More than ever, the Oakland Institute is involved in international coalition building. Currently we have requests from civil society groups in Gabon, Nigeria, Cameroon, Malawi, and Ghana for partnerships to conduct similar country studies and advocacy campaigns. In the meanwhile, we are gearing up for the release of the second phase of our work: several new country reports along with additional briefs exposing details and analysis on land investment deals. Release of the third phase is planned for early next year.



Additionally, we will soon release our reports in several different languages, including an Amharic translation of the country report on Ethiopia and a French translation of the country report on Mali. Finally, we are working with our partner group, Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, as they prepare for a Congressional hearing on USAID support of the current government in Ethiopia.

Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Land-Related Investments

In collaboration with Global Witness and the International Land Coalition (ILC), we are also engaged in a research and dialogue project aimed at identifying clear priorities and opportunities for improving transparency and accountability in decision-making around land-related investments. The first phase of research work will be followed up with a workshop that will bring together civil society organizations and representatives of people who have been affected directly by land-investments. Our goal is to develop a longer-term strategy for coordination and collaboration around improving transparency and accountability in decision-making around land-related investments.

Your Support is Critical

This work could not have been accomplished without our partners and impacted communities who are courageously organizing and speaking out to claim their rights to land and food security. We also appreciate each and every one of our donors who joined us in this important work to halt predatory land grabs, support indigenous and local people, preserve the environment, and ensure responsible investment in agriculture. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Anuradha Mittal in black ink.

Anuradha Mittal
Executive Director

