

Agrarian climate justice: Imperative and opportunity

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Abstract

The global land rush and mainstream climate change narratives have broadened the ranks of state and social actors concerned about land issues, while strengthening those opposed to social justice-oriented land policies. This emerging configuration of forces makes the need for deep social reforms through redistribution, recognition, restitution, regeneration, and resistance -- book-ended by the twin principles of 'maximum land size' ('size ceiling') and a 'guaranteed minimum land access' ('size floor') – both more compelling and urgent, and, at the same time, more difficult than ever before. The five deep social reforms of socially just land policy are necessarily intertwined. But the global land rush amidst deepening climate change calls attention to the linkages especially between the pursuit of agrarian justice on the one hand and climate justice on the other. Here, the relationship is not without contradictions and warrants increased attention as both unit of analysis and object of action. Understanding and deepening agrarian justice imperatives in climate politics, and at the same time, understanding and deepening climate justice imperatives in agrarian politics, is needed more than ever in the ongoing pursuit of alternatives.

Key words: land politics, land reform, climate change, land rush, Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA)

Convergence of diverse issues, conversion of land politics

'Climate Smart Agriculture' (CSA) as constructed and promoted by the World Bank and FAO and in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been gaining in popularity and momentum since the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21) in Paris in 2015. Their version of CSA is constructed out of recycled building blocks from the new institutional economics tradition obsessed with the pursuit of economic efficiency in the allocation and use of scarce resources, like land, and the 'win-win' management of carbon emissions. Both aspects have been brought together under CSA. More than just a flashy new term, CSA constitutes an important ideological milestone where the notion of 'ecological sustainability' is conjured as urgent and strategic alongside the neoclassical notion of 'economic efficiency.' From an agrarian and environmental justice point of view, how this new assemblage recasts land politics is (or should be) a major concern – e.g. how does it answer the core political question of who ought to get which land, for how long and for what purposes and with what implications, and, who ought to decide?

For those who see the global land rush as an opportunity, there is a tendency to portray many of the current users and uses of scarce land, water, sea and forest resources as economically inefficient and necessarily belonging more to the past than the future. The World Development Report 2008² sets the contemporary stage on re-evaluating agriculture and its role for development, emphasizing the role of market-based mechanisms in the allocation and use of resources, and the need to assist those who do not have the potential to become efficient and competitive producers to get out of agriculture.³ This neoliberal logic extends through the use and expansion of carbon metrics to nature conservation and climate change politics in the era of global resource rush. The groundbreaking critical conceptual framing of this intersection is the notion of 'green grabbing' – the grabbing of land and related natural resources in the name of the environment – by Fairhead, Leach and Scoones in 2012.⁴ Conceptually, CSA is an organic extension of the World Development Report 2008 that is founded on the quest for economic efficiency and the role of agriculture in capitalist development⁵ on the one hand, and the World Bank report on the global land grabs, on the other hand.⁶ In the latter report, the global land rush is seen as inherently good for agriculture and for the rural economy, but needing proper governance to minimize collateral damage such as widespread expulsion of villagers from their land without compensation. A 'code of conduct' for corporations to help them practice corporate social responsibility has been put forward by the World Bank to address problems associated with land grabs.⁷

The explicit assumption that some resource users and uses are economically inefficient has helped frame land and agricultural policies against peasant agriculture and in favour of modern agribusiness and capitalist agriculture. Meanwhile, another assumption, or insinuation -- that some resource users and use are environmentally destructive -- has been informing long-standing big neoliberal nature conservation initiatives, many (if not most) of which are attempts at commodifying nature and have varying degrees of impact on affected communities.⁸ The formulation in CSA takes mainstream advocacy to another level by framing it strategically within the context of addressing climate crisis and environmental destruction through 'ecologically sustainable' agriculture. This revives an old colonial-era assumption that some resource users and uses are ecologically destructive, e.g. shifting agriculture,⁹ artisanal fishing and pastoralism, and combines it now with the global land rush related assumption that some resource users and uses are economically inefficient. CSA brings these two narratives together in a single frame, where they can work hand-in-glove to reinforce each other's messages, with far-reaching implications for land politics.

Yet how today's climate change politics actually intertwines in reality with neoliberal land politics is an empirical question, one which this paper explores. The global land rush has already been researched quite extensively. Overall, much of this research has focused attention mostly on the discernible impacts of known land deals on specific local communities within their declared boundaries.¹⁰ In turn, policy actions tend to respond to the pattern of these specific cases (taken as iconic examples), and almost always privilege procedural response formulas, such as multistakeholder dialogue platforms, formalized grievance mechanisms, conflict resolution processes, making cadastre records more transparent, and formalization of (usually individual) private property land rights. What is much less explored are the broader political-institutional impacts of land grabbing on society more widely, that is, on the society-wide land questions including those pertaining to the social function of land. This broader concern is the focus of the present exploration.

Our starting point is that poverty, powerlessness and inequity in the countryside are often linked to the land question. Past and recent capital accumulation and development processes produced at least four types of social groups whose livelihoods depend on land access: (i) those who were coercively expelled from their land partly because of the global land rush, (ii) those who still have access to land but their access is seriously threatened by the land rush and other capitalist relations penetrating the countryside, (iii) those who have lost access to land (and those who have never had access to land at all) due to longer term historical processes of social differentiation and exclusion, and (iv) those who did not lose land despite being swept into the land rush but have been incorporated into the emerging enterprises through a variety of arrangements like contract farming or land leasing. Each of these four types of resulting life-livelihood changes undermines the social function of land and instead contributes to or reinforces persistent poverty, powerlessness and inequity. In our view, only deep social reforms, i.e. system-wide social justice-oriented land

policies, can effectively and meaningfully address the problem. Specific interventions can take a variety of forms: land reform, leasehold reform, tenancy reform, land restitution, forestland reallocation, reforms of contract farming and land leasing arrangements, fairer wages and better labour conditions, and so on. Historically, such policies and interventions have been difficult, but not impossible to achieve.

This exploration of the broader concern outlined above is informed by our long-standing empirical research in different countries and regions of the world, as well as by our ongoing work in Myanmar and Cambodia where large agrarian sectors remain key to the national economy, especially in terms of providing employment and livelihood to a majority rural population. In both countries, the inability of their non-agricultural sectors to fully absorb all those looking for jobs is contributing to a growing informal sector concentrated in the capital and other urban and peri-urban centers. Mining industry and tourism are key growth sectors, which also lead to social and environmental conflicts. Both countries have long history of armed conflict and violence in the countryside where land resources and territory have been contested, and both are hotspots in a land rush where Chinese and regional capital are key players. State-sponsored promotion of so-called 'available lands' for reallocation to foreign and domestic investors is a key common feature as well. Large-scale land investments for food, animal feed, biofuel (or flex crops), pulp, timber and mineral ore are increasingly joined by projects framed (or reframed) as climate change mitigation: hydropower, nature conservation, REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), among others. Both countries participate actively in the UNFCCC process, and have explicitly committed to climate change mitigation and adaptation. To varying extents, rural-oriented civil society organizations are actively addressing land issues through organizing and advocacy. As one would expect, important differences in terms of state character, class formation, capital accumulation, and spread and strength of civil society, among others, has contributed to the specific trajectories in contemporary land politics taken by each country.¹¹ Yet both countries have undergone a significant recasting of their respective land politics in the dual and converging contexts of regional land rush and climate change politics.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 is a brief discussion about Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA), focusing on its land dimension. Section 3 is a discussion on the ways in which the global land rush has altered land politics. Section 4 is a discussion on the ways in which climate change politics have altered land politics. Section 5 is a concluding discussion focusing on the implications on how we think about land politics.

Climate Smart Agriculture's land politics

Officially, CSA aims for three outcomes: increased productivity, increased resilience, and reduced emissions.¹² This is partly based on the projection that the world population will be 10 billion by 2050 and on the related assumption that global food production would thus need to be increased by 50 percent from its current level. Central to CSA is a particular kind of land politics. In the 2016 World Bank Group Climate Change Action Plan, faith in market-based mechanisms and associated approaches with respect to natural resource (re)allocation and use is reaffirmed in an important section entitled, 'Climate-Smart Land Use, Water, and Food Security'.¹³ The WB document is silent on shifting cultivation, a long fallows form of agroforestry that is widely practiced globally and, after a long period of being maligned and criminalized, is slowly (re)gaining support in light of its many contributions including to its climate change mitigation properties.¹⁴ Its silence does not mean that the World Bank supports shifting cultivation; rather, this silence alongside the emphasis on the CSA triad of productivity, resilience and reduced emission strongly suggests that shifting cultivation is included in the list of those users and uses that the Bank thinks will have to go, e.g., peasant and indigenous peoples' production systems, shifting cultivation and pastoralism, while other farming systems and technology are promoted instead, e.g., GMOs, modern seeds, agribusiness plantations alongside big conservation initiatives¹⁵ The World Bank document is also silent on how and how much an expanded industrial agriculture sector contributes to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. More importantly, the World Bank's version of CSA is silent on land redistribution, recognition and restitution, and how these measures may have relevance for climate change mitigation and adaptation questions. Neither does the FAO's version (based on the massive 570-page Sourcebook of 2013) mention these three key social justice land policies -- especially ironic in light of the FAO's key role in developing and implementing the 2012

Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure (VGGT). The latter recognizes all three of these measures as part of a new international standard on land, fisheries and forest tenure regulation¹⁶ Ignoring the social justice aspects of the guidelines, the FAO CSA Sourcebook adopts or follows the World Bank's narrow 'tenure insecurity' language and framework as the reason for lack of investments in land, whether from farmers themselves or corporate entities, and leaves open what kind of resource tenure regime could guarantee 'security' for marginalized land users and holders. What the World Bank calls Climate-Smart Land Use¹⁷ is essentially their answer to who ought to get which land for how long and what purpose in light of the three aspirations of neoliberal versions of productivity, resilience and reduced emissions.

The ways in which the global land rush has altered land politics

The narrative justifying and legitimizing the global land rush suggests that some forms of peasant production systems and pastoralism are considered to be 'economically inefficient' in terms of land use and land users, and that something has to be done about this.¹⁸ The current land rush has been actively promoted and facilitated by central governments.¹⁹ Subsequent actions have altered the balance of social forces that have interest in land and the political opportunity structure for land claim-makers. Social forces opposed to social justice-oriented land policies of redistribution, recognition, restitution, and fairer terms of incorporation of villagers within emerging enterprises, have been strengthened politically, while the big picture political impacts are far wider and deeper than any aggregated impact of specific land deals on particular local communities. Making progress on redistribution, recognition, restitution and fairer terms of incorporation has become even more difficult in light of the land rush. A closer look at Myanmar is illustrative.

Myanmar is one of the world's hotposts of land grabbing where large swathes of arable land has been grabbed from the villagers, especially over the past two-and-a-half decades and with a significant spike after 2010.²⁰ The quasi-military government in 2012 enacted several new laws related to land that initiated a land market based on a Western-style private property rights system, partly by declaring all unregistered land as 'vacant, fallow or virgin land' and subject to allocation to domestic and foreign investors. Much of the land held, occupied and used by villagers across the country and especially in ethnic border areas is long-standing, locally managed and regulated customary land that is not however registered with the national government. Registering and getting the government land use certificates is neither easy nor guaranteed, and is often out of reach for much of the rural working class and non-Bamar ethnic population. Despite deepening political polarization based on land politics and a growing popular clamour since 2010 to democratize land access and control in Myanmar, redistributive land reform and associated fundamental principles, such as 'land to tiller' (ensuring all those wanting to work the land get land) and 'land size ceiling' (preventing too much land accumulation by few elites), do not figure in the National Land Use Policy (NLUP). This is despite important other progressive provisions in NLUP.²¹ For instance, land restitution today remains one of the most difficult (re)distributive land policies in the current context of Myanmar where the number of dispossessed people is increasing because of the recent spike in land grabbing. This is in addition to many already existing claims for land restitution of people who were forced to flee their homes and their farms due to armed conflict and a long history of forced military hamletting.²² Estimates by NGO professionals working on this issue suggest that there are about million internally displaced population (IDPs) and refugees in Myanmar today.²³ Meanwhile, those who were displaced due to armed conflict are likely to face an uphill battle in trying to regain their original lands and villages as the global land rush may have already gained ground in those spaces. Several rounds of ceasefire agreements in recent decades between ethnic armed organizations and the government have opened the door for corporate interests to penetrate spaces that had previously been off-limits because of the war, a phenomenon that has been called 'ceasefire capitalism'.²⁴ The current government has taken the path of promoting extractive industries to lift the country's economy. The extractive sector does not only include mines and timber extraction, as it also includes various forms of agro-extractivism. The latter is seen in the dramatic expansion of monocultures of oil palm, rubber, sugarcane and maize. In the states bordering with China, for example, cultivation of sugarcane, maize and banana has dramatically expanded in recent years, converting biodiverse shifting agriculture communities into sedentary monocultures. This is done largely through informal, individual transactions involving layers of land brokers operating below the radar of formal institutional monitors, taking advantage of the informal land property structure. The combination of militarized forced evictions in the past,

recent corporate land deals, expansion of extractive industries, and past and recent laws that facilitate and legitimize these corporate and military land grabs and villagers' dispossession have put the issue of land politics at the center of mainstream development policy discourse. Ceasefire agreements or efforts towards such agreements with major ethnic armed groups have put land politics at the center stage of such negotiations. Yet, the official response is to deploy market-based and market-friendly policies, and a consistent political stance of committed unwillingness to pursue deep social reforms in land property systems. It seems to us that the seduction of corporate profits and rent-seeking pay-offs are too strong to resist. This is while protests and mobilizations from the villagers and their allies – especially by the fledgling national network of grassroots organizations, Lands In Our Hands (LIOH) alliance -- are not yet that strong to be able to push for significant concessions towards deep social reforms around 'land size ceiling' to cap corporate land greed and a 'guaranteed minimum land access' to villagers.

The story of Myanmar is not a unique one. We see similar patterns in Cambodia²⁵ and more generally in Southeast Asia, where we see how the political momentum of the contemporary land rush is dialectically linked to weakened political alliances, and absence of political momentum for social justice-oriented land policies of redistribution, recognition and restitution. There is not a single country in the region today that with political momentum on deep social reforms around land that is anchored on the principles of 'land size ceiling' to cap corporate land control and 'guaranteed minimum land access' to ensure equitable land allocation (e.g., the twin foundations of social justice-oriented land politics). This is despite the compelling case for such a policy, among others: significant agrarian sector, very large un- and under-employment, widespread socio-economic and political inequalities. Arguably, the political impact of the land deals may be the most profoundly complex and far-reaching implication of the land rush in several ways.

First, the land rush tends to strengthen the landed classes and corporate power in relation to the overall balance of forces in these societies. This is because the opportunities for lucrative land-based enterprises that such land investments promise to bring about, encourage landed classes and agribusiness to hold on to their lands even tighter and to vigorously oppose any redistributive land policies.

Second, within these states, the land rush is both strengthening and being strengthened by actors and policy currents that prioritize capital accumulation. States are not monolithic entities: they internalize social class differentiation and dynamics, as well as political contradictions in society. Following O'Connor and Fox,²⁶ we see states in capitalist societies generally performing two fundamental but contradictory tasks: facilitating capital accumulation (through corporate investments, taxation, etc.) while maintaining a historically determined minimum level of political legitimacy (through social policies, social reforms, etc.). The land rush is sparking contention between these two broadly competing currents within the state, but so far, it is the capital accumulation current that seems to be getting the upper hand.

Third, even as states are marked by the type of competing currents just described, they are also marked by institutional interests and conflicts as well. Central states, especially those experiencing financial challenges, tend to embrace the land rush as an opportunity to generate material benefits from cashing-in on resources over which they have asserted historical and authoritative claim. Anticipation of benefits through taxes, job and livelihood generation, and basic social and physical infrastructures (roads, schools, clinics) can become a driving force. Meanwhile, in societies with long-running efforts by the central state to extend its authority over territories marked by counter-claims and (sometimes armed) challengers including indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and class-based insurgent movements, state actors may try to shape large-scale investments to support state territorialisation campaigns. Finally, where rent-seeking traditions remain entrenched in state bureaucracies, surging corporate interest in land constitutes new opportunities for corrupt bureaucrats to exploit for personal gain.

Fourth, in light of the global land rush, smallholder agriculture and other production and tenure systems in the countryside (pastoralism, artisanal fishing, customary tenure) in these societies is being further maligned, marginalized, or 'invisibilised'. The role of discursive power in these dynamics is evident too as 'investments' are routinely made to appear in official pronouncements and policy papers by definition as only those made by corporations. Public investments and investments made by rural villagers (peasants, pastoralists, fishers) -- if and when they are mentioned -- are portrayed as inconsequential at best, and destructive at worst.

Fifth, historically, social and cultural tensions based on social class and identity (gender, generation, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion) are quite widespread in many of these societies. One of the most disturbing and egregious political impacts of the land rush has been to reignite old tensions and fan the flames of new ones. Many of what are labeled today as religious or ethnic tensions and conflicts in fact have deep historical roots in a basically agrarian dimension.²⁷

In sum, to date, the land rush has been altering the balance of state and social forces and 'political opportunity structure' in many societies,²⁸ largely favoring the landed classes and elite actors engaged in capital accumulation, while marginalizing social justice land policies of redistribution, recognition and restitution, and dividing and weakening rural working poor and their allies and movements politically. In this context, however well-intended, public policy interventions focused narrowly on formal-legal and procedural issues around land deals alone, are unlikely to stop or even slow this fundamental trend, much less to advance agrarian and social justice. Rather, precisely because such narrow responses fall short of more daring system-wide reforms around land redistribution, recognition, restitution and fairer terms of incorporation, they are more likely to ratify and reinforce these trends.

The ways in which climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives have altered land politics

More or less the same state and corporate actors who previously coveted the lands that are now the object of the land rush increasingly invoke the issue of climate change to complement and reinforce their efficiency arguments. This invocation is potent because it can further tilt the balance of state and social forces against social justice-oriented land policies. Many climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives are land-related, i.e. they require land or have impact on land and regardless of original intention recast the political economy of land and associated resources – water, seas, forest.²⁹

One phenomenon that links the global land rush and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies is the rise in popularity, materially or discursively, of flex crops and commodities – a rise that has been enabled by climate change politics (through incentives to agrofuels and through CDM and REDD+ projects). In Borrás et al.'s definition, flex crops and commodities --

have multiple uses (food, feed, fuel, fibre, industrial material, etc.) that can be flexibly interchanged while some consequent supply gaps can be filled by other flex crops. Flexibility arises from multiple relationships among various crops, components and uses. Specific forms of flexible-ness and multiple-ness can become more profitable through several means – e.g. changes in market prices [...], policy frameworks [...] and technoscientific advance facilitating conversion of non-edible feedstock [...]. The latter's economic viability depends on low-cost feedstock, which can be cheapened by several means, e.g. mining nature, super-exploitative labour, more intense market competition and land grabs. Current examples include soya (feed, food, biodiesel), sugarcane (food, ethanol), oil palm (food, biodiesel, commercial/industrial uses) and corn (food, feed, ethanol).³⁰

The multiple-ness and flexible-ness of uses at a commercial scale can be real, anticipated or imagined but has the same overall impact: the dramatic increase in the global production of these crops and commodities. Producing these crops and commodities are usually done through large-scale, industrial monocultures, even when at times it incorporates individual smallholders through a variety of contract growing schemes. The notion of flex crops helps to highlight different sectoral 'value chains' that get entangled to form 'value webs' and truly cross-border, international interconnectedness.³¹ A sugarcane plantation in Cambodia that is producing only sweeteners is just as embedded in the global 'flex sugarcane complex' as the sweeter-ethanol oriented production in Sao Paulo, Brazil. This means that a particular company operating a sugarcane plantation and mill does not necessarily have to produce multiple products of sweeteners, ethanol and others to be considered part of the 'flex sugarcane complex'; the company is subsumed, objectively, within the global complex of flex sugarcane. The global expansion of flex crops has depended on a major recasting of global land control, which in turn has been one of the most profound and far-reaching implications of climate change narratives getting entangled with land politics.

The relatively recent proliferation of sugarcane plantations in parts of Cambodia,³² Myanmar and the Philippines,³³ or the oil palm boom spreading across Southeast Asia³⁴ including areas outside the Indonesia-Malaysia hub such as Tanintharyi Region in Myanmar, and the corn boom in northern Myanmar³⁵ – all are part of the global flex crop complex. In these places, the connection between climate change mitigation and adaptation ideas and expulsion of people from the land may not be very explicit or immediately obvious. But this relative ‘invisibility’ does not make the connection less real. Indeed, this relative invisibility makes it especially difficult to detect, diagnose and regulate. This is one reason why the issue of indirect land use change (ILUC) is hotly contested by bureaucrats and activists in the European Union.

Among the social groups that have been empowered and emboldened in the era of climate change politics are big conservation organizations that seek to enclose vast tracts of land, forest or water usually located in the Global South, in the name of preserving biodiversity, preventing deforestation and nature degradation, or sequestering and trading carbon stocks. The idea behind carbon offsetting schemes is simple: industrialized countries can maintain ecologically polluting industries both locally or investing elsewhere by having the poorer countries in the Global South create some artificial balance in GHG emission. In exchange, the latter receive payments through various (usually market-based led by northern investors) mechanisms. But the exchange also depends on the partial or full disruption of villagers’ lives and livelihoods, which involves instituting predetermined prohibitions on: villagers’ access to the forest to gather non-timber forest products, landing rights of artisanal fishers, or pastoralists’ access to grazing in particular areas. Because no formal physical expulsion or displacement is involved, it is often erroneously assumed that the impacts on ‘participating’ (affected) communities is less adverse or not always and immediately considered as something wrong or to be protested on the part of villagers. Yet in reality this condition may even be more problematic, as shown by much of the critical scholarship on REDD+ and on neoliberalization of nature, which has quite forcefully raised the issue of the far-reaching impacts of such exclusionary practices.³⁶ In some cases, offsetting initiatives allow ‘investors’ to capture control of the benefits of resource use twice: first through extractive (mostly mining) type projects and second through the offsetting that is portrayed as compensating for the emissions/biodiversity destruction created by the first one.

Indeed, the ‘green economy’ concept placed economic growth and nature conservation under the same ‘umbrella’ in a wider iteration of the climate mitigation narrative ‘who pollutes pays’, while also serving to justify business as usual. It is deployed especially by those who covet villagers’ land as a cloak to cover up/green wash straightforward resource grabbing agendas. Climate change mitigation/adaptation and sustainable development ideas have now become catch-all phrases, which allow different elite interest groups to interpret such ideas differently, principally to enable their profit-making agendas. The construction of the narrative itself involves power, and occurs within power relations. This is why an industrial monoculture plantation of fast-growing trees by a South Korean company in Cambodia was able to qualify as a purported climate change mitigation investment under the Clean Development Mechanism -- even when they engaged in massive clear-cutting of the natural forest to pave the way for the artificial forest.³⁷

In sharp contrast is the long-standing traditional localized community forests that are carefully maintained by the villagers in the same Prey Lang Forest of Cambodia. Situations like these are generally not accepted by ‘green economy’ authorities as mitigation initiatives. Instead of being seen essentially as effective contributions to addressing climate change and the multiple crises besetting humanity at this time, which could and should be supported through social justice oriented policies, they are typically posited as obstacles to a ‘green economy’ and targeted for takeover by corporate and entrepreneurial land rush elites and climate change entrepreneurs.³⁸ This is happening with regard to centuries-old practices of production and resource access by indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in Cambodia and Myanmar³⁹, where what Dwyer⁴⁰ calls the ‘formalization fix’ has also become the dominant land policy tool for commodifying such spaces. Under the ‘green economy’ frame, irrigation for a large-scale agribusiness cassava plantation for ethanol can be labeled as a climate change adaptation project.⁴¹ Major hydropower projects -- that will export electricity to China⁴² while converting traditional shifting agriculture plots into sedentary, chemical-based corn monoculture plantations – can be labeled as mitigation/adaptation and incorporated into World Bank-inspired

'Climate-Smart Land Use' development plans. Ongoing agricultural, conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation in Myanmar and Cambodia may not always explicitly call for the forced eradication of shifting agriculture, but the combination of institutional incentives and disincentives suggests otherwise. Even though in many REDD+ and similar conservation sites, 'beneficiary' villagers are told that they will be supported for keeping their traditional ways of relating to and protecting forests, too often in practice, when those projects are implemented, communities are no longer allowed to engage in shifting cultivation inside the officially declared and demarcated conservation sites.

We can draw important insights from the situation currently unfolding in Myanmar and Cambodia with resonance both more widely within, as well as beyond, Southeast Asia.

First, Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) is built upon the triple principles of 'increased productivity', 'increased resilience' and 'reduced emission', with an unmistakable bias of giving extra weight to the first, which is presented as a vehicle to achieve the other two. In effect, similar to what happens with REDD+, CSA is presented as a way of providing additional income to farmers for keeping their ways of living, while in practice actually marginalizing a large part of agrarian societies (shifting cultivation, pastoralism, artisanal fishing) portrayed as the less productive, non-resilient, and GHG emitting production systems.

Second, CSA and CSA-friendly narratives, explicitly or implicitly, call for -- and essentially require -- the eradication of much of smallholder production systems (shifting cultivation, pastoralism and artisanal fishing). This can be seen partly in state policies that implicitly mean the eradication of such production systems, such as by not issuing certificates of occupancy to villagers in the midst of threats of counter-claims over the lands and land grabs, or denying them access to grazing lands or fishing grounds.

Third, by constructing a hegemonic agenda around officially designated projects and policies for climate change mitigation and adaptation, mainstream climate change narratives creates a dichotomized mitigation and adaptation framework. Only officially authorized and labelled mitigation and adaptation projects (oftentimes these are market-based) are considered to be worthy of state and international funding and institutional support, with REDD+ and other large-scale nature conservation projects as good examples of this kind (state) 'legibility' requirement, which at the same time serves to de-legitimize activities that don't fit and render them unworthy of state support. The CSA umbrella thus becomes a convenient cover for problematic projects that in turn are portrayed as mitigation and adaptation initiatives, such as the expansion of monocultures for the production of flex crops and commodities, expansion of industrial fishing and intensive industrial animal production even when these clearly contribute to expanding the industrial agriculture that, in its current level, is already one of the single biggest contributors to GHG emissions. The narrative also facilitates the relabeling of large-scale projects that are originally and essentially for industrial purposes into instant mitigation measures, such as mega hydropower projects. But it bears stressing that by privileging some types of projects and initiatives, the official narrative necessarily undermines others -- namely, long-standing community-based mitigation and adaptation practices, such as community forests, biodiverse and non-monoculture farming systems found in shifting agriculture, pastoralism, agroecology and artisanal fishing, among others -- either by delegitimizing and invisibilizing, or capturing and reorienting them toward elite-controlled 'green economy' purposes.

Fourth, the official discourse and practice in mitigation and adaptation, in turn, requires institutional reforms that marginalize long-standing, often locally- negotiated and controlled norms and typically flexible 'living' regulatory systems in natural resource politics, such as customary ownership and community resource access including social safety nets, while privileging instead formalized private property systems that include clearer and fixed project boundaries and sedentary and fixed cultivation and extraction spaces. Indeed, in many countries marked by intense and/or widespread land conflicts, the formalization of property that is closely linked to CSA expansion in practice, has been mainstreamed as the primary way of 'solving' them -- despite considerable (and still growing) evidence that there is a strong tendency for this kind of 'fix' to create new conflicts or reignite and spread old ones. Such 'fixes' meanwhile almost always benefit large top-down conservation projects and big agribusiness enterprises that, precisely, entail redefining by force and/or fiat core activities like 'protecting', 'mitigating', 'investing' in a way that necessarily undermines and excludes existing traditional practices and customary systems.

Fifth, altogether the above have reinforced, deepened and extended the political impact of the land rush, and thus, further blocked possibilities for deep social reforms on land redistribution, recognition and restitution.

To conclude: only by looking more closely at the wider political impacts of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies can we see their deeper implications including those that are otherwise not immediately obvious. At a glance, climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives may easily appear to have not yet gained ground in Myanmar, for example, because there are no officially established REDD+ areas. But a deeper look at the various processes that are interlinked in complex ways across geographic space, institutional boundaries and time indicates that climate change politics have long gained momentum and, unfortunately, are already now quite entrenched. Only by looking at the broad-spectrum political impact can we even begin to detect, and thereby begin to understand, how maize monoculture and oil palm plantations in Myanmar are intimately linked to climate change politics. In short, mainstream climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives have reinforced the exclusionary effect of the global land rush by legitimizing and facilitating the latter and/or by running a parallel exclusionary process. In this context, land-oriented climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives that are not anchored on the twin principles of 'maximum land size' ('size ceiling') and 'guaranteed minimum land access' ('size floor') that in turn frame land redistribution, recognition and restitution, are very likely to end up reinforcing land grabs and helping to expand exclusionary and ecologically problematic industrial agriculture and neoliberal nature conservation systems.

Implications for how we think about land politics

The contemporary processes of the global land rush and natural resource-oriented climate change mitigation/adaptation narrative are recasting the political economy of land, water, fisheries and forests in the rural world, and reconfiguring how capital penetrates agriculture and the countryside. Ostensibly, the twin objectives are to combat what is assumed to be the inefficient and destructive use and users of scarce natural resources, mostly in the countryside of the Global South. Agriculture is at the intersection of these purported twin processes. Three broadly distinct dimensions of this narrative – reformulated as questions -- can be distilled out in relation to agriculture and rural livelihoods: (a) what kinds of agriculture and rural livelihoods are 'efficient and productive' enough to sustain capital accumulation imperatives, (b) what kinds of agriculture and rural livelihoods are 'ecologically sustainable and less precarious' for the population, and (c) where do efficient and sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods end, and broad range of nature conservation/commodification begin. (It could be added that, ultimately, the latter question, in turn, would also train a spotlight on the concept of 'sustainable development' and on the validity and relevance of pursuing 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of this architecture). Meanwhile, these three broadly distinct dimensions are addressed through a variety of mutually reinforcing CSA and neoliberal nature conservation policies and initiatives.

But crucially, the lynchpin that links the three dimensions, discursively and materially, is land. The common denominator in political terms between climate smart agriculture and nature conservation/commodification is land control. A common policy obsession for these overlapping market-oriented advocacies is land policy. Whether one is pushing for an exponential increase in food production or in carbon offsetting, one necessarily has to confront the issues of land, land control and land policy. A critical examination of this mainstream narrative shows an ideological stand common to all: they are intrinsically averse to social justice-oriented land redistribution, recognition and restitution. It seems to us that what the combined processes suggest is a kind of 'climate smart land politics' -- that is, a predatory type of land politics that serves the neoliberal campaign against what it assumes and perceives to be as inefficient and destructive use of scarce natural resources. Simply put, climate smart land politics is neoliberal land politics sensitized to the recent corporate rediscovery of agriculture and neoliberal climate change mitigation/adaptation initiatives.

In societies like Myanmar and Cambodia, social reforms are rooted in fundamental and foundational land politics. In settings where villagers were forcibly expelled from their lands, the urgent remedy is to restore their access through land restitution. In places where villagers continue to have access to resources (land, water, seas, forests), but that such access is threatened by social processes associated with the land rush and climate change politics, protecting that access through effective recognition of their rights (whether based on class, gender, generation, ethnicity).

In societies where there is a significant portion of the population who are willing to construct livelihoods by working the land on a part-time or full-time basis, redistributive land policies (land reform, forest land reallocation, etc.) become compelling. Land redistribution, recognition and restitution are broadly distinct but interrelated social justice-oriented land policies that constitute deep social reforms.⁴³ In turn, these three policies can only be pursued if sandwiched by the twin principles of 'maximum land size' ('size ceiling') to put a limit to how much land corporations and wealthy individuals can accumulate, and a 'guaranteed minimum land access' ('size floor') to everyone who would want to work the land. Without such policies, policy initiatives around land redistribution, recognition and restitution are likely to be subordinated to market-oriented policies and social dynamics; demands for land from corporate conglomerates and climate change mitigation and adaptation imperatives will be limitless, while the capacity of other sectors of the economy to absorb villagers who were expelled from their lands is almost non-existent.

As mentioned earlier, while it is important to understand specific impact of particular land deals, it is also urgent to detect and determine through systematic analysis the system-wide political impacts of the land rush and climate change politics as well. Such impacts are foundational and therefore far-reaching – they play a key role in establishing the basic terms and limits of social inclusion-exclusion for years to come especially in transitional societies. In our view, the political opportunity structure for social justice struggles around land redistribution, recognition and restitution has been significantly altered in the contemporary era, making it exponentially more difficult. But while the challenge for deep social reforms around resource politics has become even harder in the era of the global land rush and climate change politics, the potential for the emergence of broad-based progressive multi-class, multi-sectoral, and multi-identity coordinated political struggles has likewise multiplied. These are the kinds of political struggle that are most critical today because they can connect together previously scattered sectoral struggles. The kinds of social movement that are required in the current context are those that are capable of building on and going beyond conventional stand-alone peasant struggles or peasant struggles that subsume other identities or strategies, e.g., ethnic nationalities, indigenous peoples, internally displaced peoples, people displaced by mines and dams.

There are two sides of this argument. First, climate change advocacy work by state and social forces, especially civil society organizations and social movements currently engaged in social justice-oriented work around climate politics, will be stronger only if deeply sensitized to agrarian issues and movements and intimately rooted in and engaged with questions of redistribution, recognition and restitution of rights and claims by poor villagers over their land, water, forest and territory. Second, the only way the urgency and relevance of land policies around redistribution, recognition and restitution in the era of global land rush can (re)gain traction in today's world is if it is sensitized to and embedded within the broader climate justice struggles. In short, agrarian justice and climate justice are inherently interlinked: one cannot exist without the other. But such intertwining is not without contradictions; it is neither automatic nor static; rather, it is always context-specific and dynamic and iterative. Agrarian justice for some people in specific historical-institutional junctures may mean pursuit of a livelihood for now through a contract growing arrangement with an oil palm plantation, even as a climate justice perspective reveals the perils of an aggregated large-scale oil palm plantation in environmental terms. Such revelations are crucial for informing relevant next steps. Today, justice – broadly understood as a process involving struggles for fairness that has important dimensions in class and identity (e.g. gender, generation, race and ethnicity, nationality, religion) politics -- has deep, entangled roots in agrarian and climate change politics.⁴⁴

This brings us to a different level of discussion. Deep social reforms have to have roots in land redistribution, recognition and restitution; conversely, the latter can only flourish when embedded in broader system-wide reforms, i.e. beyond land. This is where the nexus between land and food sovereignty comes in. Reforming land property system without reforming the broader agricultural and food system will only lead to 'more of the same' type results that characterized most past land policy reforms worldwide: recurring cycles of land concentration, landlessness and powerlessness in the countryside despite periodic land distribution adjustments. Here, the formulation by Schiavoni around historical, relational and interactive (HRI) approach to food sovereignty,⁴⁵ and in the context of 'competing sovereignties'⁴⁶ is quite useful in terms of deepening and expanding the proposition by Borras et al. on 'land and food

sovereignty' nexus,⁴⁷ building on Ribot and Peluso's formulation on access,⁴⁸ and on Rosset's explanation of the evolution of La Via Campesina's treatment of the land question.⁴⁹ Simply put, democratic land property systems embedded in an undemocratic agrarian and developmental policy will not result in meaningful social reform; conversely, attempts at democratic agrarian and developmental policy reforms without a democratic land policy regime component are likewise a non-starter. This intertwining becomes even more complicated in the era of climate change politics. There has been an increasing realization among social justice advocates about such complex convergence as seen in promising initiatives such as those examined by Tramel,⁵⁰ Martinez-Alier et al.,⁵¹ and Claeys and Delgado.⁵² What this implies in terms of research and political action is that it becomes increasingly more urgent and necessary to take the intertwining of agrarian justice and climate justice – indeed, a notion of 'agrarian climate justice' -- as the unit of scientific research and object of political contestations.

Conclusion

We conclude by re-emphasizing the urgent need for five key social reforms that are particularly relevant in the current condition of the rural world today in the context discussed in this paper, namely, redistribution, recognition, restitution, regeneration and resistance.

First, where wealth and the means of production to create wealth, especially land, in the context of the rural world, are too monopolized by a few, wealth and power redistribution becomes urgent and fundamental. It includes redistribution of access and control of the key means of production: land, water, seas, forests.

Second, where social exclusion, marginalization and discrimination by one dominant social group over other groups constitute an oppressive social complex layered in xenophobia, racism, patriarchy, and so on, social struggles for recognition becomes a critical struggle. This can entail recognition of indigenous peoples' right over their territory, or women's rights to their distinct access and control of the means of production: land, water, forests.

Third, where people have lost their land, territory, houses, savings, pensions and other important means of production and reproduction because of broad corporate resource grabs, social struggles for restitution have to be a key front. In many rural areas, this means restitution of access to land, territory, water, forests, especially in light of the global land grabbing during the past decade.

Fourth, ecological and climate crisis is the hallmark of the contemporary period in world history largely caused by capitalism, and has deep roots in the history of capitalism, in the capitalocene (Moore 2017). Social struggles for ecological regeneration and environmental justice have become an integral part of broader social justice struggles, as Martinez-Alier et al. (2017) argue. In the context of agrarian and food sovereignty movements, this can include struggles for agroecological farming systems (Rosset and Altieri 2018).

Fifth, these four deep social reforms can only be accomplished through fierce, relentless and disruptive resistance within and/or against capitalism, where the latter is seen as the principal cause of the multiple crises.

To be effective, the deep social reforms discussed above in the most abbreviated manner cannot be treated like a checklist from which one can cherry-pick while ticking boxes. The five broad lines of social reforms are linked in their logic because these are responding to inherently interconnected social processes. These can be seen in at least two illustrations. First, contemporary capitalism has seized the opportunity to make profit out of responses to climate change via market-based transactions such as carbon sequestration and trading, biofuels, and neoliberal nature conservation. In essence, it is 'regeneration by dispossession' – defined here as the capitalist project of operating within and regenerating nature by dispossessing ordinary villagers of their resource to facilitate continuous capital accumulation. Many of the conservation initiatives associated with climate change politics, in varying degrees, are associated with this strategy. One way to confront 'regeneration by dispossession' is through 'regeneration by restitution', 'regeneration by recognition', 'regeneration by redistribution', or a combination of these, all in the context explained above. Second, 'redistribution without transformation' was the dominant trend where redistribution took place, past and present, in some settings worldwide. Various forms of redistribution that were usually outcomes in

the form of concessions to intense social pressures, such as land redistribution, were ultimately carried out within a broadly hostile neoliberal system, so that in many instances initial gains were easily cancelled out. Many of the land reforms in the past (prior to and during neoliberalism) suffered the same fate: small-scale farmer beneficiaries lost out within a broadly neoliberal agricultural policy climate. It is crucially important to have a strategic break from past cycles, that is, to pursue struggles for redistribution in significantly different manner, namely, 'redistribution with transformation', 'redistribution with recognition,' 'redistribution with regeneration,' or a combination of these. 'Redistribution with regeneration' may prove to be the defining feature of redistributive land policies (land reform, tenancy reform, and so on) in the era of climate change politics.

If we take a closer look at the five deep social reforms, we can begin to understand better how their logics are intertwined, and we can continue on to add to the initial two combinations we have briefly listed above. These deep social reforms are no doubt difficult, but ostensibly not impossible, to pursue and accomplish – at least we cannot conclude that they are impossible unless we have at least actually tried to pursue them. One should not forget that most of the rights and freedoms that in many places still are taken for granted today, e.g. eight hour working days, minimum wage laws, the formal end of the apartheid in South Africa, and so on, appeared daunting and impossible to accomplish in their own settings and time – until the political momentum in their favour overruled any conservatism, skepticism, or pessimism. The problems confronting humanity today are huge and entrenched. The only way to address them is to 'ask big and act insurgent' – and the five deep social reforms put forward here remain key elements of such political struggles.

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Endnotes

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- 2 World Bank, World Development Report 2008.
- 3 For a critical review, see Akram-Lodhi, "(re)imagining agrarian relations," 1145-1161
- 4 Fairhead, et al. Green grabs.
- 5 World Bank, World Development Report 2008.
- 6 Deininger and Bayerlee, Rising global interest.
- 7 For a critique, see Borras and Franco, "The challenge of global governance," 161-179
- 8 Brockington et al., "Conservation, human rights," 250-252; Castree, "Commodifying what nature?," 273-297; Arsel and Buscher, "'Nature™ Inc.," 53-78.
- 9 Brady, "Alternatives to slash-and-burn," 3-11.
- 10 Among the more systematic treatments on impact, theoretically and empirically, are Cotula et al, "Testing claims...," 903-925; and Zoomers and Otsuki, "Addressing the impacts...," 164-171.
- 11 Peluso and Lund, "New frontiers of land control," 667-681; Schoenberger et al, "What happened when the land grab came...," 697-725; Park and White, "Gender and generation."
- 12 See World Bank, Climate Change Action Plan; FAO, Climate-Smart Agriculture Sourcebook; FAO, Climate-Smart Agriculture: Policies... For critical reflections, see Newell and Taylor, "Contested Landscapes" and Taylor, "What is it good for?"
- 13 World Bank, Climate Change Action Plan, 25-28.
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- 15 World Bank, Climate Change Action Plan, 25-28.
- 16 Franco and Monsalve, "Why wait for the state?"; Franco et al. "Just Standards", 341-359.
- 17 World Bank, Climate Change Action Plan, 25.
- 18 See Deininger and Bayerlee, Rising global interest.
- 19 Wolford et al., "Governing global land deals," 189-210
- 20 Woods, "Legacy landscapes."
- 21 For background information and analysis, see: TNI, Assessment of 6th draft; Faxon, "In the Law"; Mark, "Are the odds," 443-460.
- 22 For relevant analysis, see: Malseed, "Networks of noncompliance," 365-391; Woods, "Ceasefire capitalism," 747-770; Woods, "Legacy landscapes"; Franco et al, The meaning of land in Myanmar.
- 23 Transnational Institute, "Re-asserting control".
- 24 Woods, "Ceasefire capitalism." For background information and analysis see Transnational Institute, Neither War Nor Peace, and Transnational Institute, Developing Disparity.
- 25 Hunsberger et al, "Climate change mitigation, land grabbing...," 305-324.
- 26 O'Connor, The fiscal crisis of the state; Fox, The politics of food in Mexico.
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- 28 Tarrow, Power in movement.
- 29 Bulkeley and Newell, Governing climate change.
- 30 Borras et al, "The rise of flex crops...," 94.
- 31 Ibid., 93-115.
- 32 McKay et al. "The political economy of sugarcane flexing", 195-223.
- 33 Rutten et al, "Smallholder bargaining power", 891-917.
- 34 Pye and Bhattacharya, The palm oil controversy; Montefrio and Dressler, The green economy.
- 35 Woods, "CP maize contract farming in Shan State."
- 36 Heynen and Robbins, "The neoliberalization of nature," 5-8; Corbera, "Problematizing REDD+," 612-619; Mahanty et al., "The social life of forest carbon," 661-664.
- 37 Scheidel and Work, "Large-scale forest plantations."
- 38 Work and Thuon, "Inside and outside the maps," 360-377.
- 39 Milne, "Under the leopard's skin," 323-339; Franco, "The right to land at crossroads in Myanmar"; Franco et al. "The meaning of land..."; Dressler et al. "The impact of swidden decline...," 1-20.
- 40 Dwyer, "The formalization fix?," 903-928.
- 41 Hunsberger et al. "Climate change mitigation...," 305-324.
- 42 Lamb and Dao, "Perceptions and practices," 395-413.
- 43 Franco et al. "Democratic land control," 66-71. See also Fraser, "Social justice in the age of identity politics," 7-87, for a broader treatment.
- 44 Harris, Global ethics and climate change, see, for example, 35-36.
- 45 Schiavoni, "The contested terrain of food sovereignty construction," 1-32.
- 46 Schiavoni, "Competing sovereignties, contested processes," 466-480.
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- 48 Ribot and Peluso, "A theory of access," 153-181.
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- 51 Martinez-Alier et al. "Is there a global environmental justice movement?," 731-755.
- 52 Claeys and Delgado, "Peasant and indigenous transnational social movements," 425-340.