



## Land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean viewed from broader international perspectives

Saturnino M. Borrás Jr.  
Jennifer C. Franco  
Cristobal Kay  
Max Spoor  
14 November 2011 Version



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Saturnino M. Borras Jr. is Associate Professor at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), the Hague, Netherlands, Fellow of the Amsterdam-based Transnational Institute (TNI) and of the California-based Food First. He is Co-Coordinator of the international network 'Land Deal Politics Initiative' or LDPI – [www.iss.nl/ldpi](http://www.iss.nl/ldpi) – researching into the dynamics of global land grabbing. He is the Editor of the *Journal of Peasant Studies*. [borras@iss.nl](mailto:borras@iss.nl). Jennifer C. Franco is Research Associate at the Transnational Institute (TNI). [jennycfranco@tni.org](mailto:jennycfranco@tni.org). Borras and Franco are both Adjunct Professors at the College of Humanities and Development Studies (COHD) at China Agricultural University in Beijing. Max Spoor is Professor of Development Studies at ISS, and Visiting Professor at the Barcelona Institute of International Studies (IBEI) in Spain and Guest Professor at Nanjing Agricultural University in China. [spoor@iss.nl](mailto:spoor@iss.nl). Cristobal Kay is Emeritus Professor at ISS and Associated Research Professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. He is an Editor of the *Journal of Agrarian Change*. [kay@iss.nl](mailto:kay@iss.nl). We would like to thank Camilo Andres Ardila Galvis and Fabio Andres Diaz Pabon for translation assistance.

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## **Introduction and key messages**

This paper is based on an empirical research commissioned by the UN Food and Agriculture (FAO) on the state and trends in ‘land grabbing’ in seventeen countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (see *Annex* for the complete list of the studies, plus the summary paper, FAO 2011). The seventeen studies have been concluded in mid-2011. The common analytical framework of the studies is both wide and narrow. On the one hand it is wide because it looks into the broad processes of rural land and capital concentration in the context of neoliberal globalization, and on the other hand, it is narrow because it looks into the phenomenon of ‘land grabbing’ based strictly on three specific dimensions, namely: i) significant extent of recent large-scale land acquisitions; ii) involvement of foreign governments in these land deals; and iii) negative impact of such renewed land investments on food security of the recipient country. It is largely because of this kind of framing that most of the studies were able to uncover, gather and assemble significant empirical material related to recent land dynamics in the region, but have to focus analysis and conclusions based on the narrow definition and dimension of land grabbing, arriving at a conclusion that ‘land grabbing’ exists *only* in two countries in the region: Argentina and Brazil.

This paper looks into the country studies and the summary paper more closely, using a broad agrarian political economy analytical perspective.<sup>1</sup> This approach necessarily includes analysis of nation-states that are involved in transnational land deals, but goes beyond this focus. It is broad (including national land deals), but at the same time not too open-ended. By looking at the purposes (and so causes) of the current land rush we will necessarily be dealing with recent changes in and imperatives of global capitalism more generally, and the variety of efforts at tackling the challenges posed by the convergence of multiple crises of food, energy, climate change and finance capital. This enables us to navigate somewhere between too narrow and too wide parameters.

The objective of the paper is to (re)interpret the empirical material in the seventeen country studies based on emerging land grab debates and literature internationally. Based on this, we draw out some tentative conclusions and identify some possible policy recourse and future research. In addition to the broad international literature, our paper will also reflect upon the insights from the seventeen country studies in the context of the key findings and recommendations of the land grab report released by the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) High Level Panel of Experts or HLPE (Toulmin et al. 2011). We will figure out points of convergence and divergence between the latter and the current conditions and trends of land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean. In turn, we hope that the insights from this region can also help us understand better the *global* phenomenon of land grabbing. We will aspire to make this paper relevant for various audiences, namely, civil society activist, governmental, academic, and development policy circles.

Our main finding is that broadly cast, land grabbing is underway although unevenly, between and within countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The current

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<sup>1</sup> We employ, in a loose manner, a broad agrarian political economy perspective, addressing four distinct but interlinked questions: who owns what? who does what? who gets what? what do they do with the produce/wealth that is created? (Bernstein 2010).

condition of and trends in land deals point towards further expansion and faster pace in the near future. Land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean has distinct features, including: (i) the significance of private lands transacted, (ii) critical role played by domestic elites as key investors, (iii) the significance of intra-regional (Trans)Latina companies (TLCs) alongside conventional transnational companies (TNCs), (iv) the marginal extent of land deals with the Gulf States, China, South Korea and India (government or private land deals) that are among the major investors elsewhere, and (v) land grabbing in this region occurs in countries that do not fit the usual profile of a 'fragile' or 'weak' states in the way some observers argue land grabs tend to occur such as in several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. One can quickly see the difference in the political conditions between Brazil and Argentina on the one hand, and DRC and Sudan on the other hand. Yet, more generally, land grabbing in this region has a lot of similarities with the processes that occur in other regions of the world, principally the fact that all regions have been integrated into the process of neoliberal globalization during the past two to three decades, albeit in different ways and extent. Moreover, there are agrarian processes and transformations across regions that have been inspired by the recent changes in the global food, feed and fuel complex, the growing needs of global capitalist development especially in the context of the rise of BRICS and MICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa; Middle Incomes Countries) for meat, dairy products, timber and minerals, as well as the various climate change-related policy responses such as carbon trading and other mega conservation projects. Finally, the dynamics of land grabbing in the region generally reflect the overall key findings of the UN Committee on Food Security (CFS) High Level Panel of Experts' Report on land grabbing that was released in July 2011. Insights from the former can deepen and strengthen the latter.

*The highlights of our findings are:*

(1) The extent of land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of number of countries involved and area covered is wider than previous assumed. But it is not possible, at least at this point, to come up with clear quantitative data about how many hectares and households are actually affected. This conclusion is arrived at by using an analytical approach that is broader than the strict and narrow definition used by FAO in the seventeen country cases (which is based on: large-scale land acquisition involving foreign governments and ensuing food insecurity in the host country). This is the same conclusion one can arrive at looking at other regional cases (Africa, Asia and former Soviet Eurasia) once the definition of and analytical framework in analyzing land grabs were adjusted from the 'nation-states centric' transnational perspective to one that focuses on the broad political economic character and orientation of land deals. We will discuss our alternative take on 'definition' further below.

(2) Land grabbing occurs across land property rights regimes (private, state, community) and agroecological conditions and spatial locations (from actually cultivated prime agricultural lands to land frontiers; from peri-urban areas to remote rural lands) through a variety of acquisition mechanisms (purchase, lease, contract farming, value chain capture). In terms of international comparison, it is not an 'either/or' issue (i.e., either lands transacted were private or state lands), but rather it is a matter of degree within these categories in the overall trend. In this context, the involvement of private

lands under transaction is probably greatest in Latin America and the Caribbean *as compared to* other regions of the world where it is much more concentrated on the broad category of state (or ‘public’) land. Overall however, especially in terms of land area involved, it is certainly concentrated in land property regimes that are not fully and formally privatized such as land frontiers (that are often indigenous peoples’ lands) claimed by the central state.

(3) The formal nationality of ‘land grabbers’ is diverse and at times not always clear and easy to establish. There are four types of land grabbers in this context, namely, international, (Trans)Latina, domestic/national, and ‘undetermined’, with the last category consisting of companies in which the dominant nationality of investors is not clear, and some of these are finance companies based in tax haven locations in the region (viz., Panama, Cayman Islands). Transnational dimension in land deals is significant, although in general foreign governments are not directly involved (there are some scattered government-brokered negotiations but these are in very preliminary and ad hoc stage, except for some established deals in Brazil and Argentina). Meanwhile the *intra-regional* (transnational) land transactions involving (Trans)Latina Corporations may represent an even more significant aspect of the land deals in the region, or at least it is definitely an important trend to date. Finally, the role and participation of domestic or national elites (many of which are tied, to varying degrees, to international capital) is quite important, even dominant in many countries in the region. By international comparison, the region is different from the processes in Africa where *transnational* (transregional) deals are more prominent and widespread, but the Latin America and the Caribbean is closer to the Southeast Asian case. In the latter, intra-regional land investments by (trans)Southeast Asian companies are substantial, probably more important than investors from outside the region, at least for now. But the critical role played by domestic/national elites in Latin America and the Caribbean is a similar phenomenon in all other regions of the world: Africa, Asia and post-Soviet Eurasia.

(4) Land grabbing occurs not only within the context of aspiring for greater food production, especially livestock (cattle) production. It occurs within the emerging food-feed-fuel complex involving what we call here ‘*flex crops*’ (crops that have multiple and/or flexible uses in the ‘3-in-1’ complex) as well as in non-food sectors, specifically industrial tree plantation and large-scale conservation. This conclusion is significantly different from the dominant, mainstream narrative that links the current global land rush mainly, if not solely, to the 2007-08 food price spike. The latter is ahistorical. Our conclusion directly links our analysis to a broader international political economy processes involving lands beyond food production. This finding in the region is similar to all other parts of the world based on emerging empirical evidence – all contradicting the official and mainstream explanation that the 2007-08 food crisis provoked land grabs; indeed a problematic ‘*food crisis-centric*’ narrative.

(5) In most cases, land deals in the region have *not* resulted in any immediate large-scale negative impact on food security of the host country (although we can surmise that exceptions probably include sub-national local cases where there were clear displacements of communities resulting in the disruption of food production, supply and access, as in the case of Colombia). One reason for this was large-scale land deals have occurred more generally outside the staple food sector which remains in the hands of smallholders (the deals made at the expense of smallholders are of course significant in

some countries). Another reason is that massive commercial farms and plantations and conservation sites were being opened up in the land frontiers that are generally sparsely populated. This may be similar to some trends in some countries in Southeast Asia and post-Soviet Eurasia (in the latter, there exist abandoned fertile lands). However, this may be significantly different from what we witness in some parts of Africa where local communities get displaced or relocated, livelihoods get disrupted, subsistence food production destroyed. Yet, overall the direct link between large-scale land deals and food insecurity is not always easy to establish in Latin America and the Caribbean, at least not the immediate impact.

(6) Land grabbing in the region occurs in countries that do not fit the usual profile of a 'fragile' or 'weak' states. The political conditions of the two top land grabbing sites in the region, Brazil and Argentina, are markedly different. This is the same case as in other countries, e.g. Chile and Uruguay. Generally and at least based on all the FAO country studies there is no major concern in the countries studied about manipulative, non-transparent, shady and corrupt character of land deals in the region that are in the same extent and degree that we see in other countries in Africa, former Soviet Eurasia or Southeast Asia (see, e.g. Vermeulen and Cotula 2010). This is different from the dominant narrative on land grabs which assumes, arguably erroneously, that problematic land deals occur in countries with 'weak' or 'fragile' governance structures. The overall policy prescription of making land deals more 'transparent' and 'responsible' is the logical policy option for this kind of basic assumption about the problem. This assumption is being challenged more generally, and the empirical insights in the current regional study offer evidence that suggests against such an assumption which implies that land grabs are fine if only they were transparent.

(7) There is no consensus within the state and in society about these land deals; it is *contested* within the context of state-society interaction, including in environmental context and by indigenous peoples. The *role of the state* in facilitating land deals for the most part is central in the process. This is seen in five broadly distinct but interlinked tasks to facilitate land deals that only a state can do. All States are engaged in systematic policy and administrative initiatives around the notion of 'available marginal' lands: (i) invention/justification, (ii) definition, reclassification, quantification, (iii) identification, (iv) acquisition/appropriation and (v) re-allocation/disposition of these lands to transform such scarce resources that are within the legal control of central states into the latter's counterpart for renewed large-scale land-based investments. This is the same state task in land grabs that we observe in other regions of Asia, Africa and post-Soviet Eurasia. Meanwhile, *resistance from below*, whether of the organized/structured type or otherwise, is present in many countries, but are rather general thin, weak and uneven. This is a very similar situation elsewhere outside the region, but most probably in former Soviet Eurasia. Potential and actual social divides (class, gender, ethnicity, ideology, among others) are hallmarks of existing agrarian structures and institutional spaces between and within state and society, and manifest in and partly influence the character of state-society politics around land deals.

(8) *Land use change* has been *multidirectional*: within the food sector, from food to feed or fuel, from non-food/forestry lands to food, feed and fuel for export, from natural forest to industrial tree plantation. It is not always the case that land use change is from food or forest lands for domestic consumption to lands producing food and non-

food items for export – the type that is popularly protested. This diversity of land use dynamics is similar elsewhere outside the region, in Africa, Asia and post-Soviet Eurasia.

(9) In some instances, large-scale lands deals in Latin America and the Caribbean resulted in the *dispossession* by displacement of the rural poor. But more generally, it has *not* resulted in mass dispossession – at least not in the scale that we see in many places in Africa and some parts of Asia (Again, of course we see some hotspots where expulsion of population from their lands has occurred, most especially in Colombia). On many occasions, land deals resulted in the *incorporation* – adversely or otherwise – of smallholder and farmworkers into the emerging commercial farm and plantations enclaves. The mixed outcomes in terms of incorporation (adversely or otherwise) are similar to what we see in the emerging land-oriented ventures in Asia and Africa.

(10) The protested type of outcome of land grabs is one marked by non-redistributive land policies resulting in land (re)concentration combined with production set up that are not food-securing and not ecologically-nurturing. For land investments to be socially and environmentally desirable, it has to be built upon or has to result in (re)distributive land policies combined with food-securing and ecologically nurturing production set-up. However, this ideal setting is more the exception than the rule in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, quite similar to a large extent to many settings in Africa, Asia and post-Soviet Eurasia. Just where exactly the trend in Latin America and the Caribbean stands between these two poles is an empirical question.

(11) The contexts, actors, conditions, and consequences of the renewed land rush in the region require some old and newer types of public action if the ideal scenario is to be achieved, i.e.: *(re)distributive land policies combined with food-securing and ecologically nurturing productive land investments*. Conventional land policies, such as land reform, have become even more relevant and urgent in the current context – but are inherently limited. There is a need for an overarching concept that is appropriate for the changed contemporary context. The bottom-line is *to secure right of working class and indigenous peoples to have effective access to, control over and use of land and live on it as a resource and territory*. It requires not a purely market-based intervention, but a strong state-society interactive intervention, including well-organized, autonomous agrarian and environmental justice civil society movements' involvement, at the local, national and transnational levels. This is a similar observation in other regions of Asia, Africa and post-Soviet Eurasia.

### *Summary of the FAO land grab studies in Latin America and the Caribbean*

It is useful to provide a short summary of highlights of the key findings and conclusions of the seventeen country studies based on the original framework employed by FAO for the research. It has to be noted that the current land grabbing and land concentration in the region are against the background of neoliberalism that has swept across Latin America and the Caribbean. This has transformed the agricultural sector to some extent, although not always in the way as intended and as predicted,<sup>2</sup> and (agrarian) societies

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<sup>2</sup> The argument "to bring the state back in" in the context of agrarian transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean has been widely argued in recent years. Among the region-wide relevant studies is the one by Spoor (2002). He showed that the growth of the agricultural sector in ten the most important agricultural countries of the region of Latin America and the Caribbean during the period of state intervention of the 1960s and 1970s was higher and more robust than in the neoliberal 1980s and 1990s. There was also not any evidence for the supposed "lost decade" of the 1980s, as far as the agricultural sector was concerned,

more generally (Gwynne and Kay 2004). We will not go into the discussion of neoliberal globalization and the region's agricultural sector. To some extent, the seventeen papers have covered this, and the summary paper (FAO 2011) has also underscored important elements of this transformation. Our task at hand is to look into the question of land grabbing. For this purpose, two key tables are useful (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Land investments, land grabbing, and food security in selected countries

Presence of recent large (foreign) investments in land			Presence of foreign 'land grabbing'		Negative impact on food security of investment recipient country	
High	Medium	Low to None	Yes	No	Yes	No
Argentina Bolivia Brazil Chile Colombia Ecuador Paraguay Peru Uruguay Mexico Nicaragua Dominican Republic Guyana	Costa Rica Guatemala Panama	Trinidad & Tobago	Argentina Brazil	Bolivia Chile Colombia Ecuador Paraguay Peru Uruguay Mexico, 'but' Costa Rica Guatemala Nicaragua Panama Dominican Republic Guyana Trinidad & Tobago		Argentina Bolivia Brazil Chile Colombia Ecuador Paraguay Peru Uruguay Mexico Costa Rica Guatemala Nicaragua Panama Dominican Republic Guyana Trinidad & Tobago

Source: 17 FAO country studies (see Annex), plus the summary paper (FAO 2011). This is reformatted from FAO (2011).

Table 2: Land and capital concentration, by country and sector

Country	Sectors where recent significant (land & capital) concentration has occurred
Argentina	Soya, wheat, livestock, sugarcane, tobacco, fruit, conservation
Bolivia	Soya, livestock, forestry
Brazil	Soya, sugarcane, poultry, livestock, fruit, forestry
Chile	Fruit, dairy, wine, seeds, poultry, conservation
Colombia	Oil palm, sugar beets, sugarcane, soya, rice, corn, forestry
Ecuador	Banana, sugarcane, oil palm, forestry
Paraguay	Soya, corn, wheat, livestock
Peru	Fruits, vegetables, sugarcane, oil palm
Uruguay	Soya, dairy, wheat, rice, livestock, forestry
Mexico	Corn value chain, sugarcane, fruits, flowers, coffee, barley, tequila
Costa Rica	Banana, pineapple, oil palm
Guatemala	Sugarcane, oil palm, forestry

which had actually benefitted from previous substantial public investment. Finally, that after the widespread (but highly varied in terms of timing) implemented structural adjustment, the expected rapid recovery and high rates of growth in the agricultural sector did not materialize.

Nicaragua	Livestock, rice, oil palm, sugarcane, citrus, tourism, forestry
Panama	Banana, coffee, rice, oil palm
Dominican Republic	Sugarcane, banana, fruits, vegetables
Guyana	Sugarcane, livestock, rice, pineapple, forestry
Trinidad & Tobago	Sugarcane, cacao, fruits

Source: 17 FAO country studies (see Annex), plus the summary paper (FAO 2011). This is reformatted from FAO (2011).

There are some highlights that can be drawn from Table 1. First, across Latin America and the Caribbean there has been a significant increase in (foreign) investments in land and agriculture during the past decade. The level of these investments is high for nearly all seventeen countries, with only about three in the medium level (Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panama), while only one country is in the ‘low-none’ category (Trinidad and Tobago). Indeed despite the unevenness between and within countries, the vibrant investment atmosphere in land and agriculture is largely a region-wide phenomenon. Second, using the definition of land grab as something that involves foreign governments, there are only two qualified countries in this case, namely, Argentina and Brazil. Third, in all seventeen countries studied, there is no single country case where food security was undermined by the surge of land and agricultural investments.

Meanwhile, some highlights that can be drawn from Table 2 are as follows: First, concentration trends occur in land and/or capital through a variety of ways: from land grabs, to ‘commodity grabs’ (capture of goods and profits in the value chain), to ‘green grabs’ (land grabs in the name of the environments; see Fairhead, Leach and Scoones forthcoming 2012). Second, this concentration occurs in various food and non-food sectors, but there is a remarkable surge in particular sectors linked to the rise of ‘flex crops’ (crops that have multiple uses like food, animal feed and biofuels, as well as can be switched to actual use quite flexibly) particularly soya, oil palm and sugarcane – alongside land acquisitions related to the expansion of industrial tree plantations and mega conservation projects.

The insights above are among the many other highlights of the studies in the seventeen countries. It is sufficient a starting point for our subsequent discussion for the rest of this paper, which will look into the empirical material in the seventeen studies and (re)examine them from a broader analytical and international perspective. We will not go into any great details of the reports because an excellent summary paper is available, in Spanish (FAO 2011).

### **Scope, assumptions and context**

As mentioned earlier, the definition of ‘land grab’ used by FAO in the seventeen studies is anchored on three interlinked dimensions, namely, a) large-scale land acquisition; b) involvement of foreign governments; and c) negative impact on food security of the host country. These dimensions are among the most problematical and controversial aspects of the current land rush. But defining land grab this way is bound to miss significant aspects of the character and dynamics of contemporary land grabbing and possible trajectories of agrarian change.

We do not attempt to offer a standard definition of land grabbing in this paper. The term ‘land grab’ is inherently problematic and will always be contested. But one thing that makes the term quite powerful, and is the reason why we continue to use it here is because it implies power and power relations – which makes it a useful and powerful

but controversial term. It politicizes and historicizes the current scramble for land worldwide. We will continue to use the term ‘land grab’ – for lack of a better term. We will avoid substituting it with de-politicized terms such as ‘large-scale land acquisitions’ or ‘large-scale land investments’, although we will use these terms occasionally when referring to generic land transactions. At others times, we will use the term ‘land deals’.

*Defining features* rather than a strict definition. More useful for our current purposes is to outline a set of defining features of land deals in order to differentiate everyday, regular land market transactions from what is being referred to more broadly and loosely as ‘land grabs’. For us, the ten defining features are: (i) relatively significant large-acquisitions either through purchase or lease, as well as through a variety of institutional arrangements ranging from contract farming to supermarket contracts to forest conservation, (ii) involving lands in a wide range of agroecological conditions (from productive plains to forested rural areas) and spatial locations (from remote rural areas to peri-urban corridors), (iii) involving private, community or state lands, with (iv) the objective of and/or the result of such ventures is more or less to ‘extract’ land and other closely linked natural resources such as water and forest, directly – or not (i.e. capturing produce and profits through the value chain) through the production of food and non-food goods for domestic trade and consumption or for export; (v) these can be legal or illegal, carried out transparently or otherwise, corruption-ridden or not, (vi) these transactions may involve a variety of investors: natural person or corporate, private or public or private-public investment groups, domestic or foreign, (vii) resulting in undermining local-national food security or not, in the displacement and dispossession or not of previous occupants of the acquired territories, resulting or not in the incorporation (adversely or otherwise) of the previous occupants of acquired lands and/or those who live in the vicinity, and may or may not be destructive to the environment; the bottom-line is the shift of control of land and other associated resources such as water; (viii) but that such large commercial transactions should more or less be traceable to the recent changing character and dynamics of the global capitalist development in general, or the recently changing food-feed-fuel complex, the closely linked climate change-related global policy changes such as biofuels and large conservation initiatives, and the recent financial crisis where financial companies started to view land investment as an

Table 3: Total, forested, cultivated, and non-forested, non-protected agriculturally suitable area by region and selected countries

	Total Area	Forest Area	Cultivated Area	Non-cropped, non-protected suitable			
				Forest <25/km <sup>2</sup>	Non-forest with pop. density of		
				<25/km <sup>2</sup>	<10/km <sup>2</sup>	<5/km <sup>2</sup>	
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	<b>2,408,224</b>	<b>509,386</b>	<b>210,149</b>	<b>163,377</b>	<b>201,540</b>	<b>127,927</b>	<b>68,118</b>
Angola	124,294	57,941	2,930	11,502	9,684	6,625	4,561
Burkina Faso	27,342	2,072	4,817	452	3,713	1,040	256
Cameroon	46,468	23,581	6,832	8,973	4,655	3,205	1,166
Cent. Afr. Rep.	62,021	23,496	1,879	4,358	7,940	6,890	5,573
Chad	127,057	2,280	7,707	680	14,816	10,531	7,061
Congo	34,068	23,132	512	12,351	3,476	3,185	2,661
D.R. Congo	232,810	147,864	14,739	75,760	22,498	14,757	8,412
Ethiopia	112,829	8,039	13,906	534	4,726	1,385	376
Gabon	26,269	21,563	438	6,469	954	927	839
Kenya	58,511	3,284	4,658	655	4,615	2,041	935
Madagascar	58,749	12,657	3,511	2,380	16,244	11,265	6,572

Mali	125,254	3,312	8,338	582	3,908	776	28
Mozambique	78,373	24,447	5,714	8,247	16,256	9,160	4,428
South Africa	121,204	8,840	15,178	918	3,555	1,754	649
Sudan	249,872	9,909	16,311	3,881	46,025	36,400	18,547
Tanzania	93,786	29,388	9,244	4,010	8,659	4,600	1,234
Zambia	75,143	30,708	4,598	13,311	13,020	8,367	3,083
<b>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</b>	<b>2,032,437</b>	<b>933,990</b>	<b>162,289</b>	<b>290,631</b>	<b>123,342</b>	<b>91,576</b>	<b>64,320</b>
Argentina	277,400	33,626	28,154	16,228	29,500	23,835	16,856
Bolivia	108,532	54,325	2,850	21,051	8,317	7,761	6,985
Brazil	847,097	485,406	62,293	130,848	45,472	27,654	15,247
Colombia	113,112	64,543	7,339	31,313	4,971	3,776	2,838
Ecuador	25,152	11,631	3,384	3,663	638	415	313
French Guiana	8,034	7,809	6	3,554	27	27	27
Guyana	20,845	17,737	464	8,501	210	189	156
Mexico	194,218	64,447	25,845	7,206	4,360	2,857	1,719
Paraguay	39,904	19,112	5,419	10,269	7,269	6,035	5,133
Peru	128,972	68,312	3,799	39,951	496	476	438
Suriname	14,460	13,847	86	5,318	6	5	5
Uruguay	17,772	1,323	2,030	731	9,269	8,681	7,340
Venezuela	90,531	48,345	3,912	6,167	8,966	7,725	5,891
<b>Eastern Europe and Central Asia</b>	<b>2,469,520</b>	<b>885,527</b>	<b>251,811</b>	<b>140,026</b>	<b>52,387</b>	<b>29,965</b>	<b>18,210</b>
Belarus	20,784	7,784	6,019	4,853	3,691	868	204
Russian Fed.	1,684,767	807,895	119,985	128,966	38,434	24,923	15,358
Ukraine	59,608	9,265	32,988	2,594	3,442	394	74
<b>East and South Asia</b>	<b>1,932,941</b>	<b>493,762</b>	<b>445,048</b>	<b>46,250</b>	<b>14,341</b>	<b>9,496</b>	<b>5,933</b>
China	935,611	167,202	136,945	10,514	2,176	1,383	843
Indonesia	183,897	95,700	32,920	24,778	10,486	7,291	4,666
Malaysia	32,243	21,171	7,184	4,597	186	119	50
<b>Middle East and North Africa</b>	<b>1,166,118</b>	<b>18,339</b>	<b>74,189</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>3,043</b>	<b>843</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>Rest of World</b>	<b>3,318,962</b>	<b>863,221</b>	<b>358,876</b>	<b>134,700</b>	<b>50,971</b>	<b>45,687</b>	<b>41,102</b>
Australia	765,074	88,086	45,688	17,045	26,167	25,894	25,593
Canada	969,331	308,065	50,272	30,100	8,684	8,289	7,598
Papua N.G.	44,926	29,387	636	9,746	3,771	3,193	1,917
United States	930,303	298,723	174,515	74,350	8,756	6,818	5,058
<b>World Total</b>	<b>13,333,053</b>	<b>3,706,457</b>	<b>1,503,354</b>	<b>775,211</b>	<b>445,858</b>	<b>305,711</b>	<b>198,064</b>

Note: 'Suitable' means that at least 60 percent of possible yield can be attained for any of the 5 rainfed crops considered here (wheat, oil palm, sugarcane, soybean, maize). Countries are included if they have a total of at least 3 Mn ha of forested or non-forested suitable area for areas with population density <25/km<sup>2</sup>. Suitable ha per cultivated ha area based on non-protected, non-forest suitable area where the population density of the grid cell is <25/km<sup>2</sup>, <10/km<sup>2</sup>, or <5/km<sup>2</sup>.

Source: Deininger (2011; with original source: Fischer and Shah 2010).

alternative, safer investment; (ix) geopolitically, such land transactions should also be linked to the broader (direct and indirect) impact of the dramatic rise of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), and to some extent by some economically powerful MICS (Middle Income Countries) towards a more *polycentric* global food-energy regime; and (x) finally, and in terms of timeline, we are looking here of *recent* developments, focusing on the past decade or so.

This set of qualifiers is no guarantee against fuzzy classifications of land deals, but it is helpful in terms of setting the boundary, especially against regular land market transactions that occur *prior* to the recent period and context being examined here. It will also free us from the too narrow and problematic '*food crisis-centric*' analysis that is often too fixated, partly erroneously, on the 2007-08 food crisis, or the '*nation-states centric*' analysis that is often too fixated on the Gulf States, China and South Korea. These are two broad frameworks that are so commonly and casually employed in the emerging land grab literature.

One of the most fundamental assumptions underlying the global land grab narrative is that the converging crises of food, energy, climate, and finance have a solution, and the solution lies in the existence of global reserve agricultural lands: ‘marginal, empty, under-utilized and available’ (Borras and Franco 2010a, 2010b). It is assumed that taking these lands to solve the multiple crises and advance capital accumulation (a) will not displace any significant number of people since these are sparsely populated, if not completely empty, spaces; (b) will be easy to acquire since most of these lands are state lands, and (c) will result in positive sum outcomes for societies since marginal lands are converted into productive resources, and will generate livelihoods and employment in local communities. Depending on the combination of factors being considered, the global land reserve is estimated to be at a minimum of 445 million ha. Refer to the last four columns to the right of Table 3 (Deininger 2011).

Deininger (2011) is particularly looking at a specific type of available marginal land (see Table 1, third column from the right), and through that lens is able to identify and quantify such land type:

“Using the 25 persons/km<sup>2</sup> cut-off, the seven countries with the largest amount of suitable but uncultivated land (Sudan, Brazil, Australia, Russia, Argentina, Mozambique, and Democratic Republic of the Congo, in that order) account for 224 million ha, or more than half of global availability. Thirty-two countries with more than three million ha of land each account for more than 90 percent of available land. Of these, 16 are in Africa, *eight in Latin America*, three in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and five in the rest of the world” (underscoring supplied).

There are at least three contentious aspects of this assumption. First, the assumption and definition of what is ‘*marginal*’, ‘*under-utilized*’, and ‘*empty*’ or sparsely populated is problematic. Territories by indigenous peoples and by pastoralists are often the top candidates for this definition which is often based on mainstream economic ideas about factors of production and economic efficiency in resource allocation and use that are blind to social, cultural, and political dimensions of land.<sup>3</sup> A notion of an international standard of measurement about ‘efficiency of land use’ is inherently problematical because different peoples have different conceptions about land and land use: a US Midwest corn farmer has a different idea about land and land use as compared to a nomadic livestock herder in Mozambique, for example. This critique applies to the notion of ‘*yield gap*’ which is being used to justify corporate take over of ‘marginal lands’. It is similarly anchored on some international (usually western, capitalist) concept about what a yield per hectare of particular crop or herd should be: hypothetically – 5 tonnes of corn per ha in an industrial, mechanized, fossil-based farming in the US Midwest as a benchmark against which to judge a hectare of land in Ethiopia that produces only a tonne of corn through conventional subsistence farming; or indeed a standard ratio of one hectare of land for one cattle in Argentina versus ten hectares for one goat in Namibia.

Second, mapping of these marginal lands in order to identify and quantify them towards eventual appropriation is usually done through satellite imageries that capture the physical features of these spaces, but not the social relations that occur in such spaces. This approach in identification and quantification towards eventual acquisition and

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<sup>3</sup> See Akram Lodhi, Borras and Kay (2007) for an elaborate discussion on the multidimension character of land.

reallocation of land therefore considers land and property as ‘things’, devoid of social dimension (Borras and Franco 2010c, Nalepa forthcoming, 2012).

Finally, even if assuming such marginal lands exist and they are available for taking,<sup>4</sup> preliminary evidence from various regions of the world show that land investors tend to be interested in lands that do not fit the ‘marginal-unused/underutilized-empty’ profile. Instead, they prefer and acquire lands that are productive, usually with existing or potential irrigation, and close to existing road networks. This type of lands is usually farmed and settled by local communities. This is for example the case of 30,000 ha Procana sugarcane plantation in Mozambique which is adjacent to the Massingir dam where the investor got an assurance from the government for steady, sufficient supply of water (Borras, Fig and Monsalve 2011, Woodhouse and Ganho 2011).

The ‘available marginal land’ narrative is problematic when paired with the narrative about the 2007-08 food crisis that is popularly assumed to be largely due to population increases and changing (increasing) consumption level and diet preferences (more meat and dairy, as the world’s middle class expands). This argument claims that in 2050 we would need to double food production based on the current aggregate production-consumption levels and trends in the rate of population increase. Inserted into this narrative is the persistence of world hunger: 1 billion by 2011. The solution: more food to end hunger. Hence, there is a need, and so the global rush, for new lands to be used to produce more food.

There are two inter-linked problems with this assumption and prediction, and both are linked to issue of ‘distribution’, taken here in two senses: the socio-economic and political as well as the technical dimensions of food distribution. On the one hand, the existence of 1 billion hungry people is not due to lack of food, but due to the inability of these people to buy and access food. At least for now, this is the case. It is likely to change soon as population expands and agroecological resource base depleted. We would certainly need production and productivity increases. On the other hand, there is a serious problem about the massive food waste from the site of production to the dining table. The UN CFS HLPE 2011 Report placed it at around 30 percent of total food produced (Toulmin et al. 2011). Hence, producing more food does not necessarily mean actual food for all.

Moreover, initial evidence demonstrates that land deals are not always about producing food. The non-food aspect of land deals is quite significant, and comes in a variety of forms such as the vast tracts of lands for conservation, carbon offset arrangements (e.g. REDD+), and industrial tree plantations. Many of the conventional food crops are no longer always and automatically used as food, as they become part of the emerging complex of ‘flex crops’ many of which ended up or might end up being

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<sup>4</sup> Of course there are places where there are indeed available marginal lands – that are not actually agroecologically marginal, but are in fact fertile ones. These can be found for example in Soviet Central Eurasia. These are abandoned, taken out of production, but not inhabited lands. Visser and Spoor (2011: 300) argue: ‘According to the World Bank’s calculations, only Brazil and Sudan as individual countries have more potential land available in terms of non-forested, non-cultivated land suitable for rainfed production. Of course, Russia has much more fertile farmland with more precipitation than a country like Sudan, thus representing a much larger potential increase in production. Furthermore, Russia together with Ukraine and Kazakhstan took almost 23 million hectares of arable land out of production in the 1990s, representing the largest reduction worldwide in recent history (FAO/EBRD 2008). Of this area at least 11 to 13 million hectares consists of non-marginal lands which could be brought into production without major ecological constraints (2008, 2).’

used a biofuels. The very nature of flex crops makes it impossible to pin down how many food stuff (or, indeed feedstocks) ended up being used as food, as animal feed<sup>5</sup>, or biofuels – making it difficult to track down how much percent of the recent land deals are involved in food and non-food production. But one thing is certain: the percentage of non-food land deals is enormous – in Latin America and the Caribbean, as it is elsewhere in various parts of the world, and this trend continues. Hence, a *food crisis-centric* analysis of the current land grabs is misleading. But certainly we would need to raise the productivity level of agricultural production, minimize food waste (partly through improved technology and infrastructure) and expansion of cultivated land area. Historically, agricultural land area has expanded (see Table 4).

Table 4: Historical land expansion and recent land demand

Region	Cultivated land area (millions of ha)			Annual change (%)	
	1961	1997	2007	1961-1997	1997-2007
Sub-Saharan Africa	134.6	192.2	218.5	1.60	2.63
Latin America	102.6	160.9	168.0	1.62	0.71
East Asia & Pacific	183.9	235.7	262.8	1.44	2.72
South Asia	197.9	212.9	213.5	0.41	0.06
Oceania	34.0	42.8	46.7	0.25	0.38
Middle-East & North Africa	77.9	91.3	89.0	0.37	-0.23
Eastern Europe& C Asia	291.5	263.6	241.7	-0.77	-2.19
Western Europe	99.4	86.8	83.5	-0.35	-0.32
North America	235.3	232.5	225.3	-0.08	-0.72
World total	1357.1	1518.6	1549.0	4.49	3.04

Source: Adapted from Deininger (2011).

Notes: Cultivated area is land under arable or permanent crops. Land demand 2009 refers to intended or actual land acquisitions based on media reports.

During the past fifty years, agricultural land expansion grew significantly, from 1.36 billion ha in 1961 to 1.55 billion ha in 2007 in the world. For the same period, it was from 103 million ha to 168 million ha of land in Latin America and the Caribbean. Mainstream thinking tends to see that this expansion was not sufficient. More lands for cultivation are needed, in addition to the need for significant productivity increases. And these production and productivity increases are all needed *now*, resulting in a two-pronged strategy: agricultural *extensification* and *intensification* (see also Hecht 2005), as many of the recent land investments are large-scale, industrial, monocrop commercial farms and plantations – worldwide and in Latin American and the Caribbean. Of the minimum estimated ‘available marginal’ lands of 445 million ha (see Table 3, third column from the right), 28 percent of which (or 123 million ha) are in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is an important context for a closer examination of land grabbing in the region which we now turn to.

### Condition and trends in land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean

The extent of large-scale land investments in the region has witnessed a major surge during the past decade in most countries in the region. Land grabbing – broadly cast

<sup>5</sup> Animal feed in this paper is considered as non-food because its immediate use is not food for human consumption but feed to animals. Of course later people end up eating the animals. But we do not consider grass as food even when the former is perhaps the most common feed to cattle, goat or sheep.

(based on the ten defining features of land grabbing) to include foreign and domestic capital – is underway in far more countries in Latin America and the Caribbean than previously assumed – see Table 5 (and compare it with Table 1). This phenomenon occurs not only in the food sector. Land grabbing occurs in two broad sectors: within the food sector which broadly includes the food-feed-fuel complex which is marked by ‘flex crops’ and livestock, as well as in the broad non-food sector: industrial forestry, large-scale conservation, carbon offset arrangements such as REDD+, mineral extraction, among others. While land grabbing is not something new in this region, the context, condition, orientation and constellation of key players in contemporary land grabs are significantly different from the previous waves. For one, the way the region and individual countries are inserted into the global food regime during the first and second regimes that were anchored by empires in the North Atlantic (in the classic formulation by Friedmann and McMichael 1989, see also McMichael 2009, Pechlaner and Otero 2008, van der Ploeg 2008) is different from the current global food-energy regime which seems to be headed towards a more polycentric set up and multi-directional flows of food products. Yet, the region shares with other regions of the world one common context, i.e. neoliberal globalization (Akram Lodhi and Kay 2009, Gwynne and Kay 2004), as well as key policy contexts such as North-based biofuels mandatory blending policies (Gillon 2010, Hollander 2010, Franco et al. 2010) that triggered speculations of a massive biofuel market, particularly in Europe, further fanning the flames of land grabbing.

*The extent of recent large investments in land is wider in terms of geographic scope than previously assumed.* Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay are the countries usually cited as sites of recent large-scale land acquisitions. However, empirical data from the FAO seventeen country studies demonstrate that large-scale land acquisitions, broadly cast, are present in far more countries. In fact, only Trinidad and Tobago qualifies in the category of ‘low to none’, while the rest is either in the category of medium or high, with the latter having the bigger share. We differentiate ‘large-scale land investments’ with ‘land grabbing’, following the FAO definition. The categories of high, medium and low are in terms of large-scale land investments, not necessarily land grabbing (see first three columns from the left of Table 5; see also FAO 2011: 22, Table 1). This is what we have mentioned earlier about the relatively broad framing of the FAO study in terms of looking into processes of land market dynamics and agricultural transformation. There is indeed a renewed interest in agricultural investment across the region.

Table 5: Presence of land grabbing in selected Latin American and the Caribbean\*

Presence of recent large investments in land			Presence of land grabbing (domestic & foreign capital)			Country with major land investors into other countries in the region
High	Medium	Low to None	High	Medium	Low To None	
Argentina Bolivia Brazil Chile Colombia Ecuador Paraguay Peru Uruguay	Costa Rica Guatemala Panama	Trinidad & Tobago	Argentina Bolivia Brazil Chile Colombia Ecuador Guatemala Paraguay Peru	Panama Mexico Nicaragua	Costa Rica Dominican Republic Guyana Trinidad & Tobago	Argentina Brazil Chile Colombia Panama Mexico Costa Rica

Mexico			Uruguay			
Nicaragua						
Dominican Republic						
Guyana						

\* Based on close reading of the seventeen country studies and the summary paper (FAO 2011) – using as analytical lenses the ten defining features of land grabbing discussed earlier in the current paper.

*The extent of land grabbing is far wider than previously assumed.* Using a broader analytical lens, we argue that ten countries are currently experiencing relatively high level of land grabbing and another three with medium extent. The ten countries where significant extent of land grabbing is underway are: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay (i.e., all in South America, except for Guatemala), while the medium-level countries are Panama, Mexico and Nicaragua (see Table 5, columns 4, 5 and 6).

The expansion of soya, sugarcane and oil palm, all flex crops, in the context of recent changes in the global food-energy regime has led to massive expansion of commercial farms and plantations for these crops in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Guatemala (see e.g., Hecht 2005). The phenomenal increase of demand for meat and other animal products (Weis 2010),<sup>6</sup> as well as fruits and wines, have in turn led to the expansion of lands for livestock and fruits and vineyards in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay and Nicaragua.

The search for minerals and fossil fuel have led to large-scale mining concessions in Peru and Ecuador, while the expansion of industrial tree plantations is seen in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, Guatemala, and Guyana. Moreover, large-scale conservation projects are hallmarks of recent large-scale land acquisitions in Argentina and Chile. Refer to Table 6.

Table 6: Land grabbing by country, by (broad) sector

Country	Flex crops and other food sectors	Non-Food
Argentina	Soya, wheat, livestock, sugarcane, fruit	Tobacco, conservation
Bolivia	Soya, livestock	Forestry
Brazil	Soya, sugarcane, poultry, livestock, fruit	Forestry
Chile	Fruit, dairy, wine, seeds, poultry	Conservation, Forestry
Colombia	Oil palm, sugar beets, sugarcane, soya, rice, corn	Forestry
Ecuador	Banana, sugarcane, oil palm	Forestry, minerals
Paraguay	Soya, corn, wheat, livestock	
Peru	Fruits, vegetables, sugarcane, oil palm	Minerals
Uruguay	Soya, dairy, wheat, rice, livestock	Forestry
Mexico	Corn value chain, sugarcane, fruits, coffee	Flowers, barley, tequila
Costa Rica	Banana, pineapple, oil palm	
Guatemala	Sugarcane, oil palm	Forestry
Nicaragua	Livestock, rice, oil palm, sugarcane, citrus	Tourism, forestry

<sup>6</sup> Part of the major factors is the increasing volume of consumption of livestock products and dairy in middle income countries, especially China. In China, Philip Huang (2011) explains that historically, China's diet was on a 8:1:1 ratio (cereals: meat: vegetables). It dramatically changed during the past two decades to its current 4:3:3, in turn contributing to the dramatic changes in the global demand for animal feed and animal products.

Panama	Banana, coffee, rice, oil palm	
Dominican Republic	Sugarcane, banana, fruits, vegetables	
Guyana	Sugarcane, livestock, rice, pineapple	Forestry
Trinidad & Tobago	Sugarcane, cacao, fruits	

Source: FAO (2011)

*Land grabbing as well as land and capital (re)concentration occurs in two broad mega-sectors, namely, the flex crop complex and other food sectors as well as the broad non-food sector.* This is contrary to the casual dominant narrative that land grabs occur because of the food crisis of 2007-08 and that such are oriented to food production for export to food insecure countries. There is certainly some truth to this storyline, especially when we see some Chinese and Gulf State governments and/or companies negotiating with various governments in different parts of the world for possible land leases or contracts for food exports. But in general, what we witness in Latin America and the Caribbean is a large-scale nearly simultaneous responses across the region to the changing character and demands of the flex crop complex and other food sectors (especially livestock), the sharp increase of demands for minerals and other primary commodities (especially timber), as well as responses to policies linked to climate change mitigation strategies (conservation projects, including REDD+).

The rise of flex crops, namely, sugarcane, soya and oil palm, has been relatively significant (see Table 7 – data for South America and Central America, and look at the increase during the past decade although soya performance has been erratic in Central America). It is difficult, if not impossible, in the current context to make a clear-cut differentiation about the actual use of these crops. It is difficult for example to determine to what extent and how much lands have been converted to producing biofuels precisely because of the character of the preferred feedstocks. The actual, potential, or speculated markets for any or all of the flexible uses of these crops are likely to have rendered investments in them safer. This partly explains the preference for these crops in several countries in the region. Yet, overall, other food sectors remain quite important, most especially cattle raising. In South America, there were 347 million cattle in 2009, from 293 M in 1995; while in Central America there were 45.6 million in 2009 from 41.5 million in 1995. They are require far more land than any of the flex crops combined (see Wilkinson and Herrera 2010, Novo et al. in the case of Brazil).

Table 7: The rise of ‘flex crops’ in South America and Central America, Area harvested (in ha), 1961-2009

South America			
	Soya	sugarcane	Oil Palm
1961	259,534	2,124,775	38,700
1965	491,639	2,582,414	56,500
1970	1,443,590	2,485,528	57,081
1975	6,467,817	2,904,841	50,643
1980	11,467,985	3,623,922	83,088
1985	14,306,828	4,975,021	123,794
1990	17,725,284	5,290,929	210,906
1995	18,912,325	5,692,331	275,364
2000	24,156,087	5,995,162	341,709
2005	40,234,628	7,025,810	404,372
2009	42,792,479	9,878,744	448,313

Central America			
	Soya	sugarcane	Oil Palm
1961	9,943	500,207	22,910
1965	27,446	643,413	26,080
1970	111,844	761,258	21,986
1975	345,230	787,752	24,708
1980	155,287	882,750	35,447
1985	488,311	796,627	41,913
1990	309,996	875,047	57,197
1995	163,048	946,158	76,266
2000	85,992	1,071,684	109,430
2005	115,315	1,219,806	179,701
2009	83,444	1,231,025	239,204

Source: FAOSTAT, constructed by the authors.

Meanwhile, the share of non-food land grabs is significant. The two most important sectors in terms of actual and potential need for land are industrial tree plantation and conservation. The expansion of industrial tree plantations in the region in recent years has been dramatic (see Table 8). And while large-scale conservation occurs mainly in two countries, Argentina and Chile, the scale of individual cases (e.g. UCB deal in Argentina) and aggregate total are significant. Moreover, not included in this paper and in the seventeen country studies is the emerging trend of placing forests under the carbon-offset programs, i.e. REDD+. Such policies have important impact in terms of land control and on the livelihoods of local communities across the country (see, e.g. Osborne 2011 in the case of Mexico; see also Corbera and Schroeder 2011). Large-scale conservation, industrial tree plantations, policies such as REDD+, biofuel commercial farms and plantations, among others, are being referred to collectively as ‘green grabs’ – land grabs in the name of the environment. Increasingly, this part of land grabbing is getting integrated in the critical land grab literature, initially highlighted in a forthcoming academic collection put together by Fairhead, Leach and Scoones (forthcoming, 2012).

It is the same two categories of food-feed-fuel complex and other food sectors as well as the non-food sector cluster in the land grabs that we see in Africa and Asia, with the exception of the fact that the animal feed (soya) component of the Latin American region remains unmatched elsewhere in other regions of the world (Teubal 2006). But the creeping phenomenon of flex crops, although much more of food-fuel type, especially oil palm and sugarcane, underlies many of the land investment hotspots in Africa and Asia. Meanwhile, industrial tree plantations are equally massive in Asia and Africa (see Table 8 for regional comparisons), while large-scale conservation in Africa (see, e.g., Kelly 2011, Corson 2011) are comparable to what we see in Chile and Argentina. Some REDD+-related enclosures that are emerging in Latin America and the Caribbean but not significantly picked up in the seventeen cases studies of FAO are also becoming a particular type of ‘land grab’ as mentioned earlier. The UN CFS HLPE report on land grabbing (Toulmin et al. 2011) has similarly underscored the phenomenon of flex crops (although it was not called that way) and the importance of non-food dimension in land grabs.

*The scale and pace of land grabbing is uneven between and within countries, and investments are not always located in ‘marginal lands’.* The narrative on land deals worldwide is based on a simple assumption: that the crises of food, energy, climate

change and finance capital have a solution, and the solution lies in the existence of global agricultural land reserves (Deininger 2011, but see Borras and Franco 2010a). This is the reason for the arguments around ‘yield gaps’, among others. In land abundant countries, it is *theoretically* possible that to some extent the argument based on this assumption may hold, especially in clearing forest lands that are empty if not extremely sparsely populated, or even in abandoned fertile lands such as those in Central Eurasia (Visser and Spoor 2011). But there are hardly any land frontiers now that are empty.

Table 8: Regional Plantation Area and Increase in (Tree) Plantation Area During 2000 to 2010 (in 000 ha)

	Africa	Asia	Oceania	Europe	Caribbean	Central America	North America	South America	World
Plantation Area, 2010 (000 ha)	15409	115783	4101	69318	547	584	37529	13821	264084
Annual Increase (000 ha)	245	2855	78	401	15	16	809	376	4925
Annual Increase (%)	1.75	2.87	2.12	0.60	3.34	3.14	2.46	3.23	2.09

Source: UNEP (forthcoming, Chapter on Land) based on FAO (2011).

Moreover, studies show that land investments do not always come to such isolated lands. Instead, they tend to go where there are existing productive lands with water supply as well as proximate road network. Fruits and vineyards in Chile are concentrated in a few suitable geographic spots in the country (Echenique and Romero 2009; Kay 2002), and so as in Argentina (in San Juan and Mendoza regions). Significant expansion of sugarcane plantation in São Paulo occurs at the expense of adjacent or nearby small plots (many of land reform settlements). There is also an emergence of plantation corridors along the borders with existing infrastructures needed for such investments, suggestive of the cross border capital investments: in Paraguay along the borders with Brazil and Argentina, for example. This has in fact prompted national governments in the region to pass laws and policies prohibiting foreign investments within 50 kilometers from the borders worried of potential geo-political and national security implications of such foreign investments.

A combination of agro-ecological factors, well developed infrastructure and proximity to water sources, as well as favourable socio-political and legal conditions explains the attraction to some particular geographic places – and not always and automatically about ‘available marginal lands’. Evidence shows that ‘available marginal lands’ – i.e. marginal, under-utilized or un-used, empty or sparsely populated, geographically remote, and socio-politically and legally available lands – are not where most of the land investments around ‘flex crops’ and other food sectors occur (see Cotula et al 2009 for Africa). It seems, however, that several of the non-food-related land deals, i.e. industrial tree plantations, mining concessions, and large-scale conservation projects are carried out in places that more or less fit the profile of ‘available marginal lands’, although this cannot be said strictly for REDD+ areas (see, e.g. Osborne 2011 in the case of Mexico). In short, and overall, table-mapping the availability and location of available marginal lands and expect that land investors will follow is quite naïve (see Nalepa forthcoming, 2012).

In Africa and Asia, there is a similar pattern of land investments, which is highly uneven between and within countries – but a matching exercise between available zoned marginal lands and emerging enclaves of land investments do not always produce a picture of what has been promised officially. Indeed, the non-food sector such as industrial tree plantations and large-scale conservations tend to be located in places that are more or less close to the profile of marginal lands. One can think of the 300,000 ha Pheapimex eucalyptus industrial tree plantation in Pursat, Cambodia (Borras and Franco 2011) which is a sparsely populated and not significantly farmed large chunk of land, or many large-conservation areas in Africa (see Kelly 2011, Corson 2011). But it does not mean that these are always absolutely empty and available. However, similar to the trend in Latin America and the Caribbean, sites of flex crops tend to be located in areas that do not fit the marginal lands profile. On one end of the picture here is the case of Procana in Mozambique where taken in isolation this chunk of land may fit the marginal land profile, but when taken in relation to its immediate environment (adjacent to a dam) then, it is certainly not within the marginal lands category (Borras, Fig and Monsalve 2011). On the other extreme, are lands that are completely highly productive, and were simply being converted to new production orientation in the context of renewed land rush, as in some cases of good lands in Tamil Nadu converted to jatropha production (Ariza et al. 2010), or indeed, highly productive vegetable farms destroyed to give way to extensive open pit mining exploration, as in a particular case of a Brazilian mining project in the province of Tete in Mozambique.

Internal lands grabs that occur in India (see Levien 2011) and China partly due to rapid and massive urban sprawl and the mushrooming of special economic zones are carried out by expropriating highly productive, usually irrigated food-oriented farms.<sup>7</sup> More generally, and elsewhere, there were, and are, attempts for sure at locating flex crops in marginal lands. But where this was carried out, the outcomes were not always promising commercially. This is indeed the case of jatropha, a crop thought to grow in marginal conditions. But attempts in many places to grow this weed in such conditions did not result in commercially viable outcomes, such as in the case of a South Korean investment in Saranggani province, Philippines (Borras and Franco 2011), Kenya (Hunsberger 2010), and indeed in many places in Tamil Nadu, India (Ariza et al., 2010). To make this viable, farmers had to use irrigation as in the case of Tamil Nadu (Ariza et al. 2010), thereby directly competing water use and allocation with the food sector.

Furthermore, there is a similarity of broad patterns in terms of geographic spread of land investments between and within countries. In several countries, national governments carved out big chunks of lands and assigned these for large-scale land concessions. This is the case of Ethiopia where large-scale foreign land investments were

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<sup>7</sup> In order to understand partly why China is looking for distant lands beyond its borders to secure more food, among others, it is relevant to analyse not just the changing diet of middle class Chinese, but to look into the internal pressure on domestic arable land as well. In China, there was already a significant spatial shift of land use since the 1980s into the mid-2000s, as analysed by You, Spoor, Ulimwengu and Zhang (2010:12): ‘In the traditional “granary” of China, intensification of production was the only strategy to dramatically increase production, the consequence of which is substantial negative environmental stress represented by high degrees of soil salinity and water shortages. However, the shift towards even more environmentally fragile zones, which have relatively more land but more limited water resources, might rapidly increase the environmental stress—in particular water availability—in these areas. Since most grain production in China is dependent on irrigation, this observed shift will put heavy pressure on the existing resource base.

in the lowland, sparsely populated areas of Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz and South Omo (Lavers forthcoming 2012, Makki forthcoming 2012), or the pre-mapped areas for the ‘Economic Land Concessions’ (ELCs) in Cambodia. It is similar to mapping and allocating ‘special economic zones’ (see, e.g. Levien 2011) – only the scale here is massive and land use change quite extensive. By comparison, we can think of the allocation of the Amazon and the Cerrado in Brazil as key sites for land investments, the Chaco region in Paraguay and Bolivia, and so on.

*In addition, and in terms of national policies in favour of, or trying to limit, large-scale (foreign) land deals, evidence suggests that such policies do not automatically translate into intended outcomes.* Nearly all governments in South America (and Mexico) have existing laws and/or have recently passed new policies and laws prohibiting, controlling, or regulating foreign ownership of lands, the most recent to date is Peru. (This sounds contradictory because liberalization and foreignization of capital and enterprises has been underway and in full swing in the region.). This is a glaring distinction from Central America and the Caribbean where there is none, except for Guatemala. In South America, this issue is such a hot topic at present, reflecting the controversial and sensitive nature of the issue of foreignization of land. Yet despite the existence of laws and policies prohibiting or regulating foreign land ownership of land, it is in these countries where massive land investments, foreign and domestic, have been opened up during the past decade. In contrast, Nicaragua is perhaps one of the countries in the region with the most foreign land investment friendly liberal laws and policies – and yet, it has been among the countries that were least successful in attracting foreign large-scale land investments. It seems that a combination of agroecological, economic, socio-political and legal conditions, as well as the extent to which national governments market their lands to investors explains why some land investors acquire lands in one country and not in another.

In some ways, and by comparative glances, the trend in South America is different from other key sites of land grabbing in Asia, Africa and former Soviet Eurasia. In these places, initiatives are done to further liberalize foreign ownership of land or direct production operation in countries where this was not yet the case. In the Philippines, the current initiative in the national parliament to amend the Constitution is principally aimed at doing just this. But there are no known major initiatives or trends elsewhere that seek to curtail foreign ownership or control of land as direct reaction to the surge of large-scale land investments in the way we are witnessing in South America.

#### **4. Key drivers and actors of the regional land rush**

As discussed earlier, the key drivers of the current land rush in Latin America and the Caribbean are multiple and diverse but can be clustered into four broad categories. First, the changing character and increasing demand from the global food-feed-fuel complex is a key driver in the current land rush (Graziano da Silva et al. 2010). This can be seen partly from the continuing expansion of the livestock (especially cattle) sector, as well as partly from the expansion of flex crops, particularly soya, sugarcane and oil palm in several countries in the region. In addition, this is also seen in the changing patterns of consumption, i.e. sharp increases in quantity and changing preferences, especially from middle income and fast urbanizing countries within and outside the region towards meat, animal products (dairy), fruits and wine (Weis 2010). This changed (external) context has

largely accounted for the consolidation of fruits and wines sectors in Chile, has pushed for the continuing expansion of lands devoted to livestock production across the region, and has transformed the region into the world's main producer of soya. Biofuels has been a key driver within the food-feed-fuel complex, and has been the principal reason for the consolidation and expansion of sugarcane and oil palm expansion the region (see, Franco et al. 2010, Wilkinson and Herrera 2010).

Second, sharp increases in demand for minerals and forestry products from middle income countries within and outside region and from the BRICS have resulted in the expansion of extractive industries that require the capture or control of lands. Peru and Ecuador stand out as key areas of mineral extractive industry expansion (Bebbington et al. 2009), while several countries have witnessed rapid and massive expansion of industrial tree plantations. Third, policies broadly linked to various responses to environmental crisis and climate change have led to the enclosure of vast tracts of lands in the region. Argentina and Chile are two countries where large-scale conservation projects have been carried out. Across the region, REDD+, under certain conditions, is emerging to be an important driver in land grabs, but as mentioned earlier, this has not really been examined in any significant way in the seventeen country studies by FAO.

Fourth and finally, the recent financial crisis has perhaps partly made investments in land, especially flex crops, safer. This can be seen partly in the number of companies whose origins and sectors are not that clear and established, and where headquarters are located in known tax havens, such as Panama and Cayman Islands (see Table 5). Whether or not and to what extent this has led to or will lead to speculative land investments remain to be seen.

In comparative perspective, land investments in Latin America (in flex crops, other food sectors especially livestock, or industrial tree plantations) seem to be significantly different from their counterparts in Africa, as well as parts of Asia and former Soviet Eurasia. In the beginning of 2011, up to 70 percent of the lands acquired recently and allocated through large-scale land investments have not seen any progress in actual production (Deininger 2011, Cotula forthcoming, 2012). Yet, the four clusters of key drivers in Latin America and the Caribbean are the same as those found to be responsible for the land rush in Africa, Asia and former Soviet Eurasia. This is more or less the same set of key drivers identified and examined in the UN FCS HLPE land grab report (Toulmin et al. 2011).

In addition, and for our purposes, key actors active in the region can be usefully categorized into five, namely, international investors, (Trans)Latina investors, domestic or national capital, finance companies, and the central state (see Table 9).

#### *International investors*

The 'international investors' category pertains to those who are originating largely from outside Latin America and the Caribbean. They can be governments or private transnational corporations (TNCs). Governmental investors in this category are not that significant in the region. There have been recent negotiations between the governments of Gulf States, China, South Korea, and Japan for possible land acquisitions via a variety of arrangements, but nothing significant has been clinched in this regard, at least not in the scale of these governments' involvement that we see in Africa, Asia and former Soviet Eurasia (see Table 9)

Table 9: Selected land investors in Latin America and the Caribbean (partial)

Countries of origin of foreign investors	Countries active in
International	
Gulf States	Argentina, Brazil
China	Argentina, Brazil
United States	Colombia, Peru, Mexico
European countries	Colombia, Peru, Uruguay, Mexico
South Korea	Argentina, Brazil
Japan	Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador
(Trans-)Latina	
Argentina	Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay
Brazil	Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile
Chile	Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru
Colombia	Bolivia, Peru

Source: FAO seventeen country studies, plus the summary paper (FAO 2011)

Conventional TNCs are currently entrenched in the region, and to a significant extent engaged in land investments. They originate from countries such as the United States, Canada, Spain, Portugal, Italy and others (see Table 9). For a more detailed country case, Brazil becomes quite interesting (see Tables 10 and 11) because while it is increasingly becoming involved in land investments outside Brazil, it is also host to many foreign land investments itself. More generally in the region, these international investors are engaged in flex crops, other food sectors as well as in the non-food land-oriented ventures. On the one hand, they are engaged *directly* in land acquisition as in the case of United Colours of Benetton (UCB) that has acquired nearly a million ha of conservation land and for sheep raising in Argentina, or the large-scale Patagonia conservation in the same country (the China Heilongjiang Beidahuang State Farms Business Trade Group has also recently announced an investment of US\$ 1.5 billion to farm 330,000 ha in Patagonia), banana TNCs in several countries, and so on. On the other hand, they are engaged *indirectly* through supermarket companies that control value chain such as a number of companies from the United States that are deeply entrenched within the Mexican and Central American food sector (Reardon and Berdegúe 2002). ‘Commodity grabs’ or ‘value chain capture’ might be a useful concept to describe this creeping capture of value and profit through the chain. Other international investors of course are linked in a variety of ways to the region’s agricultural sector, such as through *trade* that links European, American and Chinese buyers of soya to Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil, or fruits and wine from Chile, ethanol from Brazil, sugarcane from Guatemala. Others are linked through special *climate change mitigation strategies* such as ‘carbon offset’ arrangements through REDD+

Table 10: Number and area of rural estates owned by foreigners in Brazil, as of May 2010

State	Number of Estates	%	Area (ha)	%
Rondônia	119	0.35	29,242.00	0.67
Acre	26	0.08	13,799.68	0.32
Amazonas	307	0.89	232,021.68	5.33
Roraima	66	0.19	27,729.49	0.64

Pará	1,143	3.33	235,628.39	5.42
Amapá	15	0.04	6,228.00	0.14
Tocantins	181	0.53	109,517.18	2.52
Maranhão	184	0.54	70,135.35	1.61
Piauí	82	0.24	58,770.32	1.35
Ceará	401	1.17	34,734.45	0.80
Rio Gde Norte	128	0.37	20,806.69	0.48
Paraíba	248	0.72	6,828.47	0.16
Pernambuco	368	1.07	9,667.19	0.22
Alagoas	101	0.29	13,577.66	0.31
Sergipe	81	0.24	3,439.45	0.08
Bahia	2,192	6.38	368,888.05	8.48
Minas Gerais	2,639	7.68	491,548.57	11.30
Espírito Santo	304	0.88	19,770.66	0.45
Rio de Janeiro	2,110	6.14	85,284.78	1.96
São Paulo	12,291	35.76	491,437.42	11.30
Paraná	5,130	14.93	299,061.84	6.88
Santa Catarina	1,290	3.75	54,605.77	1.26
Rio Gde Sul	1,895	5.51	113,801.07	2.62
Mato Grosso Sul	781	2.27	473,325.65	10.88
Mato Grosso	1,229	3.58	844,279.92	19.41
Goiás	843	2.45	230,629.91	5.30
Distrito Federal	217	0.63	4,314.36	0.10
<b>Brazil Total</b>	<b>34,371</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>4,349,074.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Sauer and Leite (forthcoming, 2012) based on INCRA, May 2010. Re-worked by the authors.

Table 11: Origin of the capital invested in land in Brazil, 2010

Country	Area (ha)	%	%*
Portugal	1,030,119.42	23.68	36.95
Japan	432,469.84	9.94	15.51
Italy	256,145.06	5.89	9.19
Lebanon	172,696.63	3.97	6.19
Spain	127,499.12	2.93	4.57
Germany	123,667.19	2.84	4.44
Netherlands	114,189.29	2.62	4.10
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>2,787,713.56</b>		
Others	530,927.01	12.21	-.-
Inexistent Data	1,208,690.22	27.79	-.-
Invalid Data	352,598.26	8.11	-.-
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.349.002,04</b>	<b>100,00</b>	

Source: Sauer and Leite (forthcoming, 2012) based on INCRA, May 2010. Re-worked by the authors.

It is important to examine the constellation of international investors involved in the region today within the context of an emerging polycentric food-energy regime – in

contrast to previous food regimes anchored by empires on either side of the North Atlantic (Friedmann and McMichael 1989, McMichael 2009). The current trend suggests of multiple centers of power, a more diverse range of key international actors within the governance structure of the food-energy complex, both sectorally and geopolitically. *Sectorally*, what we witness is not only the conventional food-feed TNCs involved in agricultural input-output markets (Teubal 1995). TNCs involved in the region today include unconventional actors including oil corporations, auto conglomerates, biofuel companies, and so on, reflecting the changed global food-energy regime. *Geopolitically*, we are witnessing not only North Atlantic-based TNCs and empires, but a far more diverse range of actors, namely originating from the BRICS and several middle income countries (MICS) – both within and outside Latin America and the Caribbean. It is not difficult to surmise that the implications of this changed global configuration to formal and informal rules in the governance of production, distribution and consumption within the food-feed-fuel complex, other food sectors, and non-food sectors examined here is far-reaching.

In comparison, the significance of international investors from outside the region, and the changed character of these actors as discussed above, is broadly similar to what we witness in Africa. However, the overall role of international investors in terms of *direct* involvement in land grabs is far more widespread in Africa and former Soviet Eurasia than in Latin America and the Caribbean. But compared to Southeast/East Asia which is marked by significant intra-regional transnational investments, the role played by international investors from outside the region is probably much wider in Latin America and the Caribbean. But in all regions mentioned, it is likely that they all share the same situation where land grabs are significantly linked to international investors' world through a variety of *indirect* ways: e.g., massive expansion of the Indonesian oil palm is partly because of anticipation of increasing market in Europe, which is a similar case in Colombia and Guatemala where oil palm expansion is significant.

#### *(Trans)Latina investors*

Following the discussion above, one of the most important changes in the global food-energy system and the phase of capitalist development today is the rise of powerful regional economic players seen in the emergence of the BRICS. Equally important is the rise in significance of several middle income countries (MICs) in these regions. This has resulted in a situation where perhaps an equally important land investors in the region are not the conventional international companies (TNCs), but are (Trans-)Latina Corporations (TLCs). The latter are of two types: a company with single origin in terms of nationality (Latina), and an alliance of two or more nationals (Trans-Latina). Either type may have some tie up with international finance. Either type can be in the form of either natural or juridical person. For example, many Brazilian farmers buy up or lease lands in Paraguay to produce soya or engage in livestock raising, creating recurring tensions between the locals and the Brazilian farmers. Or, many Brazilians have ended up owning significant quantity of lands in Bolivia – a trend that started much earlier, but got more momentum in recent years and the emerging production orientation has been directly linked to the changed global context (Mackey 2011). See Table 12 where it is shown that 43 percent of total soya production in Bolivia is under the hands of non-Bolivians. Refer to Tables 13 and 14 for Chilean companies operating elsewhere in the

region. The Chilean company CELCO's industrial tree plantation operations has 26 percent outside Chile (in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, for a total of 259,000 ha), while the Chilean company MININCO has 38 percent of its industrial tree plantation operations outside Chile (in Argentina and Brazil, for a total of 114,000 ha).

Table 12: Bolivia – Change in Land Area (ha) under Soybean Production by Producer Origin (1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 summer seasons)

Producer Origin	1994		1999		2004		2009	
Bolivians	86,760	36%	131,760	26%	189,700	32%	301,715	43%
Brazilians	19,075	8%	166,700	33%	185,500	31%	175,886	25%
Mennonites	103,490	43%	142,330	28%	145,800	24%	113,116	16%
Argentineans	-		-		-		70,480	10%
Japanese	27,700	11%	37,800	7%	40,500	7%	32,044	5%
Others	4,768	2%	30,450	6%	40,500	7%	7,090	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>241,793</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>509,040</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>602,000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>700,331</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: (a) data may not total due to rounding errors in source data; Source: Mackey (2011)

Table 13: Area of land and plantations by the Chilean company CELCO

Countries	Total area of land (ha)	Total area of forest plantations (ha)
Chile	1,099,846	736,000
Argentina	257,722	129,000
Brazil	126,616	67,000
Uruguay	126,786	63,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,610,970</b>	<b>995,000</b>

Source: FAO (2011)

Table 14: Area of land and plantations by the Chilean company MININCO

Country	Total area of property (ha)	Area of forest plantations (ha)	Area for 'plantar' (ha)	Area for other uses (ha)
Chile	716,590	498,000	33,326	185,264
Argentina	94,283	65,164	2,724	26,395
Brazil	213,592	94,806	31,160	87,626
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,024,465</b>	<b>657,970</b>	<b>67,210</b>	<b>299,289</b>

Source: FAO (2011)

Yet, it is not an issue of mere presence or absence of a powerful region-based player. It is also quite uneven between regions. Brazil to Latin America and the Caribbean is different from South Africa to Africa is different from Russia to former Soviet Eurasia. In terms of scale of investments, intra-regional/transnational investments are far more extensive and vibrant in Latin America and the Caribbean than the one we witness in Africa (see Hall forthcoming, 2012 for comparison) or the one in former Soviet Eurasia (see Visser and Spoor 2011 and Visser, Mamanova and Spoor forthcoming 2012 for comparison). It is comparable to Southeast/East Asia where we can include China and other key players: South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Singapore (Borras and Franco 2011). What this implies in terms of future trajectories of intra-regional production, trade and consumption – as well as governance – remains to be seen and will require further empirical research.

Moreover, the preponderance of MICS within a region also does seem to matter. MICS are not that common in Africa, but are quite common in Latin America and Southeast Asia. This partly differentiates the intra-regional trajectories in land investments between and within regions. The extent and character of MICS deploying key land investors within the region are very comparable between Latin America (Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, Costa Rica, in addition to Argentina) and Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand). Vietnamese companies crossing borders to forge land deals in Cambodia and Laos (Kenney forthcoming, 2012), or Thai companies in Cambodia and Burma, or Malaysian companies in the Philippines (Borras and Franco 2011) have some resonance with Brazilians going to Paraguay, Chileans to Argentina, Costa Ricans to Nicaragua, and so on. Again, what this implies for future trajectories of agrarian transformation and governance remains to be seen and will require further empirical research.

#### *National/domestic investors*

Despite all the talks about the significance of foreign land investors and foreignization of land, it is constant across Latin America and the Caribbean that national and domestic elites (landlords and capitalists) remain the most important investors in land and agriculture, including in the recent ventures linked to the changed global context. In several investments involving international and (Trans-)Latina companies, involvement by nationals remain common and significant. In some cases, the differentiation between foreigners and local is blurred especially when it involves naturalized and/or dual citizens, as in the case of Brazilians or Japanese in Bolivia (Mackey 2011). Whether and to what extent diaspora from outside the region plays an important role in 'foreign land investments' remains to be researched (e.g. to what extent the Portuguese land investors in Brazil are part of diaspora – see Table 11). This phenomenon is significant in some countries elsewhere outside the region, such as Ethiopia (Cotula forthcoming, 2012). Meanwhile, effort at controlling foreign ownership of land in most countries across Latin America has perhaps partly led to corporate joint ventures in order to circumvent the property ownership limitation by recruiting a local company that can own land as partner in the enterprise.

The key importance of domestic or national capitalists in the land deals in the region is similar to other regions. In Africa, Cotula (forthcoming, 2012) explains as follows:

In Ethiopia, for example, domestic investors account for over 60% of the land area acquired in the period 2004-2009. The World Bank study found that nationals accounted for 97% of the land area acquired in Nigeria, and for about half or more in Sudan (78%), Cambodia (70%), Mozambique (53%) and Ethiopia (49%) – though only 7% in Liberia (Deininger et al, 2011). Similarly, Faye et al (2011) found that in Senegal acquisitions by nationals accounted for 61% of acquired land areas.

This is very similar situation in Southeast Asia. Indonesian capital is most dominant in the oil palm sector in Indonesia, and so as Malaysian capital in Malaysia's palm sector. Of course many of this national capital are in turn linked to transnational finance capital. Perhaps the largest recent formal land allocation (at least largest on paper) in the Philippines is the San Miguel Corporation-Kuok Company land deal where the Philippine

government formally allocated one million ha of land to these two companies – one Filipino and the other Malaysian – to develop these ‘empty, marginal lands’ into productive farms for food security (which turned out to be not marginal lands – see Borras and Franco 2011). They promote cassava for ethanol and oil palm in turn. In another case, in Isabela province in the Philippines, since foreign companies cannot own lands in the country, an alliance of Taiwanese, Japanese and American companies forged a joint venture with a local company that in turn leased lands from land reform beneficiaries in order to establish the country’s largest sugarcane ethanol plantation (Franco, Carranza and Fernandes 2011, Borras and Franco 2011).

Yet this phenomenon is not to be taken out of context. In most places, it is the domestic elites that formally control land, but that subsequent investments are (in)directly linked to foreign investors or to the broader changing global contexts. The case of Isabela in the Philippines mentioned above is classic: domestic partners were recruited to directly take charge of land acquisition and consolidation, and the foreign companies take direct control of everything else beyond that (Franco, Carranza and Fernandes 2011). The case of Kampong Speu Sugar Corporation in Cambodia that is Cambodian owned, engaged in the land grab of 20,000 ha of land, linked with a Thai capital to produce and export sugar to Europe. In short, it is important to recognize that domestic elites are directly involved in a principal way and on most occasions worldwide, and they remain in greater control of land in the current global land rush – but this does not diminish in any way the critical role played by foreign investors in contemporary land grab. The key is to establish the direct and indirect ways in which domestic and international investors are entwined in the current context.

### *Central State*

Attention has been focused on foreign private companies and foreign governments and their role in the global land rush. The role played by the central state is often (inadvertently) ignored or de-emphasized. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the role of the central state in either promoting (entry of foreign) land investments, or promoting national companies to invest abroad has been critical. All States are engaged in systematic policy and administrative initiatives around the notion of ‘available marginal’ lands, and its role in facilitating land investments in these spaces include some, or all, or a combination of the following: (i) invention/justification, (ii) definition, reclassification, quantification, (iii) identification, (iv) acquisition/appropriation and (v) re-allocation/disposition of these lands to transform such scarce resources that are within the legal control of central states into their counterparts for renewed large-scale land-based investments. Here, technical re-mapping and land use reclassification is an important instrument employed by the state (Nalepa forthcoming, 2012). Concrete example of state active involvement in ways explained above is the Colombian state and Afro-Colombian territory (Cardenas forthcoming, 2012; Grajales forthcoming, 2012). In some cases, coercion accompanies state’s effort at territorialisation, enforcement of its sovereignty and authority, as well as its ardent support for private capital accumulation – as in the case of present Colombia (Ballve 2011, Grajales 2011) and in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean during the recent decades (Kay 2001). It is easy to surmise in the case of Latin America and the Caribbean that this practice of ‘state simplification’ (Scott 1998) is quite common especially since many land deals involved opening new

land frontiers. The cases of massive industrial tree plantations and large-scale conservations definitely involve the key role of the state, as well as in brokering REDD+ contracts.

The role played by the central state in Latin America and the Caribbean is quite similar in all other regions of the world despite differences in contexts. Levien (2011) has examined the role played by the state in the context of debates around accumulation by dispossession by looking at Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in India, arguing about the central role of the state in terms of appropriating lands from peasants often invoking the state's Constitutional right to expropriate lands for 'public good'. Examining the case of land grabs in Ethiopia, Lavers (forthcoming, 2012) argues that host countries are not passive and hapless victims as some reports would suggest. States are maneuvering actively to exploit emerging opportunities opened up by the changes in the global political economy that allows them to exploit their natural resources, especially land. It is the Ethiopian state that pro-actively re-classified and re-zoned its land, and reallocated huge chunks as free zones for (foreign) land investments. This is the same case in the state re-mapping of Cambodia, identifying vast tracts of lands that are allocated for Economic Land Concessions or ELCs.

Whether in the context of the original Marxist formulation of a stage towards capitalist development ('primitive accumulation'), or the David Harvey (2003) reformulation of a continuing process of 'accumulation by dispossession', or the Polanyian critique of privatizing nature (Polanyi 1944), and in other radical eclectic radical scholarships – the centrality of the role of the state in private capital accumulation process is quite firmly established in scholarly literature. It is unfortunate that during the opening salvo of research in current global land grabbing this has been inadvertently de-emphasized, although it is rapidly getting corrected in emerging scientific literature (see, e.g. Peluso and Lund 2011, Borras et al. 2011).

Stepping back, and looking at the bigger picture, there emerge three broadly distinct but interlinked areas of state actions that are relevant in understanding contemporary land grabs, namely, 'state simplification process', assertion of sovereignty and authority over territory, coercion through police and (para)military force to enforce compliance, extend territorialisation, and broker for private capital accumulation. First, in order to administer and govern, states engage in simplification process to render complex social processes legible to the state. The creation of cadastres, land records and titles are attempts at simplifying land-based social relations that are otherwise too complex for state administration (Scott 1998). This requires state's official powers at recording land relations and (re)classifying lands. This in turn brings us back to the notion of 'available marginal, empty lands': if it is not formally privatized, then it is state-owned; if official census did not show significant formal settlements these are empty lands, if the same official census did not show significant farm production activities, these are un-used lands. Currently, many of land investments in Latin America and the Caribbean are in frontier regions, encroaching into indigenous peoples' territories as in the case of Afro-Colombians (Cardenas forthcoming, 2012) or taking in grasslands such as the case of the Cerrado in Brazil (Oliveira 2011).

Second, beyond the economic benefits of land investment, the latter is also viewed as an essential building block for state-building process where sovereignty and authority are extended to previously 'non-state spaces' (Scott 1998). Again, a good

example in the region is the Afro-Colombian case (Ballve 2011). Third, coercion through police and (para)military force to enforce compliance to state simplification project, as in the case of Colombia (Grajales 2011). Finally, this task of the state is carried out to a large extent on behalf of the dominant classes of capital, transnational or domestic, though it is always accompanied by the other task of the state to maintain a minimum level of political legitimacy – making accumulation and legitimation uneven and contested, across geographic spaces and over time (Fox 1993, ch. 2). This is the case across Latin America and the Caribbean, as it is elsewhere.

In short, the critical role of the central state in the current land rush makes the issue of land grabbing a murky issue: legally and technically speaking, taking what is yours is not always considered ‘grabbing’. Taking a class analytical lens to view relational state-capital links (Bernstein 2010) as well as politicizing and historicizing our analysis of state-society relations around land and territorial contestations constitute an initial step towards a better understanding of the role of the state in contemporary global land grabbing.

## **5. Dynamics of land use change**

One of the most objected features of global land grabbing is the land use conversion from lands devoted to food production for local consumption or forestry to food and biofuels for export, as well as from small scale farming to large-scale industrial plantation. This is certainly not without solid basis, and this occurs to some extent in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, the direction of change in land use does not always fit the dominant critical narrative.

One phenomenon in agriculture that partly differentiates the current global land grabbing from previous waves of enclosures is the emergence of ‘flex crops’, as already mentioned multiple times earlier as well as the continuing expansion of livestock raising, especially cattle – in the global context of expansion of middle class in BRICS and MICs. The technological requirement for flex crops has been established: e.g., flex sugarcane mills, and so on. The convergence of food and energy crises, and the fusion of food and energy sectors in the global food-energy regime has partly shaped and has been reshaped by the rise of these flex crops that are in turn integral part of the changing food, feed and fuel complex. This has implications on trajectories of agrarian change, specifically land use change. The conventional notion of comparative advantage along crops may have been partly overtaken by the new notion of flex crops. The problem of investment apprehension towards boom-bust cycles in various crops may be partly solved by flex crops where one has multiple possibilities for trading partly depending on price signals or state subsidies. It is not surprising that a significant portion of renewed land investments are in these flex crops and other food sectors (livestock remain a key sector), in addition to non-flex crop commodities such as timber. We will use the notion of flex crops in taking a broader picture of land use change dynamics. A broad typology of four ideal-type directions of land use change is captured in Figure 1 and elaborated in Table 15.

Based on Figure 1 and Table 15, we see that what critics object against large-scale land investments do occur in Latin America and the Caribbean, namely, C2 which is non-food lands that include forestry and savannahs, getting converted to production sites for flex crops and other food products (fruits, livestock and others) for export. This is in addition to D2 which is the same type of lands getting converted to non-food use (timber,

carbon offset contracts, and so on) for export. For C2, examples include the Brazilian Amazon and the Cerrado which are major sites of current land rush by domestic, (Trans)Latina and international investors, or indeed much of the soya expansion in Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina, among other countries.

Figure 1. Main directions of land use change

Type A Food to Flex crops/food	Type B Food to Non-food/food
Type C Nonfood to Flex crops/food	Type D Nonfood to Nonfood

Adapted from Borras and Franco (forthcoming, 2012)

For D2, examples include many of the large-scale industrial tree plantations in Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, among others, large scale conservations in Argentina and Chile, as well the emerging carbon-related forestry captures (e.g. via REDD+) such as those in Mexico (Osborne 2011). The range of investors is similar: domestic elites, plus a significant (increasing) role played by (Trans)Latina companies, such as the example of Chilean companies involved in industrial tree plantations within and outside Chile as cited earlier. International investors are dominant in large-scale conservation.

Table 15: Character, Direction and Orientation of Land Use Change

Ideal-Type	From	To
A	Food production	Flex crops/food production
A1	Food for consumption	Flex crops/food for domestic exchange
A2	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Flex crops/food for export
A3	Food for export, monocropping & industrial farming	Food for consumption and domestic exchange, small-scale, polyculture
B	Food production	Non-food production (industrial tree plantation, conservation, REDD+, and so on).
B1	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Non-food for export
B2a	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Non-food for local use and domestic exchange, but corporate-controlled
B2b	Food for consumption, domestic exchange	Non-food local use and domestic exchange, noncorporate-controlled
C	Non-food	Flex crops/food production
C1	Non-food lands	Flex crops/food for consumption, domestic

		exchange
C2	Non-food lands	Flex crops/food for export
D	Non-food and marginal/idle lands	Non-food production
D1	Non-food lands	Non-food production for use and domestic exchange
D2	Non-food lands	Non-food for export

*Note:* shaded rows represent those types that are the object of anti-land grabbing views and political campaigns; they all represent change from local/domestic use to production for export. Food lands include lands devoted to livestock.  
*Source:* Adapted from Borras and Franco (forthcoming, 2012).

The C2 pattern of land use change in the region are similar in many parts of the world: from the massive clearing of Indonesian forest for conversion to oil palm plantations to the acquisition of second growth forest/grazing lands in Mozambique for conversion to sugarcane plantations for biofuels. The D2 pattern of land use change in the region is also not unique as it is the same case in many parts of the world: from industrial tree plantations in Cambodia to large-scale conservation projects in Africa.

However, what is different in Latin America and the Caribbean as compared to other regions in the world is that evidence tends to suggest that majority of the recent land investments did not happen by way of converting pre-existing food-oriented peasant agriculture into flex crops/food products and non-food products for export, i.e. the A2 and B1 flows (see Table 15) – or at least not in the scale that we witness in Africa and Asia as well as in China. Most country studies in the FAO study on land grabs in the region have reported along this line, with a hint of possible few exceptions, such as peasants and Afro-Colombians who were expelled from their lands in Colombia to pave the way for oil palm expansion. To date, there is an estimated 5.1 million persons were displaced and dispossessed, directly involving about 6.6 million ha of farmlands. Most, if not all, country cases reported no evidence to show that food security has been undermined to any significant extent in this region (see Table 1). Overall, much of the land investments occurred in agricultural land frontier. Hence, the heavily criticized A2 and B1 land use change directions (see Table 15), while true in many regions of the world, has not really occurred in any significant or alarming extent in Latin America and the Caribbean.

But A2, B1, C2 and D2 are not the only flows in land use change in Latin America and the Caribbean and elsewhere outside the region. While there are some potential and actual social and environmental issues in these particular flows, this may be different in others, as for example in the case of A1 or A3, with the latter in fact providing some basis for possible alternatives, including ‘food sovereignty’ alternatives based on agroecological perspectives (Altieri and Toledo 2011, Rosset et al. 2011). Other flows might be more complex and pose some dilemmas, such as B2 – B2a and B2b, where the difference is whether or not the production model is corporate-controlled. The case of competing models of alternative biofuel production in Brazil (corporate, community, corporate-community, and so on) as studied by Fernandes et al. (2010) is a good illustration of the dilemmas and contradictions in alternative production models.

Finally, the land use change dynamics shown in Table 15 should not be seen as unrelated flows. It is important to determine whether and how various flows are linked to each. For example, the expansion of cattle, food crops, soya and sugarcane in Brazil is better seen as interlinked – in political economic terms, as well as spatially and temporally – with one influencing the other’s trajectories, as empirically demonstrated by Novo et al. (2010).

## 6. Dynamics of land property and labour relations change

The seventeen FAO studies have been framed secondarily (though significantly) within the perspective of and debates around ‘foreignization’ of land property (The principal framing being the involvement of foreign governments and undermining of food security). It is certainly quite relevant and important, especially because it strikes right into the heart of what is a controversial and politically sensitive dimension of global land grabbing. The political tension in Paraguay near the border with Brazil where native Paraguayans feel aggrieved of their dispossession amidst land take over by Brazilian capitalist farmers is one example of how potentially and actually explosive this issue is in the region (the tension-filled phenomenon though of what is sometimes referred to a ‘Brasiguayos’: Brazilian commercial farmers in Paraguay is quite different from the less tension-filled Brazilian presence in Santa Cruz, Bolivia as noted by Mackey (2011). The Gulf States, Chinese and South Koreans recently controlling land in the Cerrado in Brazil (in addition to earlier foreign investors such as the Japanese) is another example.

In the context of Latin America and the Caribbean however and as mentioned earlier, the extent of international investors, especially involving foreign governments, is not as wide as it is in Africa or former Soviet Eurasia. For one, we have not seen hundreds of Chinese farmers relocating to a Latin American country to directly farm a Chinese purchased land. In addition, it is also not always the case that there is clear-cut native-foreigner animosity over ‘foreign’ ownership of land, as explained by Mackey (2011) in his study of Brazilians owning lands in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. Yet, overall, the foreignization of land property remains a politically sensitive issue, driving South American governments to formally prohibit or regulate such practice. But on its own the ‘foreignization narrative’ has major weaknesses and limitations, and can be misleading. It is also fraught with contradictions: foreignization of land is not acceptable, but foreignization of capital and investments (which ultimately indirectly captures land resources) is welcomed. This question is better seen when embedded within a broader perspective on dynamics of land property relations change.

The ‘foreignization of land’ narrative offers incomplete perspective and can be misleading in number of ways. First, there are two extreme poles in this narrative, namely, the ‘*foreign government-as-land grabber*’ and the ‘*diaspora-as-foreign-land grabber*’; both are indeed processes of foreignization.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, by narrowly defining land grabs as those land investments with direct participation by foreign government, one will end up accounting for only very small portion of the global land rush phenomenon. On the other hand, by automatically counting diaspora land purchases as land grabs may slightly deflect our analytical focus away from the relevant dynamics that we are interested in: the processes of agrarian restructuring due to recent changes in the global food-energy regime and the overall capitalist requirement for key primary commodities. It is certainly important to include these two poles in our analysis, but one should go beyond these.

Second, a foreignization narrative tends to deflect a sharper focus on the more crucial issues surrounding global land grab phenomenon, i.e. the causes, conditions, mechanisms and consequences of global land grabbing. For example, critics look at A2, B1, C2 and D2 in other regions and the role played by foreign investors in these

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<sup>8</sup> See Zoomers (2010) for related discussion.

objectionable land use change flows. Such an analysis is relevant, but it poses dilemmas and contradictions: what if it is the same land use change, but does not involve a foreign investor? – which is the case to a significant extent in various regions of the world.

Third, the foreignization narrative inadvertently focuses on a narrow section of ‘foreign’ actors or drivers or investors, i.e. (a) limited to a few ‘newcomers’: China, Gulf States and South Korea, at the expense of a comprehensive and more precise understanding of the role played by the traditional North Atlantic empires, as well as the broader role played by the rise of the BRICS and MICS, and (b) limited to governmental or corporate land grabbers at the expense of connecting to some key policy drivers, e.g. the European Union biofuel mandatory blending target that has sparked massive worldwide speculation for biofuel markets and so opening of new plantations for a variety of feedstocks (Franco et al., 2010, White and Dasgupta 2010), or the US decision to convert its corn sector to ethanol and its implications to the global food-energy regime (Gillon 2010, Hollander 2010).

Finally, the foreignization narrative in the end is strongest in terms of objecting against ‘foreign ownership of land’ in a country, that in turn partly drives recent national policy initiatives at curtailing such a phenomenon. But this happens without really addressing the logic that underpins global land grabbing as the latter continues amidst dominance of domestic elites, as in the cases of Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay or Argentina (Teubal 2009) – and elsewhere, such as Cambodia and the Philippines. Does land grab necessarily and always require foreignization of land? Conversely, does foreignization of land always imply land grab?

Instead of overly focusing on foreignization of property, in addressing changes in land property relations it is useful to look into the *character and direction* of change in social relations of property. This perspective will bring us closer to our task of trying to have a better understanding of the dynamics and trajectories of agrarian change in the midst of global land grabs. There are two key features of the dominant narrative in land grabs. One is the foreignization of spaces, as explained above. The other is the casual assumption that land grabs lead to dispossession: people are expelled from their lands. There are two broad types of land dispossession, namely, ‘dispossession through differentiation’ (which is the classic Leninist, or indeed, Chayanovian perspective) and ‘dispossession by displacement’ (Araghi 2009; see also Li 2011). Our concern in this paper is focused more on the latter than in the former. A few cases of dispossession (the latter type) certainly occur in Latin America, with perhaps Colombia as an iconic case, and some instances of smallholders getting displaced in Paraguay and Argentina. But this phenomenon of dispossession by displacement in Latin America and the Caribbean is at a scale relatively less significant, at least to date – when compared to processes of dispossession in other regions in the world, especially Africa and Southeast Asia in the general context of land grab debate, and in China and India in the form of ‘internal land grab’ (by domestic grabbers, for internal production-consumption and urban sprawl requirements). Hence, to include Latin America and the Caribbean in the sweeping conclusion of: ‘land grabs lead to massive dispossession by displacement’ is not supported by evidence.

Land property relations change is better understood from the broader perspective offered by the typology in Figure 2.<sup>9</sup> The defining principle of Type A is *redistribution* of land-based wealth and power 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 is a ‘zero-sum’ reform process although redistribution is a matter of degree, depending on the net loss of classes of landed property and the net gain of the landless and near-landless poor. The conventional notion of redistributive land reform applied only to large private lands, is the most commonly understood example of redistributive land policy. However, there are a variety of other policy measures that can change the relative shares of land held by social classes and groups. These include land restitution, share tenancy, land tenure reform, land stewardship, indigenous land rights recognition and labour reform, regardless of whether the policy is applied to private or public land. The key is to establish the degree to which land-based wealth and power is redistributed.

Type B is *distribution*. Like Type A (redistribution), the landless and near-landless working poor are beneficiaries of land-based wealth and power transferred to them. But in Type B, the original source of wealth and power is either the state or community or a private entity fully compensated by the state. This ‘positive sum’ reform process does not confiscate resources from one social class to redistribute to another and has been deployed in some cases precisely to avoid more radical redistributive policies (Fox 1993, 10). However, in other cases, this type of reform involves affirming and protecting pre-existing land access and occupancy by poor peasants whose tenure is insecure, as in many countries in Africa (Cousins 2007).

Figure 2: Flow of Land-Based Wealth and Power

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

Source: Borras and Franco (2010c)

Type C is *non-(re)distribution*, whose defining character is the maintenance of a status quo, marked by land-based inequity and exclusion. The most typical land policy here is

<sup>9</sup> The elaboration/discussion about this typology draws from a paper by Borras and Franco that is forthcoming in the *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 11(1), January 2012; see Borras and Franco (forthcoming, 2012).

‘no land policy’ which, in conditions of land-based inequities and exclusion, supports the existing distribution of land-based wealth and power. In other settings, a similar effect may be created when an existing land policy, even a redistributive land reform policy, is kept dormant ‘from above’ or becomes frozen or flounders in the course of implementation as it comes up against impediments within the state or in society or both. However, this kind of situation should not be confused with others involving active land policies that are categorically non-(re)distributive, to which we turn next.

The fourth type, Type D, is *(re)concentration*. The defining character here is that while land-based wealth and power transfers do occur, access to and control over land is further concentrated in the hands of dominant social classes and groups: landed classes, capitalists, corporate entities, state or other dominant community groups such as village chiefs. This kind of change can occur on private or public lands. The organization of control over land resources can be through individual, corporate, state or community property rights. The transfer may involve full land ownership or not. Different variations are possible, but the bottom line is the same: the beneficiaries of such transfers are dominant social classes and groups (or the state).

In the context of the typology above, the existing trend in Latin America and the Caribbean on the eve of the current land rush was away from (re)distributive land policies (Types A and B), and towards Type C (non-redistribution). When contemporary land rush in the region started to gain momentum, the trend away from Types A and B got even more consolidated, with Type C standing tall. During the same period, Type D (reconcentration) has accelerated (based on the seventeen studies by FAO). The seventeen country studies by FAO have, more generally, pointed out varying forms and degrees of (re)concentration of land ownership and land-based wealth and power through direct land grabs or agricultural value chains. Today, in many countries in the region, the Gini coefficient for land ownership remains very high. This is despite the long history of land reformism in the region (Kay 1998). The onslaught of land investments and land grabbing may even exacerbate this already problematic condition of land control.

One of the immediate effects of rising economic value of land is that it would make the already difficult (re)distributive land policies even more difficult. Private land owners’ resistance will become even stronger. State’s calculation of its control over land resources and possible dividends is likely to block, not facilitate, pro-(re)distribution (Types A and B) policy currents (Kay 1998). Today, not many countries in the region talk about conventional redistributive land reform in any vigorous and vibrant manner – and arguably, not even in the countries where some sort of land reform is still underway carried out with varying degrees of state support and excitement, namely, Brazil, Paraguay, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador. Market-led agrarian reforms were attempted in Central America as part of the 1996 Peace Accords, but with dismal outcomes (see, e.g. Gauster and Isakson 2007 for Guatemala, and de Bremond 2007 for El Salvador) as well as in Brazil (de Medeiros 2007). Auctioning state lands has been resorted to in Peru and has been heralded by mainstream economists as a good way to (re)allocate land resources for more efficient use (World Bank 2010). Formalization of titles to claimants, not necessarily along the ideological bias of conventional land reform, is favoured in some places (Eguren 2006). This is the case for example in Brazil, with the aspiration of *Terra Legal* to formalize some 300,000 homesteaders’ land claims in the Amazon, a policy which is very much calculated in the context of rising investments in agriculture

for the expansion of agribusiness into this agricultural land frontier. In the *Terra Legal* campaign individual farm size ceiling has been increasingly adjusted over time to the current 1,500 ha – which is relatively large even by Brazilian standards of family farms (Oliveira 2011).

Meanwhile, land deals do not always necessarily result in the dispossession by displacement of affected local communities. In many cases it can result in the incorporation, adversely or otherwise, of smallholders and indigenous communities into the emerging plantations and value chains (Butler Flora and Bendini 2003). While peasants may retain some access to land they increasingly have to diversify their sources of income and seek a variety of off-farm employment opportunities furthering the process of deagrarianization (Bryceson et al. 2000, Gómez 2002, Giarracca and Levy 2004, Brumer and Piñeiro 2005, C. de Grammont and Martínez Valle 2009, Edelman 2008 and 1999). In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean evidence suggests that this is likely to be the more prevalent condition and possibly the future broad trajectory.

As mentioned earlier, evidence suggests that in Latin America and the Caribbean, expulsion of peasants and indigenous peoples from their land is not the norm – save for some major pockets of cases, e.g. Colombia and Paraguay.<sup>10</sup> Much of the concern is about foreignization of land property (which we discussed above) and concentration of land and capital. For the latter, it is not much about whether or not peasants are expelled from their land, but more of question of the *terms* under which they are incorporated into the emerging flex crops complex, other food sectors (especially livestock), value chain, and other non-food land-based businesses such as industrial tree plantations or REDD+ contracts. It brings us to the useful concept of ‘adverse incorporation’ put forward by Du Toit (2004) which goes beyond questions of ‘social exclusion/inclusion’. Using the concept of ‘adverse incorporation’, we look at how and in what ways the very terms of poor people’s incorporation into the emerging land-based businesses cause their poverty and disempowerment. This is important to point out especially because a ‘catch-all’ policy prescription accompanying global land grabbing is the narrative that land investments are opportunities to be welcomed – but they have to be regulated based on some ideas of ‘codes of conduct’ (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, Deininger 2011; see Borras and Franco 2010a, 2010b, as well as Cotula forthcoming 2012, for critical views). Not expelling peasants from their lands, and incorporating them into the commercial farms and plantation enclaves either as contracted small farmers through a variety of arrangements such as contract farming or joint ventures, or as farm workers, is a key social dimension of the notion of a desirable land investment. It is at the very heart of the advocacy for the adoption of a set of principles, more specifically known as ‘Principles for Responsible Agriculture Investments’ put forward by the World Bank, UNCTAD, FAO and IFAD (World Bank et al., 2010; see also World Bank 2010, Deininger 2011).

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<sup>10</sup> It has to be pointed out in classic Marxist agrarian political economy peasants getting expelled from their lands is not bad per se – as long as they are absorbed in other sectors of the economy as labourers. The problem is when they are expelled from their lands – but that, in Tania Li’s formulation, they have nowhere else to go and no employment to gain elsewhere; they become ‘surplus’ people; ‘surplus’ in the sense that the current conjuncture of capitalist development at a given moment and space where these people are located does not need them (Li 2011). That becomes a big problem. And for Li that is one central question today in many land grabbing hotspots such as Indonesia.

Available evidence in Latin America and the Caribbean based on the seventeen country studies by FAO does not offer any conclusive insight whether and to what extent peasants and workers are being incorporated adversely. There are earlier studies about existing commercial farms and plantations employing workers not in very good terms, such as through casualization of labour, such as those we see in Chile as well as in the sugarcane sector of Brazil. Moreover, there is evidence that indirectly suggests possible adverse incorporation into the value chain, such as the Mexican food value chain controlled by US-based supermarkets (Rubio 2003, Teubal et al. 2005). This is one area that needs further scientific research in the future. However, it is most likely that it is much more *differentiated terms of incorporation*, that is, ‘adverse’, ‘favourable’ and somewhere in between. The study done by Fernandes et al. (2010) about various experiences in small-scale, community-based biofuels projects linked and not linked to large-scale industrial processors in Brazil – where some are adversely incorporated, others not – is perhaps suggestive of such diverse conditions.

This is the same situation elsewhere outside the region. For example, McCarthy (2010) studied different villages in the province of Jambi in Indonesia which is a major expansion area for oil palm. His study shows that some groups were expelled from their lands, others not; for those not expelled, they were incorporated into the oil palm sector, and some were incorporated adversely, others not. The factors that underpin socio-economic differentiation are multiple, and include pre-existing social class status, capital and access to what kinds of land, quality of labour and so on (White 1989, Kay 2006). Polarized positions on either side of the debate, either those focusing on adverse incorporation or favourable terms of insertion will surely be able to mobilize evidence to support their positions. A more systematic review of lessons from the political economy of past institutional arrangements (e.g. contract farming, joint ventures, trade agreements, and so on) in particular societies will be relevant and important to be able to assess current conditions and future trajectories for these types of development strategy (see, e.g. Little and Watts 1994).

## **7. Trajectories of agrarian-environmental change**

Bringing and linking together our analysis of dynamics of land use change and of land property and labour relations change brings us to a broader, integrated agrarian-environmental change perspective. The difficult challenge is: how can we feed the world via socially just and environmentally sustainable way? Table 16 provides another typology that can provide signposts for our analytical exploration and in putting into perspective what is happening in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as elsewhere outside that region.

The worst scenario which is hyped in the media and NGO quarters about global land grabbing is that the latter leads to situations captured in the ideal-type H (see Table 16): the accompanying land policy is for non-redistribution and/or (re)concentration, subsequent land use change do not result in greater food security to people who need it or may even undermine existing food security, and such land use change is not ecologically nurturing and might even be environmentally destructive. Cases are put forward depicting peasants who were expelled from their lands or state lands being enclosed for agribusiness purposes, alongside massive forest clearing in order to produce biofuels for

cars or timber of industries in national hotspots like Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, and Paraguay.

On the opposite pole is ideal-type A: where land policy is (re)distributive, and productive enterprises lead to food security through production model that are ecologically nurturing. The study by Rosset et al., (2011) on the Cuban *campesino-a-campesino* agroecological movement, Holt-Gimenez’s (2006) book on the Central American agroecological movement, and the recent scoping study by Altieri and Toledo (2011) about the five poles of ‘agroecological revolution’ in Latin American and the Caribbean show the existence of this alternative concept. These are real, not imagined, working alternatives. There are several difficult questions for this alternative: can it achieve the necessary scale to feed the region and the world, increase to needed level of productivity, and so on? The debate goes on.

Table 16: Possible linkages between changes in land property relations and land use

Changes in land property relations	Changes in land use (i): Food securing	Changes in land use (ii): Ecologically nurturing
A: (re)distributive	Yes	Yes
B: (re)distributive	Yes	No
C: (re)distributive	No	Yes
D: (re)distributive	No	No
E: nonredistributive/(re)concentration	Yes	Yes
F: nonredistributive/(re)concentration	Yes	No
G: nonredistributive/(re)concentration	No	Yes
H: nonredistributive/(re)concentration	No	No

Source: Borras and Franco (forthcoming, 2012)

Yet, in the real world, between ideal-types A and H there exist diverse combinations of the three key elements of land policy, food security and ecological dimension of production. These various combinations pose dilemmas and contradictions to different social classes and groups in society. For example: ideal-type B maybe acceptable to some agrarian justice advocates, but not to environmental justice advocates; conversely, ideal-type C maybe acceptable to environmental justice advocates but not to agrarian justice advocates. Meanwhile, ideal-type E may not be approved by land justice advocates, but it might have no problem gaining popularity from the broader quarters of a society. These various combinations, from B to G, occur in real life in the region, and are reflected, to varying extents, in the seventeen country studies by FAO. It is relatively easy in the context of public policy to think about ethics of development and pursue win-win scenarios: ideal-type A is clearly the uncontested win-win scenario. But perhaps the most common types are neither Types A nor H – but those in the shades of ‘gray’ -- from B to G, or combinations of these within a country. It is from this perspective that we can have a better understanding of the character of the subsequent political contestations around global land grabbing, which we will now turn to in the next section.

## 8. State-society contestations around land grabbing

States and societies are differentiated along multiple potential divides: class, gender, ethnicity, ideology, rural-urban divide, among others. States are better seen as a contested arena itself composed of a range of actors and differentiated along such potential divides. And so, while it is useful to look into inter-Ministry political dynamics, it is also equally

useful to look into social groups within ministries. Stepping back and looking at the big picture, the broader class alliances and competing ideologies at play are also important factors to look into in trying to understand the character of the state. This will help us understand why central states take a pro-active large investment friendly strategy when they do.

Meanwhile, the long tradition of agrarian political economy scholarship in Latin America and the Caribbean has taught us one basic point: that societies and local communities are not homogeneous entities. Local communities are usually differentiated – again, along class, gender and ethnicity divides, among others. The main point being made here is that to assume or casually claim that civil society groups have consensus views (often times assumed to be oppositional to land grabs) is wrong and misplaced. Moreover, to assume and casually claim that central states have coherent position and strategy towards land investments is just as problematical. But cleavages between and within states and civil society are not always to be perceived as something negative. Equally important, these cleavages open up avenues for possible contestations and mobilizations when these lead to changing political opportunity structures (Brockett 1991, Tarrow 1994, Fox 1993). This basic starting point will also frame our discussion on implications for public actions in the next section. This is an important reminder in looking into the dynamics of state-society interactions around land grabbing Latin America and the Caribbean. A few observations, largely but not solely based on the seventeen country studies, can be made.

First, there are similarities and differences of views and strategies by States across the region. It is common to all that ‘foreignization of land’ – meant here as foreigners being allowed to own land property – is politically sensitive and problematical. But in the region, there are two clusters. On the one hand, South American governments have moved, in varying ways and extents (past and current), to pass laws and policies that can prohibit or regulate foreignization of land property. On the other hand, there is no significant move like this in Central America (with the exception of Guatemala) and the Caribbean. Land renting/leasing and contract growing with foreign companies are different, and are generally welcomed by all central states across the region. Some are more successful in their campaign to attract land investors such as Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia, while others not despite highly liberalized (land) policies, such as Nicaragua.

Second, there are differentiated reactions and positions by various social groups within and between local communities. The emerging land grabs literature worldwide is dominated by terms such as ‘local communities’ or ‘local people’. They (inadvertently) imply a notion undifferentiated communities, which is problematical. More generally worldwide, local communities include landless rural labourers, poor peasants, rich farmers, local elites such as *hacenderos* in Latin America or chiefs in Africa, entrepreneurial land brokers, or corrupt petty government officials. These communities are also differentiated along gender, ethnicity, and generation. These differences also occur between communities. When a land investment comes in these local communities, it impacts differently on these various social classes and groups between and within local communities. In turn, these groups react differently to the investment: some in support, others not. This is concretely illustrated in the case of Procana sugarcane plantation in Mozambique where the project had differentiated impacts on animal herders, substance

farmers, women, older and younger community members, and relocated communities from nearby Limpopo international park (Borras, Fig and Monsalve 2011). To what extent this is true in the current context of land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean has not been significantly addressed in the FAO country studies. Yet, our guess is that it will be a similar situation. Nevertheless, further research into this angle is urgent and necessary.

Third, there are differentiated positions between organized civil society groups, partly along the actual and potential divides between labour, agrarian, and environmental justice perspectives. In general, it is rather casually assumed that organized civil society groups are opposed to land investments, and are opposed in the same way for the same reasons. Yet, civil society groups are diverse and are differentiated along multiple divides including class origin and mass base, ideology, politics, and institutional make-up including source of funds (Borras 2010, Borras, Edelman and Kay 2008). This is an important starting point in order to understand better the differentiated reactions, positions and collective actions by various civil society groups.

A land investment may be seen by a workers' trade union as a major job generating venture and it is likely to push for labour standards as a regulatory framework, while a small farmer's association may see it as a land grabbing process which might result in their dispossession and is likely to oppose it, or an environmental justice group may see it as an environmental disaster and will mobilize against it. For example, Indonesia is a hotspot in terms of massive land investments and forest clearing today is also host to key transnational civil society groups: World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and La Via Campesina. But these four international networks see the problem of massive oil palm expansion and forest clearing differently, frame demands differently, and interact with (inter)governmental institutions in variegated ways – and so their impacts on actual policy making and politics around oil palm and forest are necessarily different from one another (see, Peluso et al. 2008, Pye 2010). Moreover, a REDD+ venture may get a green light from an environmental group, but might be opposed by a peasant association partly because it partially limits, if not completely prohibits, some livelihood activities by peasants (Osborne 2011).

Hence, while land grabbing, especially the most protested scenario H (see Table 16) potentially unites agrarian and environmental justice groups, the diverse scenarios from B to G are issues that potentially divide them. This is a useful analytical handle that can help us study and understand civil society's positions with regards land investments. The seventeen studies by FAO have not particularly covered this area of inquiry in any deep and systematic way. However, there are other studies that suggest such cleavages exist, as in the case of major split within the Brazilian Landless Movement (MST) a few years ago on the issue of biofuels, and subsequent differentiated views between rural-oriented civil society groups (small farmers' association, workers' trade unions, and so on) in Brazil on the same issue, as examined in Fernandes et al. (2010). Overall, this is another issue that requires urgent research.

Fourth, there are differentiated positions between organized civil society groups and sections within local communities. Civil society groups have ideological and institutional interests that do not always reflect or dovetail with those of the various sections of local communities affected by a major land investment. Therefore, it is often that organized civil society groups take positions towards land investments that contradict

the positions of sections of local communities. For example, organized agrarian and environmental groups in the Philippines are protesting actively against the largest sugarcane biofuel plantation in the province of Isabela, denouncing it as land grabs, while the overwhelming majority of the affected sections of the local communities (many of whom are land reform beneficiaries) are not against the investment at all, although many of them would want to have better deals (Franco, Carranza and Fernandes 2011). Again, the seventeen country studies by FAO in Latin America and the Caribbean do not include in their framework such an angle of inquiry. However, there are circumstances that might suggest the existence of such cleavages. For example, in São Paulo, Brazil, organized agrarian movements and even the land reform agency INCRA have been mobilizing to try to prevent land reform beneficiaries from leasing their lands to the expanding sugarcane plantations for various reasons: ideological, political, socio-economic, organizational. But it is of public knowledge that leasing of land by land reform beneficiaries continue to occur at a significant extent and pace, and many of these individuals are, or were, members of organized civil society groups.<sup>11</sup> This is another area of inquiry that requires further research in Latin America and the Caribbean and elsewhere.

Fifth, and arguably, there is relatively weak transnational organized opposition to global land grabbing. The issue of liberal trade through the World Trade Organization (WTO) provoked massive protest worldwide in the 1990s and a little bit beyond that period. Peasant and farmer organizations across the Global South-North divide unite, and engaged in relentless, widespread, militant collective actions – connecting local, national and international initiatives (Edelman 2009). Powerful institutions paused and listened to them. They made a huge impact (Borras, Edelman and Kay 2008). If indeed global land grabbing occurs at a scale being reported in the media and civil society circles that potentially and actually expels peasants from their lands and would undermine the food security of the world, then indeed this is even graver than the WTO threat. But to date we have not witnessed a similar conflagration or even a spark of multi-level protests from the same groups of civil society organizations with scale and intensity that is anywhere close to the anti-WTO campaign. Or, indeed, not even close to the scale and intensity of the campaign against Genetically modified (GM) crops by the same groups (Scoones 2008). There are scattered mobilizations, including those in the arena of the UN Committee on Food Security (CFS). However, as is well-known, civil society groups are more effective in their collective actions when and where they combine diplomatic negotiations with militant street and farm actions, as what Via Campesina has been well-known for (Deere and Royce 2009, Borras 2008).

Sophisticated political strategy and collective actions are not particularly widespread, coherent and consistent today in the midst current global land grabbing struggle front, which is marked mainly by negotiations around the UN CFS, be at the global front or regional fronts, including Latin America and the Caribbean as well as by the usual manifestoes and reports from large, well-funded nongovernmental donors. One reason for this is that most of the sites of major land grabs are not the same sites of the organized mass base of (trans)national agrarian movements. Whether or not this will remain so, or that this might change, remains to be seen. La Via Campesina, CLOC (*Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo*), and allies are

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<sup>11</sup> Partly based on field work by Borras in Sao Paulo, in 2008. See also Monsalve et al. (2008).

organizing the first ever peasant movement-led international conference and strategizing initiative to be held in Mali on 16-21 November 2011. Whether it will lead to a major shift in collective actions towards more persistent and militant forms remains to be seen. But at least, one key ingredient for effective collective actions is present: that is, the presence of effective research and information gathering mechanisms that can inform policy advocacy and campaigns. This is in the form of several radical NGOs and think tanks working around the land grab issue, including GRAIN, Foodfirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), Focus on the Global South, and so on, that are in turn working closely with radical (trans)national agrarian movements. Again, this is another area that requires closer attention and careful research in Latin America and the Caribbean, and beyond.

### **9. Policy and political implications and challenges for future research**

The renewed state and corporate interest in land that has led to the current global land rush has in turn posed old and new issues in (trans)national governance that requires actions from state and non-state actors. Instead of a list of prescriptions regarding public action, this section raises further analytical issues and dilemmas that are important to consider in drawing up public action plans, nationally and transnationally. This is simplified in four clusters: state, international institutions, civil society organizations, and research and academic community. We also strongly suggest for those interested in possible range of options for public actions to take a careful look at the set of recommendations offered in the UN CFS High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) report on land grabs (Toulmin et al. 2011). The latter set of recommendations is more global and comprehensive, but many of which are relevant to the context of Latin America and the Caribbean.

#### *State*

Central states are key players in global land grabbing, as we have discussed earlier. As such, they will play a contradictory role in any public actions: as a key actor pushing for land investments and at the same time as a state that mediate the interest between those that promote large-scale land investments and those who oppose them, between those who accumulate lands and those who get dispossessed. There is nothing new in this, as states are always in the dilemma of maintaining a minimum level of legitimacy in governance while at the same time are required to facilitate capital accumulation (Fox 1993, ch. 2). This is likely to result in cleavages within the state: between those who tend to prioritize political legitimacy and those who prioritize capital accumulation, and such cleavages run between and within ministries and levels of governance. While this facilitates the rise of state actors who may not be keen to take on pressures from civil society groups, the same may open up spaces for more interactions between sections of state actors and civil society groups (ibid.). Attempts at looking at public actions concerning state are better grounded when taking off from this assumption. It takes the state as a contested arena, and policy making as inherently conflict-ridden.

There are some issues for discussion. First, regulating/prohibiting foreignization of land being taken up now by most governments in South America is quite understandable, and focusing one's analysis on land grabs on this issue is important.

However, such a focus skirts rather than confronts the issue of land investment and land grabbing. As such, regulating land grabbing cannot be a ‘catch-all’ state policy regarding land investments. Public action related to land policy is better off embedded within the land property relations change typology we discussed earlier. In this context, states should exert all effort not to veer towards Types C and D land policies (non-redistribution/reconcentration). These governments should establish mechanisms and policies towards Types A and B (re/distribution) where desirable and possible, especially in settings marked by high degree of inequality in land ownership, which is the case for many countries that are recipients of large-scale land investments such as Bolivia (Kay and Urioste 2007) and Colombia, as well as countries that are both recipient and origin of land investments, such as Brazil (Wolford 2010) and Chile.

Second, speaking of level-playing field, it is not fair to talk about productivity of small scale farming and large industrial scale farming without looking at the history of neglect in terms of productive investments in the small scale farming sector. It remains a central obligation of the state to provide significant investment in small scale farming sector. It is ideal if this is done along the agroecological path, partly because the corporate sector can take care of itself and should not need additional public funds. Any public investment should be geared towards achieving scenario A (see Table 16): (re)distributive land policy combined with food-securing and ecologically nurturing production models. Third, there are two central issues at the heart of land investments that states should consider: making sure that people are not expelled from their lands, but at the same time making sure people are incorporated into the emerging land-oriented ventures but not in an adverse manner. In short, states are morally obliged to avoid as best as it can sliding into scenario H (see Table 16).

### *International institutions*

By international institutions here we mean in the broadest sense to include UN organizations such as FAO, UNCTAD, UNHRC, and UNEP, international financial institutions such as the World Bank, IADB, and IFAD, nongovernmental donor organizations (including bilateral and multilateral agencies), as well as philanthropic organizations that are all involved in one way or the other in issues around land grabbing. International organizations – together and separately – historically, have played critical role in land and rural development policies in Latin America and the Caribbean, and beyond. They are all quite concerned about the potential negative implications of land grabbing, and so are actively searching for ways to deal with the phenomenon. But this circle is a highly differentiated community, by ideology and politics, among others.

There are some issues for discussion. First, there are three key policy currents all related to dealing with land grabs, namely, the RAI principles as discussed earlier, the Voluntary Guidelines as anchored by FAO, and the Minimum Human Rights Principles as advanced by the UN Rapporteur for the Right to Food Olivier de Schutter (de Schutter 2011). In the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, a strong support by the international institutions for the Voluntary Guidelines and the Minimum Human Rights Principles will a move in the right direction. This will, among others, connect well with civil society groups, especially (trans)national agrarian movements such as CLOC and La Via Campesina. Second, the UN CFS High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) report on land grab has put forward the proposal of organizing a UN observatory anchored by FAO and

linked to the Voluntary Guidelines wherein it will be made mandatory for national governments to make annual reports about land investments and their impact on local communities, food security and the environment. It will be useful if this can be explored and supported in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Third, a visible UN-anchored, possibly Voluntary Guidelines-related ‘complaints centre’ should be established to provide clear and concrete rallying point for local communities who are desperate to demand accountability. This is especially relevant in cases where people were expelled from their lands by land investors involving (trans)national companies, but that national political settings are not that supportive to their demand for accountability and reparation. This is especially relevant with the rise of non-traditional key actors in global large-scale land acquisitions coming from the ranks of BRICS and MICs, from the Gulf States to Brazil, from China to Chile, from South Korea to Argentina, from India to South Africa, and so on. The requirement for global governance has become more complex with the rise of BRICS and MICs alongside the traditional powerholders from both sides of the North Atlantic. Finally, it is important for international institutions to support efforts for direct actions by those who are most affected by land grabs, and providing them and their social movement organizations institutional arenas for engagement: ‘not about us, without us’, as a popular rallying slogan would remind us.

#### *Civil society organizations*

The challenge for organized civil society including peasant movements is enormous. It is relevant to put forward some issues for discussion. First, following the typology on land policy, there are two broad struggle fronts where organized civil society groups must simultaneously engage, namely, *struggle against dispossession* and *struggle for (re)possession*. Land grabbing that expels peasants from their lands require coherent struggles against dispossession. This is a defensive struggle. Alongside is the need to heighten struggles for (re)possession especially in settings where land ownership distribution is extremely unequal as in so many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean today. This is a more pro-active struggle. Whether and how and to what extent organized groups will be able to carry out this dual task remains to be seen, but these groups need external state and non-state political and logistical support. This should in various forms, including favourable institutional arenas for political contestations.

Second, while land is central to contemporary peasant struggles, it is important to avoid a ‘*too-land centered*’ struggle framework. Labour reforms, especially in light of trends towards adverse incorporation, are equally important. Whether and how *land-oriented* **and** *labour-oriented struggles* could complement each other is not always automatic and obvious, as shown in the case of Brazil. Third, any effective struggle against dispossession and destitution in the current context of global land grabbing will necessarily require *cross-class alliances*. Forging tactical and strategic alliances between agrarian, labour and environmental justice movements will be critical. Constructing alternatives, such as ‘food sovereignty’, will require similar cross class coalitions to be more effective. And while this will create synergies, the same will inherently bring out tensions (see Borras, Edelman and Kay 2008).

#### *Research and academic community*

The challenge for the research and academic community is equally huge and difficult. The need for informed policy making and policy advocacy by state and non-state local, national and international actors is urgent and necessary. There are some urgent issues for discussion. First, there is a need to broaden the ranks of scholars and practitioners involved in ‘engaged research’ – research that is not purely academic, but takes on board practical interests and with deep sense of urgency, as well as takes the side of the poor. The Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI – [www.iss.nl/ldpi](http://www.iss.nl/ldpi)) is a good example. It is a loose global network of universities and dozens of individual academics who are engaged in serious scientific research on global land grabbing. But its reach remains relatively limited, and should be expanded, including in various regions such as in Latin America and the Caribbean. Similar networks within the region and elsewhere should be encouraged and supported. Second, there is an urgent need to carry out research on particular ‘blind spots’, some of which were identified earlier that have something to do with reactions by local communities, differentiated impact on local communities, diverse resistances, variegated positions by organized civil society groups. The summary paper by FAO (2011) has also offered an extended outline of pending big picture questions that are important for our fuller understanding of land grabbing in the region, but that it requires further scientific research. There are several other strategic questions of political economy, political ecology and political sociology that require deeper scientific research. Third, there is a need to make regular bridge between academic community, development policy practitioners, government officials, and political activists about land grabs that would inform policy making and policy advocacy work by state and non-state actors, now and in the near future.

## **10. Conclusion: towards a ‘land sovereignty’ agenda**

As final reflection point, we come back to some of the most common and casual issues being floated as possible responses to global land grabbing, including: land reform, or no to privatization of the remaining commons, and so on. The problem with these formulations is that it runs into a lot of dilemmas and contradictions: land reform – but many sites of current land grabbing worldwide and in Latin America and the Caribbean involve land reform settlements, it is then not a shield against land grabbing and dispossession; the problem with choosing either private or public, state or community ownership of land is that land grabbing occurs across property rights regimes. How then can we make sense of these contradictions and be able to move forward? Below we offer a concept, i.e. ‘land sovereignty’, for discussion, drawing from Borras and Franco (2010b).<sup>12</sup> It is not meant to advocate for ‘land sovereignty’ – but we simply want to raise some analytical issues that might help us think deeper about possible policy and political actions now and in the near future.

In our view, it is useful to have an overarching framework that takes the messy, complex, actually existing land-based social relations (along James Scott’s formulation) as the starting point, emphasizing *rural poor people’s effective access to, control over, and use of land* (Borras and Franco 2010b, 2010c). ‘Land sovereignty’ aspires to dialogue with the popular proposition for a radical alternative today: ‘food sovereignty’ (the right

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<sup>12</sup> The rest of the discussion on land sovereignty is taken from Borras and Franco (2010b).

of peoples to produce and consume healthy and safe food in or near their territory – see Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2011). As an alternative conceptual framework and political platform, we define *land sovereignty as the right of the working class and indigenous peoples to have effective access to, control over and use of land and live on it as a resource and territory* (Borras and Franco 2010b). Simply put, land sovereignty is the rural poor people’s right to land – more or less along the lines advocated by Via Campesina in its campaign to have a UN Peasants’ Charter (see Edelman and Carwil 2011). The use of the term ‘sovereignty’ here sounds awkward, but we could not think of any other better term.

The starting point of land sovereignty is a reaction to the dominant view on land which is founded on the quest for the most efficient economic (re)allocation and use of land as a scarce factor of production that can be attained by leaving it primarily to the forces of the free market. But the forces of the free market respond primarily to profit motivation, and are almost impossible to hold accountable (the difficulty of ‘codes of conduct’, for example – see de Schutter 2011, Borras and Franco 2010a for critiques). We therefore bring the state back in, and so the idea of sovereignty immediately involves the role of the nation-state. However, in our definition of land sovereignty, we do not stop in the nation-state as we bring ‘people’ into the definition, highlighting the notion of a ‘popular sovereignty’ – but more specifically the working classes, or the rural poor. Here, the word sovereignty implies the ‘people’ and the ‘state’, the two key elements of the common conception of ‘sovereign’ or ‘sovereignty’. In this sense, land sovereignty emphasizes a ‘bundle of powers’, as conceptualized by Jesse Ribot and Nancy Peluso (2003). It takes on board formal ‘rights’ (as in the notion of ‘bundle of land property rights’), but embeds these within the question of power relations, as elaborated in a related discussion by Fox (2007: 335). The character of land grabbing issues in Latin America and the Caribbean which necessarily deals with ‘*state* sovereignty’ and ‘*people’s* effective control’ over land and territory has a natural connection with the ‘land sovereignty’ framework.

To be useful, the notion of land sovereignty should be interpreted in a broad and flexible manner depending on specific concrete circumstances. It can be national or local in scope. It can be used to produce food for consumption and the market, as well as for other productive endeavors. In terms of systems of property rights, these can be communal, community, state, or private property rights, held individually or collectively. Hence it goes beyond the common binaries: private versus public, state versus community, and so on. Unlike the limited scope of the several variants of land reform, land sovereignty simultaneously addresses all the broad and key land-based social dynamics of redistribution, distribution, non-redistribution and (re)concentration. And so necessarily, land sovereignty includes land reform. The concept of land sovereignty necessarily addresses the two broad fronts of contemporary land struggles: struggles against land dispossession and displacement, as well as struggles for land (re)possession.

The notion of land sovereignty politicizes and historicizes the de-politicized and ahistorical popular mainstream conception of land governance, bringing in social relations as the key unit of analysis and object of policy and political advocacy rather than ‘things’ like papers and titles. Land sovereignty is thus used in the hope that it can also contribute to the construction of a counter-narrative in reaction to the aggressive neoliberal ‘land governance’ perspective – which is a state-centric concept and political

project whose dubious and deeply flawed starting point and guide to action is the neat state land property standard grids and categorizations that attempt to simplify (i.e. dismiss, reject, distort) actually existing land-based social relations. Land governance is a view and initiative ‘from above’. Land sovereignty brings the ‘people’ back in. Its starting point is the actually existing land-based social relations ‘from below’, and thus is inherently political and historical in orientation, addressing power relations emanating from the social relations of land-based property and production. In a way, land sovereignty is the notion of a *‘people’s (counter)enclosure* in the midst of widespread attempts at corporate-driven and state-sponsored enclosures worldwide. Finally, the notion of land sovereignty is inherently a cross-class political project involving different strata of the working classes and groups, both rural and urban, within and across national borders. As such it internalizes the pre-existing tensions among these different groups. But a workable political project like land sovereignty is one that confronts, and does not back away from, political tensions while exploring potential synergies among diverse groups within a cross-class coalition. Land sovereignty is a rough concept that may be worth-exploring as a useful analytical guide.

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#### **Annex**

Complete list of the FAO-commissioned seventeen country studies on land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the first title being the summary paper.

- FAO, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe. Santiago: FAO.
- Baumeister, Eduardo, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Nicaragua. Santiago: FAO.
- Carrera, Jaime Arturo and Jaime Luis Carrera Campos, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Guatemala. Santiago: FAO.
- Donoso, Santander Tristan, 2011a. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Costa Rica. Santiago: FAO.
- Donoso, Santander Tristan, 2011b. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Panama. Santiago: FAO.
- Echenique, Jorge, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Chile. Santiago: FAO.
- Galeano, Luis, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Paraguay. Santiago: FAO.
- Lavandier, Ingrid, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Republica Dominicana. Santiago: FAO
- Martinez, Luciano Valle, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Ecuador. Santiago: FAO.
- Murmis, Miguel and Maria Rosa Murmis, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Argentina. Santiago: FAO.
- Piñeiro, Diego 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Uruguay. Santiago: FAO.
- Remy, Maria Isabel and Carlos de los Rios, 2011. Dinamica del mercado de la tierra en America Latina y el Caribe: El caso de Peru. Santiago: FAO.
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