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## Large-scale land deals and social conflict: Evidence and policy implications

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# Large-Scale Land Deals and Social Conflict: Evidence and Policy Implications

## Abstract

How do large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) increase the risk of conflict, and what kind of policies can mitigate this effect? We address these questions with a systematic and policy-oriented synthesis of prior research. First, we suggest a simple conceptual framework linking LSLAs to social conflict through relative deprivation. Second, we present empirical evidence on the associations between land investments and social conflict, drawing on pre-existing quantitative and qualitative studies as well as on own descriptive analyses and case studies. Taken together, this evidence suggests that conflicts accompany a substantive share of LSLAs (10 to 20 percent). Specifically, contentious dynamics often start with violations of community interests, which spur largely peaceful community protests that trigger coercion and violence at the hands of armed actors associated with national governments and investors. Third, we develop a set of policy recommendations in highlighting the need for thorough regulatory frameworks, meaningful consultation, and full transparency.

Keywords: sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, large-scale land acquisitions, social conflict, relative deprivation

JEL: Q15, Q18, D74

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# Large-Scale Land Deals and Social Conflict: Evidence and Policy Implications

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## Article Outline

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- 2 Conceptual Framework: Potential LSLA-Related Drivers of Social Conflict
- 3 Empirical Evidence on the LSLA–Conflict Link
- 4 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

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## 1 Introduction

Since the first years of the new century, foreign investors have acquired more than 30 million hectares of potential farmland in low- and middle-income countries. In many places in the developing world, the acquisitions of land and the associated commercial agricultural projects have met local resistance. Large-scale land deals have sparked protest and repression in places like Ethiopia (Human Rights Watch 2016), Indonesia (Abram et al. 2017), and Sierra Leone (Sturgess and Flower 2013). In other cases, they do not seem to have had any discernible effect on conflict (Mamonova 2015; Mousseau, Schaefer, and Mittal 2012). Understanding these ambiguous consequences is crucial for two reasons: for comprehensive assessments of the repercussions of land deals and as a basis for the design of policy interventions that mitigate their negative impacts, respectively.

A recent review of the socio-economic impacts of the “global land rush” came to the conclusion that – by and large – “the non-consensual and uncompensated loss of land often comes with only little socio-economic benefits – be they employment, positive productivity spillovers, or infrastructure” (Lay et al. 2021: 8). In addition, large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) continue to destroy rainforests, natural habitats, and biodiversity on the agricultural frontiers of Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia. Violent social conflict is among the worst potential repercussions that land deals can have “on the ground,” but local protest or resistance may also lead to potentially harmful projects being abandoned or to improved outcomes for local populations. This ambiguity and the complex transmission channels from LSLAs to conflict imply that a careful analytical look at the relationship between the two phenomena is required.

LSLAs increase the risk of social conflict when they cause or reinforce subjective or objective relative deprivation under certain economic, political, and social conditions that are particularly conducive to conflict escalation. Relative deprivation – meaning discrepancy between what people think they deserve and what they perceive themselves to actually get from the investment – can cause grievances, frustration, and aggression. The loss of (access to) land can cause relative deprivation directly. However, quite often grievances are related to the unmet expectations of affected populations, be it in terms of employment (not) created by the investment or unfulfilled promises with regards to local infrastructure. Such grievances often result from insufficient information and/or consultation. Consultations and corresponding actions can help align the expectations of investors, local populations, and other actors, for example national and local government, and thereby prevent conflict.

Besides the nature and likely impacts of investment there are numerous dimensions to investment contexts that matter for the likelihood of LSLA-induced conflict too, including poverty and income levels, pre-existing intergroup inequalities, and previous periods of (violent) conflict in the target region. Further, the quality, accountability, and inclusiveness of the institutions that govern investments in land, including land (tenure) rights and local and national governments, also play a key role. Here, local elites often act as brokers between investors, the central state, and local communities.

These introductory thoughts illustrate the complex interactions between large-scale land deals, their (potential) socio-economic and environmental impacts, and social conflict. While there has been some theoretical and empirical work on different aspects of these interactions, in particular on the link between land (scarcity) and conflict, a comprehensive policy-oriented synthesis of more recent empirical contributions is lacking. This paper addresses this gap by, first, providing a conceptual framework that links LSLAs to social conflict. Second, we present empirical evidence – including own analyses, previous cross-country studies, as well as case studies – documenting some of the patterns to the relationship between LSLAs and social conflict, illustrating also the importance of specific transmission channels. Third, based on these findings, we develop a set of policy recommendations and hint at further research needs for evidence-based policies.

## 2 Conceptual Framework: Potential LSLA-Related Drivers of Social Conflict

For this review, LSLAs are understood as large-scale land transactions of dozens, hundreds, or thousands of hectares that involve a domestic or international investor who typically seeks land for agricultural production, often plantations. Social conflict is broadly defined as group struggles over values, power, or resources – including protests, riots, communal violence, or repression by the state or private actors (e.g. Oberschall 1978). This section introduces a simple conceptual framework that aims to specify in which implementation phases, between which actors, and under which structural conditions LSLAs may be particularly likely to instigate social conflict.

LSLAs can have ambiguous socio-economic effects. On the one hand, they have the potential to threaten livelihoods. They may displace peasants (Thondhlana 2015), restrict access to land for cultivation or grazing, and contribute to environmental degradation (Nolte, Chamberlain, and Giger 2016: 42). LSLAs may also impact negatively on income generating activities – through net employment losses and/or precarious labour conditions on investment farms (e.g. Kenney-Lazar 2012; Bottazzi et al. 2016).

On the other hand, LSLAs can also contribute to improving the material living conditions of the population resident in the vicinity of investment sites. In addition to creating new employment opportunities (Bleyer et al. 2016), land acquisitions may foster technological spillovers potentially increasing smallholder productivity (e.g. Deininger and Xia 2016). Investors' compensatory activities to offset negative externalities may improve social infrastructures, too (Nolte, Chamberlain, and Giger 2016: 46).

The objective and subjective (in the eyes of affected population) relationship between these potential costs and benefits varies over time and across social groups. Among other things, the type and magnitude of LSLA-related effects depend on the respective implementation stage (e.g. planning versus operation) as well as on communities' location relative to the investment sites. Classic theories of social conflict provide a conceptual framework explaining how this variation to costs and benefits can drive social conflict. Accordingly, manifest (violent) social conflict emerges in the presence of *motives* and *opportunities* for mobilisation.

One essential *motive* is sentiments of "relative deprivation": the term refers to the discrepancy between what people think they deserve ("value expectations") and their perceptions of what they actually get ("value capabilities"). These discrepancies create grievances. The more intense and prolonged they are, the greater the probability that these grievances translate into frustration and aggression (Gurr 1970; Runciman 1966).

However, frustration and aggression alone do not necessarily translate into violent interactions. In addition to grievances, mobilisation depends on the presence of *opportunities* for collective action. This includes, for example, weak or biased state institutions, identities (ethnic, religious) that increase people's social engagement, or the presence of local elites that facilitate protests, riots, or communal violence (Meyer 2004; Tilly 1978).



From this theoretical perspective, LSLAs increase the risk of social conflict when they feed perceptions of relative deprivation in economic, political, and social contexts that provide fertile ground for the taking of collective action. The following subsections describe (1) how LSLAs may reinforce different types of relative deprivation and (2) under which conditions they are likely to trigger social conflict.

## 2.1 Relative deprivation in the context of LSLA

Three types of relative deprivation are particularly relevant in the context of LSLAs; they are not mutually exclusive, but rather represent different facets of social conflict – ones that may arise across alternate phases of the LSLA implementation cycle and foster tensions within diverse types of actor constellations.

### *a Deprivation relative to the status quo*

Any kind of socio-economic change can nurture feelings of relative deprivation, as people fear or experience that their living conditions deteriorate relative to the status quo. In theoretical terms, “value expectations” remain constant while “value capabilities” decrease over time. The resulting discrepancy can foster grievances geared towards the perceived drivers and proponents of change (Gurr 1970).

LSLAs can produce this kind of relative deprivation. For people living within or close to investment areas, LSLAs may entail sudden losses of employment opportunities, material assets, or socio-economic status (Lay et al. 2021). In particular, the loss of or restrictions in access to land are likely to elicit strong emotional reactions, as people may perceive these acts as not only existential threats to their means of production but also as attacks on spiritual, traditional, or ancestral commodities (Kolers and Kolers 2009; Moore 1978).

This specific kind of conflict-inducing effect is particularly likely in the planning and inception phase of a LSLA, when the potential local costs and benefits of the investment become apparent (Dell’Angelo et al. 2017). Importantly, incomplete information about the technical specifications of the planned investment (extent, timing, compensation) may also nurture rumours and misconceptions fuelling perceptions of deprivation that deviate from the LSLA’s “true” impact. These kinds of effects are likely to wane over time in the operation phase, as the implementation of the LSLA has by now been “set in stone” and people adjust to a new status quo.

The resulting perceptions of deprivation can manifest in different kinds of conflict constellations. The “object” of people’s grievances depends on their attribution of blame: namely, which local communities and investors as well as state institutions are seen as responsible. However, LSLAs may also foster conflicts between communities and local elites (perceived to be) misrepresenting the interests of community members and/or trying to secure personal gain at the expense of their constituencies.

### *b Deprivation relative to other social groups*

Feelings of relative deprivation arise not only as the result of socio-economic change over time. People also assess their own status relative to that of other social groups. Consequently, discrepancies between “value expectations” and “value capabilities” may emerge as people fear/observe that their own group’s status deteriorates or, contrariwise, that of other groups improves disproportionately.

Livelihood outcomes from investments are likely to differ across social groups; some may benefit or lose out disproportionately (Cotula et al. 2014). This variation is not only related to proximity to investment sites. It also results from relative resources and capabilities. For example, poor and remote communities may lack the political and economic influence that would allow them to shape distribution processes. Similarly, small landholders may have lower capacities to adapt livelihoods to the changing socio-economic environment (Borras et al. 2011, 2012). The resulting objective patterns and subjective perceptions of inequality may feed feelings of injustice, envy, and discrimination among some segments of the population.

These dynamics can arise in the LSLA’s inception phase and extend throughout the operation one, too. Initially, they may centre around the exact location and extent of the investment areas. Later, they may focus on the distribution of employment opportunities or investors’ compensatory activities.

Such feelings of relative deprivation increase the risk of conflict between ethnic or religious identity groups within or across village communities. Risks are particularly high when people blame other communities or community members for exploiting their privileged social, economic, or political positions to influence the distribution of costs and benefits (Benjaminsen 2008; Østby et al. 2011). Disadvantaged groups may also interpret distributional patterns as expressions of state-based discrimination, reinforcing grievances against national institutions.

### *c Deprivation relative to expectations*

Finally, discrepancies between what people think they deserve and what they actually get can arise from unmet expectations regarding gains and losses: sentiments of relative deprivation emerge as “value expectations” rise while actual “value capabilities” fail to increase proportionally. LSLAs can produce this kind of relative deprivation when investments nurture hopes of increased income opportunities and/or accompanying improvements of social infrastructure that do not later materialise. These unmet expectations have the potential to create frustration among parts of the population that had initially placed hopes in the LSLA’s socio-economic outcomes – because the government or international investors propagated the investment’s benefits or because a lack of participation and information created false expectations (Ansoms 2013; Borras et al. 2011).

Unmet expectations are likely to become virulent in the LSLA’s operation phase, when people are able to tangibly contrast their initial hopes with the actual impacts of the investment. That is, in terms of the development of their income situation, investors’ implementation

of compensatory activities, or the value of beneficial developments relative to the evident concrete costs. Once initial expectations about positive development vanish, discontent may arise and grievances gain momentum (Sändig 2021).

Similar to the first type of relative deprivation described above, unmet expectations are likely to foster conflict between local communities and investors as well as local and national governments – with the latter being blamed for not holding to original agreements and announcements. Similarly, conflict may arise between local communities and their respective local elites. For example, if the former realise that the latter have misinformed community members about the implications of the LSLA and/or have agreed to arrangements that later proved detrimental to community members.

## 2.2 Contexts factors increasing/decreasing LSLA-related conflict risks

LSLAs do not necessarily create widespread feelings of deprivation. Similarly, perceptions thereof do not automatically lead to collective action. The likelihood that relative deprivation results in actual social conflict depends on various political and socio-economic context factors.

These factors shape the LSLA's impact by either dampening or increasing the scope and magnitude of various types of deprivation or by influencing the likelihood that related resentment translates into actual (violent) mobilisation. LSLAs inducing conflict depends on the interplay between various individual context factors; here, we focus on selected key ones. We structure the discussion around three pertinent dimensions:

### *a Nature of the investment*

The LSLA's core characteristics determine the nature and magnitude of its economic impact on the investment area, as well as the intensity of resulting feelings of relative deprivation and risks of violent mobilisation.

*Type and extent of investments:* LSLAs' technical properties, such as their size, need for water, or production models (i.e. degree of mechanisation), shape the extent to which investments affect local social, economic, and ecological conditions (Mercandalli et al. 2019). Consequently, these technical specifications shape the objective and subjective costs and benefits of LSLAs. In general, larger, more resource-intensive and more mechanised investments are likely to be, on average, more conflict-prone than smaller ones that rely instead on local labour and have a more modest impact on local resources.

*Investment planning:* There is great variation in the extent to which investors interact with the local population in the affected geographic areas. Two elements of this interaction are particularly relevant. First, inclusive (i.e. across groups or between local elites and community members) consultations are a precondition to achieve free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) from affected populations. Second, the extent of information provision plays an essential role

in terms of shaping subjective assessments of the LSLA's impacts and managing local expectations. Thus, exclusive or uneven consultation processes as well as a lack of transparency increase the risk that LSLAs drive social conflict (Dell'Angelo et al. 2017, 2021).

*Investment implementation:* The extent to which an LSLA's implementation corresponds to initial plans and agreements is an important determinant of the risk that (unmet) expectations create grievances and frustrations. Deviations do not necessarily result from prior purposeful misinformation by investors or state/non-state institutions (Ansoms 2013; Borrás et al. 2011). They may also stem from poor planning (e.g. ignorance of potential negative externalities or potential operational risks). In either case, implementation delays, deviations from original technical planning, and/or unfulfilled agreements on compensatory measures can increase the risk of conflict.

### ***b* Socio-economic contexts**

Similar investments may have substantively different types of economic and social impacts depending on the nature of pre-existing economic systems and intergroup relations in the respective investment areas.

*Pre-existing agricultural production:* For example, properties of pre-existing agriculture production (specialisation, typical farm sizes) and livelihood strategies (e.g. reliance on subsistence farming) determine who (which specific segments of the population) are affected by the LSLA, to what extent, and in what specific ways (in terms of the relationship between economic gains and losses). In particular, socio-economic costs and associated conflict risks will tend to be more pronounced in densely populated areas. Those locations with a high prevalence of subsistence farming and a certain heterogeneity in prior agricultural-production patterns will be susceptible, too (translating into the LSLA's unequal effects).

*Pre-existing intergroup inequality:* In contexts of high levels of political or economic inequality, advantaged groups are more capable of adapting, capitalising on the benefits of investments, and of averting negative implications. This can harden pre-existing divisions and competition, increasing the risk of local intergroup conflict. A large body of empirical research demonstrates that such "horizontal inequalities" between ethnic, religious, or regional groups are particularly prone to increasing the risk of violence, as they combine motives for resorting to violence with the potential for effective (group-based) mobilisation – whether against other social groups or the state (Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011; Østby et al. 2011).

*Previous periods of (violent) conflict:* Previous episodes of conflict increase the risk that people perceive social cleavages related to the LSLA (between various social groups or local communities and the state) as a continuation of pre-existing drivers of discontent (e.g. inequality, discrimination). Moreover, prior conflict increases the risk that such grievances result in manifest violence, as opposing parties can draw on resources for armed mobilisation such as ingroup–outgroup antagonisms or exclusionary forms of social organisation (Bauer et al. 2016; Schaub

2014). Thus, LSLAs entail particularly high risks of violence in post-conflict countries and areas with a history of local-level turmoil.

### *c Institutions*

The quality of national and local formal and informal institutions determines the extent to which people can voice their grievances, claim their rights, and peacefully manage LSLA-related conflicts.

*Participation and responsiveness:* Conflict risks will be substantially higher in political contexts where options for institutional forms of protest and litigation are limited (Krieger and Meierrieks 2016). Moreover, state responsiveness and reactions to discontent play a key role in determining how social conflicts evolve – for example, the heavy-handed enforcement of displacement, intimidation, and the repression of dissent all increase the risk of cycles of opposition and state violence (Carey 2006). Thus, LSLAs are more likely to contribute to the emergence and/or escalation of social conflict in autocratic and repressive states that are unwilling or unable to accommodate arising grievances in non-violent ways.

*Corruption and accountability:* Formal and informal state institutions play an important role in shaping the distribution of an LSLA's costs and benefits. Local elites, in particular, act as brokers between investors, the central state, and local communities. However, these elites may have interests that differ from those of their respective communities – for example, they may perceive an LSLA as an opportunity for personal enrichment, for strengthening their local power position, and/or for channelling benefits to their own constituencies (Fairbairn 2013; Kirst 2020; Schoneveld and German 2014). Thus, local-level clientelism, ethnic favouritism, and rent-seeking behaviour on the part of formal and informal institutions may contribute to reinforcing sentiments of relative deprivation, intergroup inequality, and discrimination.

*Land governance:* Finally, another important institutional factor is the quality of local land governance, including “pre-investment” land-tenure arrangements, tenure security, and the role of local authorities in decisions over land – also vis-à-vis higher-level authorities. In particular, tenure uncertainty deprives local communities of legal protection against “land grabbing” by international investors and/or state institutions (Dell'Angelo et al. 2017). Combined with a lack of effective and impartial adjudication, weak land governance increases the risk that evictions, population movements, and restrictions on access to land foster the emergence and escalation of land-related conflicts in the context of LSLAs (Eck 2014).

## **3 Empirical Evidence on the LSLA–Conflict Link**

There are a growing number of empirical works on the link between LSLAs and social conflict. Most are case studies – at times looking at multiple LSLAs – using qualitative approaches. They may not explicitly examine the conflict dynamics of a specific case, but analyse more broadly the characteristics, (local and national) politics, as well as causes and consequences of

LSLAs. Qualitative evidence on LSLAs (and conflicts) also comes from a grey literature of reports by non-governmental organisations, international bodies, development agencies, think tanks, and development consultants. In addition, there is a very small quantitative empirical literature that looks at correlations between LSLAs, the presence of conflict, and certain context conditions.

We begin our empirical review with said quantitative evidence, which we complement with some own descriptive analyses of data on LSLAs and social conflict in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Our subsequent narrative review of qualitative works and a purposefully chosen sample of case studies then tries to document the types of conflicts that occur in relation to LSLAs. We seek also to highlight the transmission channels at work here, as well as the relevant context conditions.

### 3.1 Quantitative evidence and maps: The ambiguous “big picture”

We first provide descriptive statistics that illustrate the (potential) co-occurrence of LSLAs and conflict. We then highlight spatial associations between the two phenomena, focusing on Southeast Asia and SSA. We chose these two regions in the subsequent analysis because we consider the data on LSLAs<sup>1</sup> in key target countries of Southeast Asia (most notably Indonesia) and in SSA to be of a higher quality and to offer better coverage than some leading countries in Latin America (above all Brazil). Further, there are important similarities between the two chosen regions, including the prominence of smallholder farming (irrelevant in Central Asia and Eastern Europe) as well as deforestation threats.<sup>2</sup>

The Land Matrix database contains some (direct) information on the presence of conflict related to LSLAs. Specifically, it contains a variable on the “presence of land conflict”; however, it does so without specifying the type and intensity, or the parties involved. For the 1,984 large-scale land deals (since the year 2000) involving a foreign investor, the variable indicates the presence of land conflicts in 222 cases (figures as of 18 January 2022). Further, there are data on community reactions to the respective land deals: in only 66 cases does the Land Matrix report community consent, the rejection of the deal in 191 others, and mixed reactions in 107 more. Finally, when scanning the database entries (comment fields) for conflict-related keywords we found 170 entries mentioning “conflict,” 85 related to “protest,” and 86 connected to “violence.” Taken together, these figures indicate that the majority of LSLAs are not accompanied by significant conflicts (or protests) that make it into the news, a report, or research paper – and, eventually, into ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) data or the Land Matrix either. Yet, there are a considerable number of LSLAs that are associated with such conflicts – about 10 per cent of all deals globally at a minimum, meaning in at least around

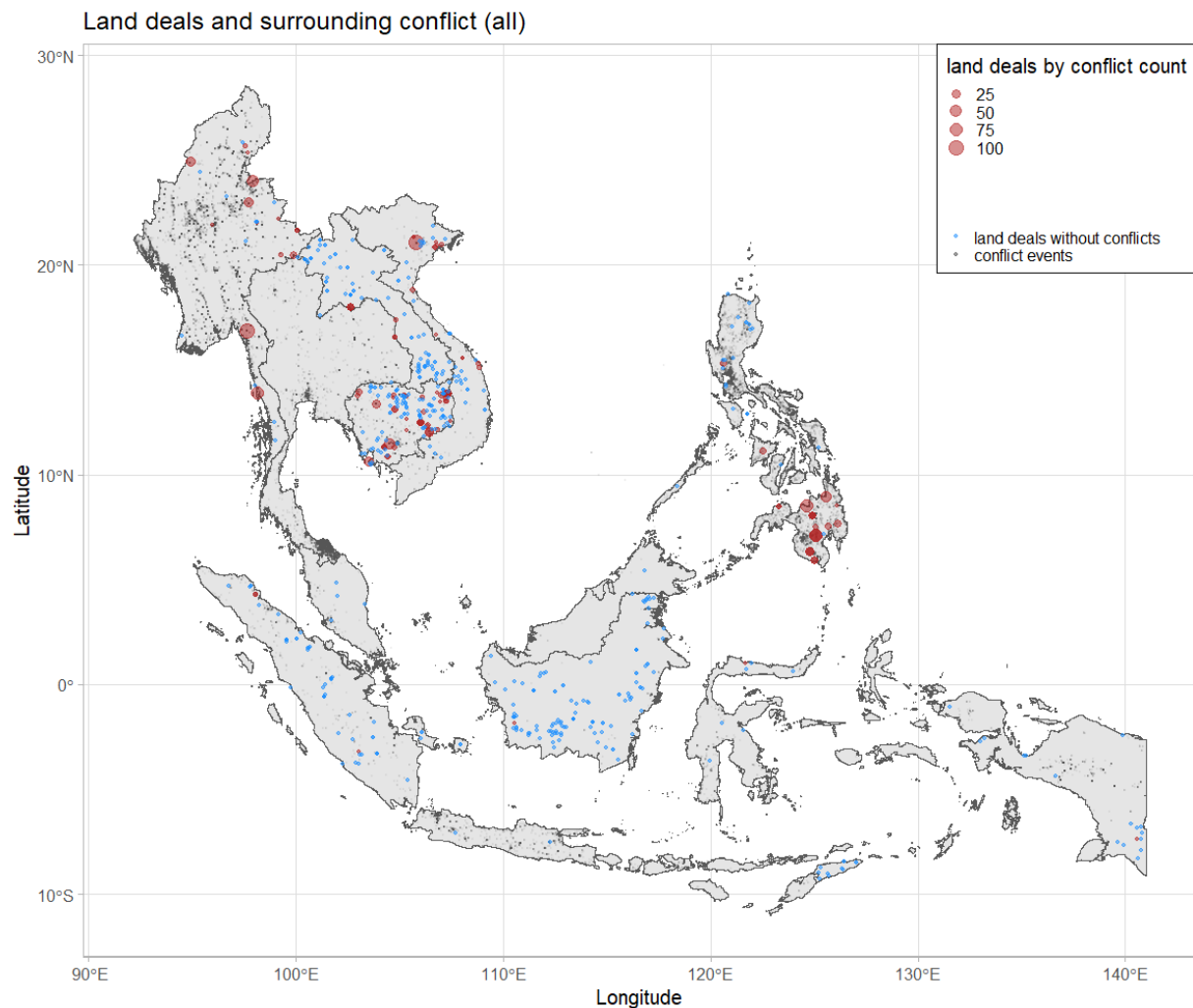
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1 Data on LSLAs come from the Land Matrix, covering the Global South – which includes Africa, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

2 In densely populated South Asia, there are fewer LSLAs.

200 out of the recorded transnational deals for agriculture.<sup>3</sup> As we will see, these global figures conceal considerable heterogeneity across both regions and countries.

**Figure 1. Land Deals and Conflict in Southeast Asia**



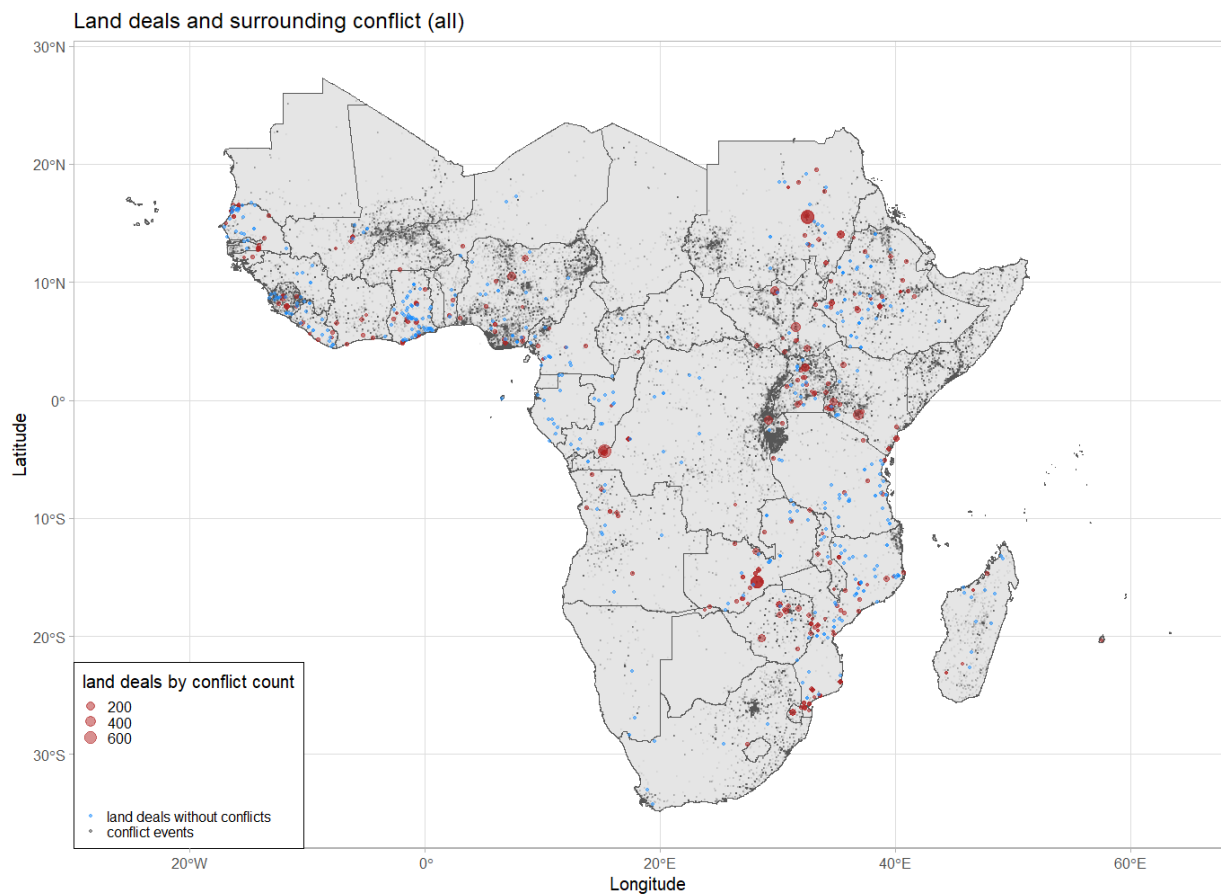
Source: Authors' own compilation, based on ACLED and Land Matrix data.

Figure 1 shows that a considerable share of land deals in Southeast Asia are associated with conflict events. To be precise, 17.8 per cent of all investments (figure again from the Land Matrix database) are located close to conflict events (+/- five years around moment of onset, and within a 10 kilometre radius). Figure 1 also shows that the conflictive land deals are clustered, with many concluded in the southern part of the Philippines (Mindanao) and in Cambodia. While Mindanao is a conflict-prone region anyway, this is not (so much) the case for Cambodia. There are relatively few land deals seeing (registered) conflict in Indonesia and Laos – despite the large number of such deals in the two countries. There are some conflicts

3 As the lack of consultation often play a role in conflict related to LSLAs, please note also the (incomplete) information of the Land Matrix on consultation processes: not consulted (123 cases); limited consultation (120); FPIC (53); other (15); no information (the remaining 1,673).

occurring in close proximity to land deals in Vietnam and several such hotspots in Myanmar too, a country with a huge number of conflict events (including in rural areas) unrelated to these deals. We visualise (1) in red the land deals associated with conflict events, with the size of the red dot indicating the number of such events within a 10 km radius around the land deal and as occurring five years before or after the conclusion of the contract,<sup>4</sup> (2) in blue the land deals without any registered conflict event in close proximity, and (3) in grey all conflict events.

**Figure 2. Land Deals and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa**



Source: Authors' own compilation, based on ACLED and Land Matrix data.

In SSA, the share of LSLAs located close to conflict is even higher: in 38.5 per cent of all cases there is at least one conflict event that is within a 10km radius of that deal. These land deals are more evenly distributed than in Southeast Asia. Yet, certain clusters are apparent. From south to north, there is a first cluster of deals in the southern corner of Mozambique, but numerous conflicts in close proximity to land deals can be found across the country. In neigh-

4 In most cases, the deal's conclusion refers to conclusion of the contract (negotiation status = "concluded / contract signed." When this information is missing, we consider a deal concluded based on information on implementation (operation status = "startup phase (no production)" or "in operation (production)").



bouring conflict-prone Zimbabwe, there is hardly a land deal without a conflict nearby. Similarly, Zambia's LSLAs – in particular in the country's agricultural investment corridor in the south – are often associated with conflict events. Many land deals are associated with conflict in western Kenya, in Uganda, and in South Sudan – in a region with a relatively large number of armed-protest events anyway. Ethiopia, a major target country of foreign LSLAs, has fairly frequently seen conflicts close to these land investments; so has Egypt. Moving to West Africa, land deals coming in tandem with conflict can be found in several countries – from Nigeria to Senegal. Liberia and Sierra Leone stand out as hotspots; in both countries, a number of these deals are spatially associated with social conflict.

These descriptive insights from Asia and Africa do not allow us to identify causal links between LSLAs and conflict. However, they do at least suggest substantive variation across regions and countries in terms of the extent to which land deals are spatially associated with violent protest. LSLAs coincide with conflict in places with a high prevalence of the latter, for example Mindanao, Nigeria, or South Sudan, but also intersect in ones that are relatively peaceful too, such as Ghana or Zambia (not so apparent in Southeast Asia).

There have been very few quantitative studies on the relationship between LSLAs and conflict that make an attempt to isolate the concrete effects of the former from other potential causes of the latter. Balestri and Maggioni (2021) apply a quasi-experimental research design to SSA data. They use a limited sample of 72 geo-referenced large-scale land deals (data taken from the Land Matrix) to identify 95 “LSLA-treated” grid cells in SSA that they then compare with geographically close and socio-demographically similar ones in terms of conflict outcomes. Using this relatively small and selective sample they look at the effect of LSLAs on organised violence, defined as any incident of lethal violence perpetrated by an organised actor against either another organised actor or civilians<sup>5</sup>; in other words, their analysis is restricted to relatively intense forms of conflict. If anything, their results on the effects of LSLAs on organised violence are ambiguous (and highly sensitive to specification). They find a conflict-increasing effect of “domestic deals” (which are not comprehensively covered by the Land Matrix), while the early phases of a project's implementation appear to be associated with lower levels of conflict. In sum, the results of this study should be interpreted with care. Similarly, the study of 133 countries (covering the years 2000–2013) by Krieger and Meierrieks (2016) comes with caveats, too. The authors find a positive correlation between the number of LSLAs (measured at the country level) and the risk of ethnic tensions. Moreover, these tensions are more acute in countries with less democratic institutions. The study suffers, however, from some important shortcomings: in particular, the inclusion of high-income countries as target destinations for LSLAs even though they are not covered by the Land Matrix.

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5 They also examine “one-sided” events targeted at civilians alone.

The weak correlation between the geographic location of these LSLAs and that of conflict events, alongside the absence of strong country-level patterns (in terms of the spatial association between such deals and armed protest), is indicative of the relevance here of specific local conditions and of project/investor characteristics. This is not to downplay the role of country-level factors, for example poorly protected land rights, weak judicial systems, and the lack of accountable institutions (from the village- to the national level). Yet, these weak institutional frameworks and governance systems – in particular with reference to land and land rights – leave ample room for investors, local authorities, and affected populations to pursue their own interests to the detriment of others. This may eventually give rise to localised social conflict, often between investors and affected populations, but with an important role for local and higher-level authorities, as we will see in the following.

### 3.2 Qualitative evidence: Resistance and repression

Before reviewing the qualitative evidence, we want to highlight that we have – as has much of the literature on LSLAs and conflict – so far implicitly assumed that the presence of social conflict should necessarily be seen as something with negative consequences or development impacts. Yet, as pointed out above, conflict may also arise where options for institutional forms of legitimate protest and litigation – for example in pursuit of the protection of the land rights of affected communities – are limited. In fact, we will see below that – partly violent – resistance by affected populations, meaning the presence of social conflict, has often led to large-scale projects being modified or abandoned – for better or worse. This is not to legitimise violent protest as a way of achieving certain ends, but it is a call to differentiate between and closely examine the different types of conflicts that are associated with LSLAs. In addition to local resistance, we frequently see violent repression of affected populations – often as a response to resistance against large-scale projects.

This pattern of mobilisation that culminates in repression and coercion can be observed in many of the cases studied by Dell'Angelo et al. (2017), who examine what they call “commons grabbing” – understood as a situation in which LSLAs target land commonly used under customary or similar law via coercion. The authors argue that the establishment of large-scale production “entails fundamental social transformation” (p. 8) for smallholder-based production systems. They also posit that the underlying land acquisitions “preferentially target common land and land with multiple access and use claims” (p. 8), turning these commons into private property or concessions. These effects and processes produce conflict via different forms of coercion, including the lack of informed consent from previous land users, exclusion of the latter from negotiations, and evictions involving physical violence. Among a global sample of 56 LSLA cases – selected from 35 peer-reviewed articles – they find coercion in tandem with protests and physical but non-violent resistance in one-quarter of them, and coercion including violent physical action in another 25 per cent besides. The major risk factors vis-à-

vis conflict are clearly the lack of FPIC and land loss. The study also finds government support to play a major role in the implementation of the large-scale land deals under consideration. Although there may be some bias towards selecting “more conflictive” LSLAs in the sample used by Dell’Angelo et al. (2017), the share of deals associated with some form of social conflict is still in line with the estimates of the occurrence of conflict reported above from a larger sample.

The results from Dell’Angelo et al. (2021), who again look at commons grabbing, corroborate the findings of their previous study. Here, the authors focus on mobilisation and rely on data from the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas), a database on environmental conflicts and related mobilisations worldwide. Dell’Angelo et al. (2021) select 185 conflict cases from the EJAtlas (out of a total 2,642 at the time) that involve commons grabbing and are related to some form of agribusiness. Their descriptive analysis of the coded cases shows that local civil society organisations, including those representing indigenous people and farmers (plus women, landless peasants, or pastoralists), are the most frequent mobilisers – being often supported by external actors, including mainly international environmental bodies but also scientists and wider social movements. Mobilisation typically occurs as a reaction to the implementation of the land deal, although it can also be observed beforehand too – that is, when potential projects and plans are first announced. Mobilisation is most commonly non-violent, taking both confrontational (mainly street protests, blockades, land occupations) and less confrontational forms (mainly public campaigns and petition letters). While such forms of mobilisation can be observed in the vast majority of cases, potentially violent instances (mainly damage to property) can be observed in about one-fifth of all occurrences.

When one looks at cases that the authors classify as “high intensity conflicts” characterised by “mass mobilizations and/or arrests, criminalization, violence and even murders” (72 out of the 185 cases), the share of violent forms of mobilisation increases to around one-third (28 per cent for property damage and 13 per cent for threats to use arms, with overlap). Mobilisations, often by local actors, are often met with confrontational countermeasures on behalf of investors and/or authorities. These measures most frequently include repression (37 per cent of cases), migration/displacement (35 per cent), violent targeting of activists (32 per cent), and criminalisation (32 per cent). In a considerable number of cases (24 per cent), the murder of activists is even reported. While such reactions prevail, there are also a significant number of LSLAs in which mobilisation leads to increased participation (22 per cent), compensation (20 per cent), better compliance by the investors (17 per cent), or court decisions in favour of the mobilisers (13 per cent). Further, in about one-fifth of the cases projects are suspended temporarily, cancelled, or the investors withdraw. Dell’Angelo et al. (2021) consider their findings clear evidence of “a dynamic of oppression” that starts with the violation of community interests, therewith triggering largely peaceful community reactions ultimately suppressed through coercion and violence.

We complement these studies by Dell'Angelo et al. (2017, 2021) with a narrative synthesis from Southeast Asia and SSA. Using the conceptual framework sketched above, we examine the types of social conflict in the selected cases and focus on (a) the role of relative deprivation and (b) the influence of context conditions related to the investment, socio-economic variables, as well as institutions. As in our earlier analysis, we identify 590 LSLAs in SSA and 460 in Southeast Asia (from the Land Matrix) that intersect with a conflict event in the ACLED database (+/- five years around the contract conclusion date, and occurring within a 10km radius). From these, we select 25 cases in each region that are best documented in the Land Matrix database (as measured by the number of sources). We then further reduce our selection by only including those cases that (a) report the presence of a land conflict and (b) are documented by at least one "research paper" (both variables as classified in the Land Matrix). In a final step, three more cases had to be dropped because the quality of documentation was misclassified (in the Land Matrix). This procedure leads to a selection of a total 21 cases.<sup>6</sup> Table 1 in the Appendix provides details on each of the cases in tabular form. Most information is obtained from the Land Matrix, but we included additional sources too (referenced in Table 1).

#### *a Patterns of conflict: Repression against mobilisation and resistance*

With regards to the patterns of mobilisation and conflict, the selected cases confirm what had been observed by Dell'Angelo et al. (2021). Peaceful mobilisation against the investment is the norm, in particular via demonstrations and protests. Examples include a protest march of more than 100 people at the Equatorial Palm Oil plantation in Liberia and demonstrations in front of the regency parliament in East Kotawaringin, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, to claim financial compensation for lost land. Petitions and legal action are other common forms of peaceful resistance. For example, more than 350 signatures were gathered in opposition to the JTF Madagascar jatropa plantation in Ihosy District, while people affected by a sugar cane plantation filed lawsuits in both Cambodia and in the investor's home country, the United Kingdom. In some cases, the local population reclaimed their land either by planting on cleared land or by taking over neglected but already planted areas. The former has, for instance, been reported from the First Resources oil palm plantation in East Kalimantan, where some villagers started planting rubber on the plantation concession. The latter was reported for one of the Feronia plantations in the DRC, where affected communities reclaimed 400 hectares of existing oil palm plantation, which they intended to manage cooperatively (including processing of the fruits in their own small-scale mill). While protests typically remain peaceful, they turn violent in a few cases. When parts of the affected population resort to violence they frequently do so by damaging company property, as was reportedly the case at the PT Dongin

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<sup>6</sup> We purposefully add the case of "Sime Darby" to the selection since we know it well from our own research. This case no longer counts as a transnational LSLA (in 2020 the plantation was acquired by MANCO, a domestic investor); therefore, it was not selected by our original screening procedure.

Prabhawa oil palm plantation in the Indonesian province Papua, at the Green Future Innovations sugar cane plantation in the northern Philippines, or at Sime Darby in Liberia.

Theft, especially of oil palm bunches or fruits, is a highly contentious topic around LSLAs and is often reported as the cause of violence against civilians. We see allegations of theft in the cases of Sime Darby in Liberia, Feronia in the DRC, Socfin in Cameroon, and First Resources in East Kalimantan; imprisonment frequently follows. Yet, the reactions of investors and authorities are often more violent. They regularly involve arbitrary arrest (e.g. Herakles Farms in Cameroon), mistreatment (e.g. Sime Darby in Liberia), and torture (e.g. Feronia in the DRC). In our 21 cases, five entail reports of murdered civilians, protesters, or activists. Very frequently, there are reports of repression, violence, and intimidation by private security forces on behalf of the investor (e.g. in PT Mustika Sembuluh in Indonesia or Socfin Socapalm in Cameroon).

Intra- or inter-community conflicts appear to be the exception rather than the rule. The Senhuile-Senethanol investment in northern Senegal amplified local factionalism. Pastoralists whose commonly used land was threatened by the project clashed with other local residents who supported the latter. The conflict escalated into violence and two people died. Eventually, the government intervened and the project was then relocated. A jatropha investment in Ghana (by Smart Oil) led to tensions between indigenous populations and migrants who had settled in the area decades ago. While the two groups previously lived together peacefully, the indigenous population felt the settlers shared responsibility for the increasing pressure on land resources. In addition, plantation employment left little time for other obligations like communal labour – another source of intra-communal conflict. The police had to intervene to resolve the conflict.

#### ***b Relative deprivation: Land loss, poor jobs, and unmet expectations***

The potential loss of land is often central in LSLA-linked conflicts. Large-scale forced eviction is not the rule, but there are two examples of forced evictions in our list from Cambodia. The establishment of the sugar cane plantation Angkor Sugar in northern Cambodia is an extreme case here: People from 33 villages had to move without their FPIC being obtained. Further, some of those displaced voiced concerns that the land they were assigned as compensation was not only much smaller than their original holdings but also had not been cleared of land mines. More common than large-scale evictions are infringements on communally held and/or used land (see above), as well as on privately used farmland. In some cases, companies appear to have cleared land cultivated by smallholders (e.g. Golden Veroleum in Liberia).

Additionally, other socio-economic problems are very frequently mentioned as important drivers of mobilisation against the investment too. Employment and working conditions, for instance, are often linked to conflicts around LSLAs. Very low salaries at the plantations of Feronia (amounting to almost only half of the World Bank's extreme poverty threshold of USD

1.90 for contract workers) are one example. Notwithstanding, the company was still complying with national law, which installed an exception for the national minimum wage for agribusiness in 2018. Delays in salary payments for several months forced employees to take out loans, resulting in a form of debt servitude.

The much-cited Addax investment is a case with ambiguous socio-economic impacts, as the project is associated with both adverse effects (e.g. evictions, destruction of water sources) and positive ones too (e.g. some lease and compensation payments, employment). It is an example of how a large share of the risks and costs of a project's failure – here also due to the Ebola crisis, followed by the transfer of the project to two subsequent investors – may be borne by a poor and vulnerable population (see also the section on consequences below). Today, locals have incurred the “initial” costs of the project (land loss and disruption of livelihoods) but the presumed gains have not materialised. Resistance against evictions – as in the previous cases reportedly associated with threats of violence – accompanied the project from the start, and there have also been strikes against working conditions on the plantation.

Environmental impacts are mentioned in almost all cases: water pollution from pesticides, fertilisers, and mill effluent in many areas (e.g. at Green Futures Innovations in the Philippines, Addax Bioenergy in Sierra Leone, or First Resources in Indonesia); haze because of burning rainforests and peat adds to these problems, in particular in Central Kalimantan; the rapid deforestation of peat forest for oil palm plantations in Seruyan District, meanwhile, was linked to increases in haze intensity during the wildfires in 2006, occurring right after the investment boom under the notorious *bupati* (regent) Darwan Ali (PT Mustika Sembuluh).

Another common grievance among affected communities are unfulfilled promises of infrastructure and social services. The management of the former Sime Darby plantation had promised to build more than 40 new villages with housing, social infrastructure, and places of worship. Little of this was ultimately realised. Promises of employment – with multiple well-remunerated positions – moved many to agree to a proposed investment (if, indeed, they had/have a voice at all). Eventually, however, most plantation workers would be employed under precarious conditions as short-term (sub)contractors. Similarly, local-infrastructure development did not materialise as promised in the case of Feronia in the DRC.

*c Characteristics of the investment: Huge concessions and the mitigating effects of inclusion*

LSLAs instigating conflict are often very large in size, particularly in SSA. Yet, concessions are often much larger than the area actually cleared or in operation. For example, the concession for the former Sime Darby plantation in Liberia covers 220,000 ha, while the plantation currently covers about 10,300 ha. The Feronia plantations in the DRC, established during colonial times, cover around 130,000 ha split over four different locations: three of oil palm and a fourth of grains, vegetables, and fruits. From this concession area, again only one-quarter is operational. Of a contract size of 160,000 ha intended for jatropha in the Tana River Delta in Kenya,

only 10,000 ha were cleared for a pilot plantation over the course of a year – before the investment was then cancelled altogether.

The huge contract sizes create considerable uncertainty around LSLAs. The larger the area, the more difficult it is to conduct meaningful and effective consultation with potentially affected populations. However, most of the reported protests and conflicts ensued when evictions actually happened and/or when land was cleared or put into production. Contract farming has often been seen as one mode of a more inclusive agricultural model by linking smallholders to large farming operations. We see contract-farming schemes or corresponding plans in about half of the cases of conflict. In 11 of the latter there is no contract farming, in three plans are mentioned, and in seven deals such schemes were indeed realised. Of those in existence, the schemes are small in some LSLAs (e.g. less than 1 per cent of the area at PT Mustika Sembuluh, Central Kalimantan) but relatively important in others (30 per cent at PT Dwie Warna Karya, also in Central Kalimantan; 1,000 contract farmers on the Socfin Socapalm plantation in Cameroon, compared to 2,244 employees). While contract-farming schemes cannot generally prevent social conflict through better economic inclusion, they also do not appear to be a major source of discontent. Instead, they are perceived by locals as a way to benefit from the LSLA, for example in the case of Oil Palm Uganda. We discuss the issue of contract farming in the context of donor support in more detail below.

#### *d Socio-economic context: The myth of unused land*

Plantation investments are realised almost exclusively in poor rural environments, quite frequently ones with little previous exposure to large-scale commercial agriculture. Oil Palm Uganda, situated on Bugala Island in Lake Victoria, is a case in point. The area was poor, even by national standards. In contrast to many other cases, smallholder farms were only marginally affected (2 per cent of the plantation area), while most of the land was transformed from wooded grasslands, other grasslands, and forest. Typically, LSLAs yielding conflict (partially) target land used by smallholders: that is, at least some parts of the local population face a threat of or experience the loss of land, a key livelihood source. The Kho Kong investment in Cambodia forcibly evicted 500 families; the area designated to Herakles Farms in Cameroon is inhabited by around 33,000 people. Even in cases where plantations are decades or centuries old, smallholders are affected when these sites are modified or – as occurring quite frequently – expanded. Sime Darby in Liberia was mostly transformed into its new guise from large-scale rubber plantations dating back to 1954. The initial establishment of what are today's Feronia oil palm plantations in the DRC date back to 1911. In both cases, recent expansions have affected (anew) many smallholders.

A second group at risk are pastoralists, who may lose access to commonly used grazing land and to water sources – for example in the Senhuile-Senethanol case in Senegal (another not-so-well documented case involving conflicts between Fulani herders and an investor can be found in Ghana; Land Matrix case #4341). As in other similar cases, the corresponding use

rights are typically not formalised and thus ignored in land deals. This may also exacerbate pre-existing cleavages between pastoralists and other – sometimes ethnically distinct – groups, although there is no explicit evidence on this link.

Finally, LSLAs also target forests, swamps, and other natural “unused” land. The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE)-linked plantation PT Dongin Prabhawa in Papua, Indonesia, is an example, where forest savannah and swamps have been converted into agricultural land. This does not mean, of course, that the area was uninhabited or unused before the investment. On the contrary, the forests were used by the Malind indigenous group, who were displaced by the plantation. Even a region that looks uninhabited and unused to the unknowing eye – like the area of the JTF *jatropha* plantation in Madagascar – is vital to many farmers and pastoralists alike.

*e Nature of institutions: Threatened community land rights*

Almost all of the target regions where conflicts with local populations occur are characterised by communal land rights and by overlapping and conflicting (de facto and de jure) land claims. In several cases, the land rights of indigenous populations under communal customary tenure are affected, including in Indonesia (e.g. First Resources and PT Dwie Warna Karya), in Ghana (Smart Oil), and in the Philippines (Green Future Innovations). The complexity of land-tenure systems is illustrated by the Kenyan Tana River Delta. This region is a crossroads for many nomadic or semi-nomadic herders. Diverse population groups share land in varying ways and in different periods of the year through a complex set of customary rules, whose partial conflict with statutory land law was exacerbated by the arrival of the investors. Another interesting case is Oil Palm Uganda – established, as noted, on an island on Lake Victoria. Here, land titles were held by better-off parts of the population – many of whom had relocated to the mainland, which led to conflict during the implementation process when locals saw non-resident landowners returning.

In many cases, local authorities at different levels have played an important role in the LSLA at hand. In several instances, mid-level authorities have an important role to play – say at the district- or provincial level. A case in point comes from Indonesia. The PT Mustika Sembuluh oil palm investment in our list is just one of many projects in a regency under Ali. Research by the Gecko Project and Mongabay (Mongabay 2017) found that under his governance, 37 concessions of nearly half a million ha (!) were issued in 2004 and 2005 alone (the regency comprises around 1,650,000 ha). One of these concessions even overlapped with Tanjung Puting National Park. Logging companies started exploiting the former communal lands in the 1970s, and oil palm companies continued the practice – including PT Mustika Sembuluh. The then regent was under investigation by the KPK (the Indonesian “corruption eradication agency”) but never charged. Wilmar International, today one of the world’s largest palm oil companies, was created by a merger of the plantation portfolio in Seruyan with others from



the family business. In reaction to the irregularities in the regency, the company “mothballed” plantations approved by Ali.

In particular, the inclusion of such authorities as contracting parties can thus not be seen to guarantee the consultation or inclusion of affected populations. This also holds for traditional authorities. For the Smart Oil jatropha plantation in Ghana, the paramount chief and local chief negotiated the deal jointly. Once concluded, the paramount chief reportedly replaced the disagreeing chief in order to have better access to the compensation fund. In the Socfin case in Sierra Leone, there was an initial agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture and traditional authorities that did not lead to meaningful consultations with affected populations.

### *f Consequences and failure*

A number of projects were abandoned as a consequence of these conflicts; some never really went into operation. After initial frictions related to the Bedford Biofuels investment in Kenya’s Tana River Delta, for instance, the investor first made several concessions to the demands of the local population. He pledged to keep 60 per cent of the concession jatropha-free, to allow cattle ranching close to plantations, to protect livestock routes, and to spend millions of dollars on community projects. After a relatively small pilot area was run for 12 months, the investment was, as noted, finally abandoned. Local and international environmental organisations played a major role in the fight against the investment.

Senhuile-Senethanol in Senegal is another example of an investment that shut down after a wave of conflict. In other cases, conflict led to a change of ownership: for example, at the former Sime Darby plantation in Liberia, which is now in the hands of a national investor. Herakles Farms in Cameroon was first delayed, then started operation on a reduced area, was abandoned some years later, before being taken up again under new management. Affected populations around the Feronia oil palm plantations filed a complaint with the investors’ grievance mechanism which was deemed admissible, and whose mediation process is pending. At the same time, the company declared bankruptcy and underwent a restructuring of ownership.

The consequences of such ownership change and restructuring for local populations is difficult to judge, but there have been no reports of substantial improvements for locals in such cases. Yet, not all complaints and protests are without success. At the Kho Kong sugar cane plantation in Cambodia, the aforementioned lawsuits – filed by affected communities both there and in the UK – resulted in three victories for the complainants. First, Bonsucro, a sustainability certification initiative, withdrew certification for Tate & Lyle, the UK importer. Second, the European Union agreed to revise its Everything but Arms (EBA) agreement with Cambodia and, finally, the UK importer paid out USD 2,000 each to some of the affected families. In the case of Herakles Farms in Cameroon, a complaint to the “Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil” (RSPO) eventually led to a considerable reduction in size of the concession area.

In the Feronia case, a mediation process is under way, but has not yielded any results (see below).

The qualitative findings presented here have to be taken with a pinch of salt. We sadly cannot verify all the pieces of “evidence” reported above. Yet, the sheer number of reports on violent repression by investors and associated private and state security forces suggest that this very frequently occurs when a LSLA meets local resistance.

### **3.3 Can donor involvement make a difference?**

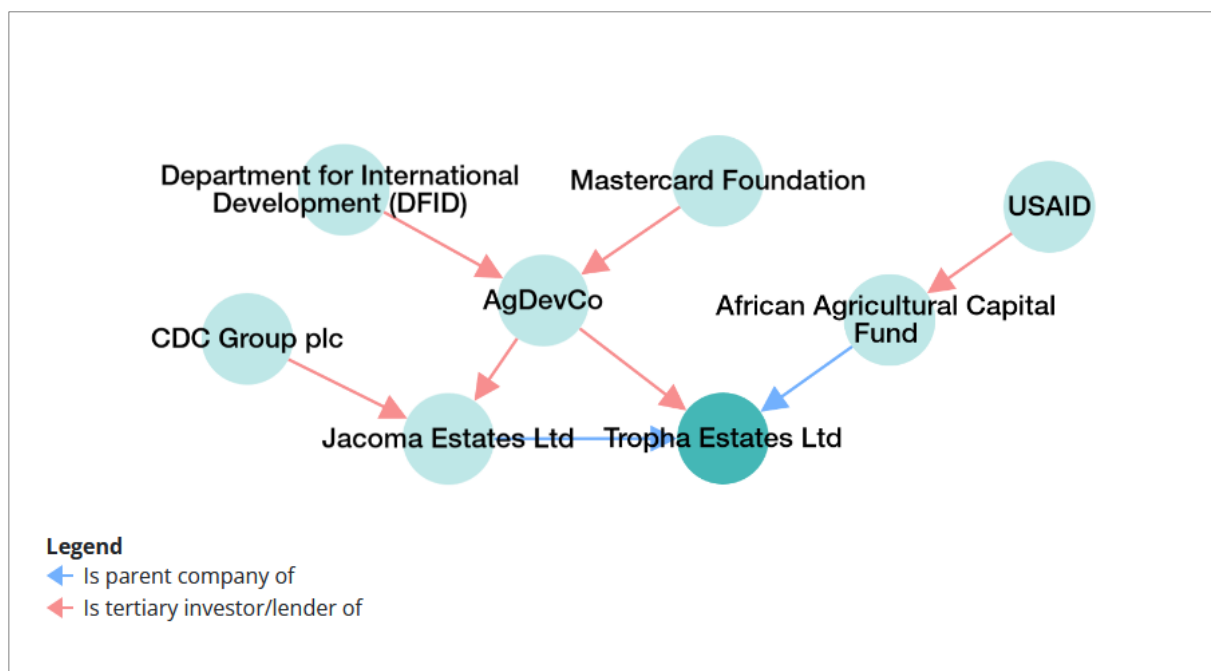
We now present some suggestive evidence on whether and how donor involvement in LSLAs can make a difference. While the majority of the above “conflictive” cases are investment projects by private companies that do not involve bilateral or multilateral development banks or agencies, some have indeed received donor support. There are reasons to assume that donor involvement may lead to LSLAs less prone to social conflict. The involvement of international donors who adhere to human rights principles is likely to influence the selection of supported projects and – once underway – compliance with the relevant internationally agreed frameworks (e.g. the Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) principles, or the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT, see Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2012). This is not guaranteed, as the following examples from our selective sample of LSLAs illustrate. Donors are or were involved in the Addax case in Sierra Leone, in the Feronia investment in the DRC, in the JTF project in Madagascar, and in Oil Palm Uganda.

The Addax investment in Sierra Leone was supported by seven European and African development banks. Their compliance mechanisms were apparently not effective in preventing adverse socio-economic impacts and the use of repressive means of silencing dissent on behalf of the investor. Further, donor involvement was not accompanied by a long-term strategy that would have prevented or mitigated the negative impacts resulting from the eventual withdrawal of the originally supported investor from the project (who reportedly paid back all loans; Kruckow 2021).

Feronia’s oil palm project in the DRC is known for having seen the involvement of several European development agencies, namely from Belgium (BIO), Germany (DEG), the Netherlands (FMO), Spain (AECID), and the UK (CDC Group). Through the “Independent Complaints Mechanism” of the DEG, an NGO representing affected communities filed a complaint concerning the legitimacy of the land titles, human rights abuses, and insufficient FPIC processes. Independent adjudicators deemed the complaint admissible and started a mediation process. Although commendable, these processes are very slow and are still to show any visible impact on the ground. In the meantime, as noted, the investor company declared bankruptcy and significant portions of the donor investments were lost.

In JTF Madagascar's jatropha investment, both the Finnish Fund for Development Cooperation (Finnfund) and BIO are involved together with the Italian private investor Tozzi Green. Petitions with hundreds of signatories, street protests, and letters of complaint addressed to the prime minister have remained largely without consequence; the plantation continues to operate. In the context of Oil Palm Uganda, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) supported the establishment of a contract-farming scheme. IFAD was criticised for giving the green light to the project, but continued its support regardless. Although the project overall has not been without its problems (see above), its positive impacts seem to be associated with this contract-farming component.

**Figure 3. Ownership Structure behind Tropha Estates, Malawi**



Source: Land Matrix.

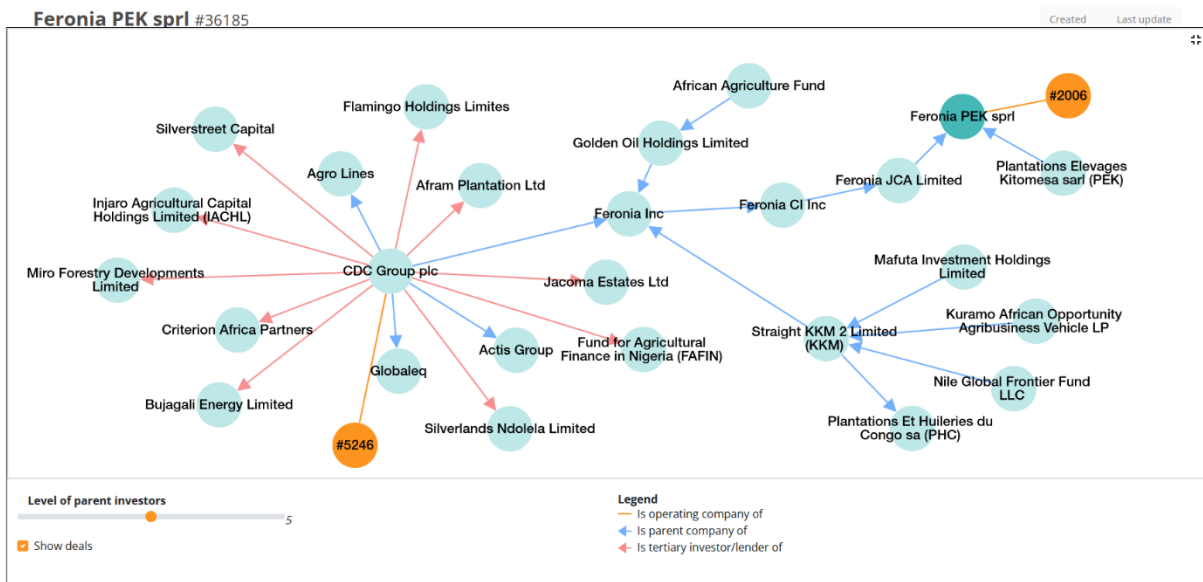
This is not the only example where the establishment of contract-farming schemes has been associated with more favourable outcomes for rural populations in proximity to LSLAs and with less conflict (which is also why these cases are not part of our selection). One such case is Amatheon Agri in Zambia. Although the company was also accused of not consulting with affected communities, there are no reports of any violent action (or threats thereof) on behalf of the investor.<sup>7</sup> Amatheon's operations include smallholder schemes that are supported by DEG and the United States Agency for International Development (USAid). Another project with strong smallholder involvement through contract-farming schemes is Tropha Estates in Malawi, cultivating macadamia nuts, chillies, and paprika (Land Matrix case #4560). According to the relatively limited information available, this project has not produced conflicts with

<sup>7</sup> See: [https://landmatrix.org/deal/3783/#local\\_communities](https://landmatrix.org/deal/3783/#local_communities).

local populations and appears to have signed up a considerable number of contract farmers (more than 5,000) and generated a significant number of jobs (about 700) – that based on a core plantation lease of 1,600 ha. Tropha Estates is supported both directly and indirectly through various donors, including USAid, the British Department for International Development, and CDC (see Figure 3 above). We show this ownership structure to illustrate the complex investor and owner networks behind many LSLAs. While they diversify financial risk for the project, on the one hand, and for the investor, on the other, such structures also diffuse responsibility and accountability. While this is, of course, not a major problem in Tropha Estates’ case, in that of Feronia’s DRC operations it was (and continues to be).

In Figure 4 below, meanwhile, Feronia PEK (at the top of the picture) is linked to Feronia Inc (listed in Canada) through two additional companies (Feronia JCA and Feronia CI), both based in the Cayman Islands. Feronia Inc is then linked to CDC Group, which is also involved in Jacoma Estates – the owner of Tropha Estates Ltd. This probably tells us that donor involvement that is too distant from the actual project and the operations on the ground – as in the case of Feronia – may not enable donors to effectively enforce compliance with responsible-investment principles. It implies also the risks of getting involved in LSLAs with adverse local impacts and instigating conflict.

**Figure 4. Ownership Structure behind Feronia PEK, Democratic Republic of Congo**



Source: Land Matrix.

Coming back to contract farming: This is not to hail it as the pathway to reconciling LSLAs with inclusive rural development, but rather to say well-designed and donor-supported contract-farming schemes can have positive effects on rural communities that otherwise benefit little from LSLAs. Another case with significant – and much-criticised – donor support illustrates how difficult this can be: Asili Farms. The latter receives donor support through the

Common Fund for Commodities (CFC), an autonomous intergovernmental financial institution established within the framework of the United Nations.<sup>8</sup> Asili Farms is Uganda's largest grain and oilseed producer, and it cooperates with the so-called Joseph Initiative to establish contract-farming schemes and other forms of support to smallholders (e.g. demonstration plots). According to the Land Matrix, one of Asili Farms' projects (case #7679) can be associated with a lack of consultation, with eviction, and with the use of heavy-handed responses by the local police and private security forces. A recent joint report by the CFC and the Royal Tropical Institute (2018) details a project to support small and medium-sized enterprises in the maize value chain to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

Another company that received substantial donor support, specifically from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and DEG, is Zambeef. Although NGO reports (FIAN 2012) suggest that Zambeef's land investments were not without local conflict, including as a result of the displacement of dozens of farmers, there have been – to the best of our knowledge – no subsequent reports of unresolved or heightened tensions in the context of these investments. At least in the Land Matrix, there are relatively few other cases of explicit IFC participation in agricultural projects (far more in mining and energy) and none with IFAD involvement.

#### 4 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This study has documented how LSLAs are very frequently associated with social conflict, in particular in SSA. In the latter region, we find at least one social conflict event within a 10km radius of a land deal in 38.5 per cent of all LSLAs. For 17.8 per cent thereof, the corresponding share is lower in Southeast Asia, but still indicates that LSLAs often trigger local contestation that is ultimately very frequently met with force by public and private security forces on behalf of the investor. Our findings on the patterns of conflict and violence here are in line with what Dell'Angelo et al. term "a dynamic of oppression" (2021: 11). This starts with the violation of community interests, triggering largely peaceful community protests that are then suppressed through coercion and violence.

Social conflicts arise due to specific local conditions and project/investor characteristics, but are of course not entirely unrelated to country-level factors such as weak land-governance systems, poor labour standards, or the limited enforcement of environmental-protection provisions. Conflictive LSLAs may occur in contexts already prone to tensions, but also in relatively peaceful places too – for example in Ghana, Indonesia, or Zambia. Conflicts are driven by a variety of factors; unsurprisingly, however, those over access to land are often key: in many of the analysed hotspots, LSLAs directly targeted land used by smallholders and/or pastoralists. In the most conflictive cases, investors appropriate land via coercion and forced eviction. As the

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8 This case was not selected in the above list since it had less supporting sources (9) compared to those chosen (13–49).

land-tenure rights of affected populations – in particular, on commonly used land – are weakly protected, they resort to protests to make their grievances heard. This is accompanied by the ambiguous role of local authorities failing to protect the land rights of owners and users living in their constituencies. However, LSLA-induced grievances extend beyond the loss of land. In mobilisations against large-scale investments – being subsequently met by violent repression – locals also protest against: (1) precarious working conditions on plantations; (2) environmental impacts; and, (3) unfulfilled promises by investors (in terms of infrastructure, social services, employment opportunities).

While there are common patterns to these conflicts between investors and local populations, the impacts of LSLAs are more ambiguous – including also in cases of violent protest. Local communities may be split between opponents to and proponents of an investment, although the majority within communities tend to reject the large-scale projects in the reviewed cases (with conflicts). Some projects entail both adverse and positive effects, the latter often originating from deliberate actions to include smallholder farmers. Our analysis of several projects involving donor support suggests that this involvement can be beneficial, because it strengthens the initiative's inclusive components – in particular by supporting contract-farming schemes. Yet, contract farming should not be seen as a panacea for the adverse impacts that many LSLAs have and the social problems and conflicts they cause.

From our analysis, we can derive the following policy recommendations that could bring (some) LSLAs considerably closer to Article 12.4 of the VGGT (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2012): “Responsible investments should do no harm, safeguard against dispossession of legitimate tenure right holders and environmental damage, and should respect human rights.” Compliance with these principles would massively reduce the considerable risk of conflict in relation to LSLAs. Before we turn to the recommendations, we first want to highlight that resistance, protest, and contestation – which have spiralled into localised violent conflict triggered by repression, coercion, and force enacted on behalf of the investor – have probably prevented potentially harmful projects from being implemented.

#### *a Preventing adverse impacts*

- National laws should require thorough assessments of the social and environmental impacts of all land investments (including proposals on how to handle difficulties / mitigate adverse effects). Technical reports which allow realistic appraisal of the economic prospects of the agricultural investment should be compulsory, too. Assessments should be based on mandatory community consultation and a systematic “do no harm” framework.
- Subnational regions with an explicitly high risk of conflict (e.g. recent post-conflict countries or regions with ongoing tensions) could be declared restricted areas vis-à-vis investments. Governments of conflict / post-conflict countries should be supported in identifying and demarcating areas to be (temporarily) excluded from any LSLAs.

- Governments play a key role in facilitating LSLAs, providing and enforcing legal frameworks, and dealing with arising conflicts. Within bilateral and multilateral policy dialogue, countries should be pressed to ensure that land deals / investors adhere to international frameworks / international guidelines (e.g. RAI, RSPO, VGGT). Corresponding grievance mechanisms should be established and made accessible to affected communities.
- Aid activities could provide technical and financial support to civil society and advocacy organisations working on land-related contestation in affected countries. This support could strengthen bottom-up activities aiming at monitoring governmental/investor adherence to both national and international standards.
- Support should be given to affected countries in establishing national LSLA monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure investors' compliance with agreed provisions (social, economic, and environmental safeguards, the provision of compensation) and to allow for more informed policymaking regarding LSLAs.
- Technical assistance should be provided to the governments of affected countries with the aim of reforming legal frameworks vis-à-vis land governance, with the specific objective of securing informal tenure rights and common-property regimes.

*b Meaningful and inclusive consultation*

- Community consultation needs to take place before any activities start on the land in question. They should adhere to national law, which in turn should respect traditional leadership structures on the local level.
- Regulations on community consultation should include provisions that ensure the participation of the local population (rather than just the village leadership) to prevent rent-seeking behaviour and clientelism. Demarcation processes need to be as inclusive as possible, and at best involve also neighbouring communities such that horizontal conflicts between communities can be mitigated from the outset.
- Targeted international aid activities could focus on supporting local communities in building capacities that allow them to (1) thoroughly assess the costs and benefits of a given LSLA and (2) effectively negotiate with international investors and state institutions alike. Specifically, aid interventions could provide direct technical assistance and/or funding for consultancy support to affected communities.
- There should be scope for individual (community- or village-level) agreements regarding compensation and additional community investments. These should be as transparent as possible.

*c Information, expectation management, and conflict resolution*

- Investors should be pressed to devise transparent and active information campaigns as part of their general investment plans. These campaigns should be designed to ensure regular and systematic information on the project's core elements, as well as on its progress over time (e.g. via regular community consultation, local radio, social media).
- International investors are responsible for the preparation of appropriate, realistic, and feasible compensation plans (including contingency provisions, if required). Consequently, they should be held accountable for any deviations from original such plans independent of the specific causes thereof.
- Support should be provided for the development of formal national land-dispute settlement systems (e.g. Ombudsman offices) that are independent and widely accessible (e.g. including regional offices in the most affected areas). In particular, these institutions should be staffed by individuals with the necessary skills and competencies in land-tenure rights and conflict resolution.
- In areas with known LSLA-related conflicts, aid agencies could implement specific projects aimed at supporting local communities in building capacities for peaceful conflict management within and between affected villages. Interventions could include information and awareness campaigns, training workshops in peaceful conflict management, or support given to the establishment of local-level peace committees focusing on the settlement of land-related conflicts.
- Private security forces appear to quickly resort to violence when confronted with local resistance. This neglected aspect of the LSLA–conflict link must now receive more policy attention. Improved selection, training, and accountability vis-à-vis such forces may be an important lever to mitigate conflicts around LSLAs.

*d Inclusive models of land-based investment, transparency, and accountability*

- Land-based investments need to be more inclusive and contribute to broad-based rural development, particularly through spillovers to and the inclusion of smallholder farmers. In many smallholder-dominated contexts where conflict can be observed, the archetype is large-scale farming operations.
- Donors should only engage in well-prepared projects with strategies for including local populations. This must include ones to mitigate potential risks for the latter, in particular the ramifications of project failure – which should not be borne by affected populations themselves.
- While donor coordination and joint action is of great value, and synergies should certainly be cultivated, the complexities in project-ownership structures – including donor involvement – may also diffuse responsibilities. More attention should be paid to potential indirect involvement in problematic projects through equity funds and other financial vehicles.



If donors decide to engage in a project, they should be fully accountable for it. Modest engagement may hinder the assuming of full responsibility.

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## Appendix

**Table 1. Selected LSLA Cases with Key Characteristics**

Case (investor, country)	Type(s) of conflict(s)	Characteristics of the investments	Socio-economic context	Characteristics of institutions	Consultation	Deprivation (relative to status quo)	Deprivation (relative to other groups)	Deprivation (relative to expectation)	Conflict consequences	Sources
<b>Sime Darby, Liberia</b>	<p>Strikes; frequent conflicts between investor and villagers: vandalism of company facilities, incidents of torture and mistreatment of residents by the company, non-violent protest (smaller groups)</p> <p>Issues/allegations:</p> <p>theft and damage to plantations/facilities; lay-offs and employment conditions; expansion of plantation into cropland / communal land</p>	Very large oil palm plantation (220,000 ha concession); no smallholder involvement; expansion of plantation area and replacement of previous rubber plantation; no contract farming	High poverty and previous conflict experience	Concessions were mainly granted on land held by the government (public land), often appropriated from indigenous communities; expansion affected land under customary tenure (under the authority of local or paramount chiefs); new Land Rights Act of 2018 recognises/protects customary land tenure	Only a few villages were contacted by the company before plantation establishment; leadership and ordinary citizens typically invited; main topic: which land areas would be transferred to the investor, compensation payments were hardly discussed	Little direct land loss (because of previous plantation); own research (not published) suggests only small positive welfare effects (but higher cash incomes in villages with plantation employment)	Although plantation employment is sought after and rationed, there is no evidence of relative deprivation between those with or without it	Investor was welcome initially; local residents placed “high hopes” in investment; although the company provided schooling and healthcare services in selected locations, expectations regarding infrastructure, social services, and employment were not fulfilled	Sime Darby withdrew from the investment in 2020, plantation has since been taken over by a domestic company; conflicts between investor and locals, for example over employment / working conditions, continue	Kepe and Suah (2021); own data; LM #1388; Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (2018); FrontPageAfrica (2016, 2020); Liberia News Agency (2018)
<b>Equatorial Palm Oil, Liberia</b>	Petition and protests against investor over land issues (with > 100 participants); arbitrary beating and detention of villagers by riot police (hospitalisation) (Land Matrix, LM)	Very large oil palm plantation (170,000 ha concession); no smallholder involvement; no contract farming	See above	See above		A human rights risk assessment from 2017 identifies just remuneration, right to collective bargaining, and working safety as critical areas (Nomogaia 2017)				LM #1393; Nomogaia (2017)

Case (investor, country)	Type(s) of conflict(s)	Characteristics of the investments	Socio-economic context	Characteristics of institutions	Consultation	Deprivation (relative to status quo)	Deprivation (relative to other groups)	Deprivation (relative to expectation)	Conflict consequences	Sources
<b>Senhuile-Senethanol, Senegal</b>	Intercommunal violence between supporters and opponents (followed by police arresting and jailing project opponents); several protests against the project (hundreds of protesters); death of 2 villagers during protests	Large (20,000 ha) biofuel project (sunflower); no contract farming	Semi-nomadic pastoralists in target zone (2 villages and approx. 40 hamlets, 2 borewells and forests used in common by herders of the rural community)	Local level:  local government (rural council) is divided into 2 rival groups within 1 party (PDS) who compete for recognition on national level and support on local level; the factions use the investment to sharpen their profiles (“no-camp” vs. “yes-camp”)  National level:  minister of decentralisation supported the investment before the rural council was formally informed; central government did not intervene in the local dispute; prime minister halted the project after death of 2 villagers		(Semi-) nomadic pastoralists would have lost access to (parts of) the area used for herding and household gardens	Pastoralists in the area of the plantation location are more strongly affected than Fulani elites, who historically manage the land used for irrigated agriculture (which was not selected for the plantation area)		Project eventually abandoned	Gagné (2021); LM #3433
<b>Herakles Farms (Sithe Global Sustainable)</b>	Formal complaint by locals at the RSPO against company, based on inadequate environment	73,086 ha, 99-year lease; of these, 60,000 ha are used for oil palm; rest:	Typical livelihood activities in the concession area are farming (small-	The investor’s proposals were met with different reactions among local	Either none at all or via elites; some consultations were done poorly, so that	Insecurity over whether villagers’ land would be appropriated	Company incites intercommunal conflict by (1) getting	Promises of investment in local infrastructure (e.g. electricity,	First lease after MOU in 2009 delayed until 2013; after the complaint at	Ndi and Batteredbury (2017); LM #1159

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<b>Oils Cameroon, SGSOC, Cameroon (United States company)</b>	tal assessments – consequently, firm withdrew membership of RSPO; intimidation (arbitrary arrests and legal prosecution) of locals; destruction of crops and unannounced clearing of farmland by the company (displacement of approx. 250 people); company promised to conduct joint demarcation exercise but never followed through	environmentally, socially “protected area”; no contract farming, but 1 report states that the company supports small-scale farmers’ oil palm development	scale) and harvesting forest products; concession area is inhabited by approx. 33,000 people from 3 clans	populations, where the chief’s attitude played a decisive role; customary tenure institutions recognise land as a collective resource that can only be owned by communities or a group of people with a common lineage; no formal land demarcations or land-tenure documentation; company is backed by the national government and local elites	locals signed documents whose consequences they did not fully understand	at a later point in time; displacement, land loss, and deprivation of livelihood	people to report on neighbours’ actions against the company and (2) the modification of land, which leads to intra- and inter-village conflicts; top-down approach benefited local elites disproportionately (partly subjectively, partly objectively)	healthcare facilities, water access), of employment, and of better living standards were not realised; farmers claim that compensation for destroyed crops was not paid out	RSPO (2011), national government passed a decree (2013) for a 3-year lease and reduced concession area (approx. 20,000 ha); the investment was abandoned in 2015, but taken up under new leadership later the same year	
<b>Socfin, Sierra Leone (investor: Belgo-Luxembourg)</b>	Affected communities (organised in an association) claim the plantation to be illegitimate; protests, with subsequent repression by local police and death of 2 civilians and prosecution of protestors (1 member of parliament / speaker of the protestors)	Oil palm; lease of 12,000 ha; initial agreement between Ministry of Agriculture and chiefdoms (traditional authorities) Later government sublet the land to the company (for 50 years); villages inside the area are surrounded by the plantation		Speaker of Association of Affected Land Users is an MP and was prosecuted after protests; Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone started a mediation process which was never concluded (due to absence of paramount chiefs	FPIC was not respected / some community members report coercion to give up land No forceful evictions/ resettlements	Food security, access to education, and livelihood opportunities decreased due to lack of land and of livelihood diversification; 10,000 people displaced (LM)				RIAO and RCD (2021); LM #2371

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		(+500m buffer zone); no contract farming		and other political key actors); solving the problem was an election promise of the president in 2018, but actions never followed; UNDP and WFP intend to resume it						
<b>Addax Bioenergy, Sierra Leone (Swiss-based company); later: partly sold to investor from Mauritius, then to Sri Lankan investor</b>	Protest and strikes by workers of the plantation in 2011 (EJOLT 2022a); threat of violent protest by community members against announced evictions in 2019	Sugarcane estate, ethanol refinery, biomass power-plant; co-financed by company and 7 European and African development financial institutions (DFIs); initially, 54,000 ha (23,500 ha used); severe scaling-down of operations in 2015 (due to Ebola and low yields); later repeatedly selling of the company to other investors; contract farming planned	There are 53 villages within the project area; the scaling-down of the project brought hardship to the affected communities, who were left without both land and employment	Government representatives and local authorities convinced local communities to agree to the investment	Limited FPIC; local communities felt pressured to agree to the deal to fulfil the president's personal wishes	Disruption of livelihood activities (fetching of water and firewood became more difficult); pollution and destruction of water resources; 300 people displaced (LM)	Women of affected households had to walk larger distances to fetch firewood or water, so that feeding the family became harder	Promises made by the company regarding infrastructure investments were not fulfilled		SILNoRF et al. (2021); LM #1798; Bottazzi, Goguen, and Rist (2016); Brot für die Welt (2019); EJOLT (2022a)
<b>Feronia Inc., Democratic Republic of Congo (investors)</b>	Several deaths (e.g. through police brutality after palm theft); police repression (e.g. shooting of protestors,	Oil palm; concession area 127,000 ha (> 100-year leases;	The country's second-biggest employer in 2016;	Company operations led by close associates of the president;	Established in 1911 under colonial rule by Lever Brothers (later Unilever,	Environmental degradation and health impacts, higher		Inadequate labour conditions (e.g. bad/no equipment); low wage rates	Villagers reclaimed 400 ha of the plantation near	AEFJN et al. (2021); LM #1999, #2006;

Case (investor, country)	Type(s) of conflict(s)	Characteristics of the investments	Socio-economic context	Characteristics of institutions	Consultation	Deprivation (relative to status quo)	Deprivation (relative to other groups)	Deprivation (relative to expectation)	Conflict consequences	Sources
<b>from: Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Mauritius, Netherlands, Spain, UK)</b>	also by company security guards); official complaint filed by 9 communities (in cooperation with a CSO) via DFIs' "Independent Complaints Mechanism"; allegedly some members of the organisation were killed, others suffer from police repression (incarceration); looting, displacement, torture of community members and workers; protests (e.g. affected villagers block a road for 3 days); local organisations (of the affected communities) are heavily repressed; intimidation (e.g. arbitrary imprisonment to force contract signature (EJOLT 2022i))	approx. 25,000 ha are for oil palm); co-financers are European DFIs; Feronia is not a specialist in oil palm and made annual losses at the time of approx. USD 6–91 million; Feronia filed for bankruptcy in 2020, the land was transferred to another company despite majority ownership by European DFIs; no contract farming	about 100,000 people live on the plantations; the DRC continues to depend on food imports, including vegetable oil imports; shifting cultivation is common in this region	European DFIs play very critical role; by law, all land belongs to the state but customary rule is allowed to govern over unallocated land in rural areas; formal law does not recognise private land ownership, rather perpetual or standard concessions	subsidiary Plantations Huileries du Congo, PHC); during the acquisition by Feronia, no consultations; affected populations lay accusations of century-old land grab on new investor	child and maternal mortality than in the rest of the region; child labour (to fulfil the daily piece rates, and ultimately to get paid at all); employment irregularities (very short or no contracts, long payment delays)		(below minimum wage); late payments; job insecurity; local infrastructure projects did not take place (e.g. schools, healthcare centres, roads)	Lokutu and collectively manage a small-scale mill; complaint via ICM (Independent Complaint Mechanism) was deemed admissible, mediation process in preparation	EJOLT (2022i); GRAIN (2017); Pallarès (2021); Currier (2021); Téllez-Chávez (2019); Djalovski, Hartmann, and Windfuhr (2021)
<b>Angkor Sugar, Cambodia; closely linked to 2 other concessions in the same area (investor: Thailand)</b>	Intimidation; house demolitions by police and army; villagers' forced agreement ex-post to house destruction; evictions right before harvest; destruction of community forest; formal complaints / lawsuits; detention and imprisonment of village leaders; persecution and oppression of media and investigators	Sugar cane; contract size 6,523 ha; no contract farming	33 villages affected across the 3 concessions	Motivated by the EBA agreement between the EU and Cambodia; approved through the Cambodian economic land concessions scheme	Forced evictions without FPIC; intimidation into signing-off land	Villagers claim to have been resettled in areas that have not been cleared from mines; compensatory land much smaller than previous plots; many (illegally) migrated to Thailand in search	Additional pressure on social infrastructure in resettlement areas that had already been settled		Resistance remains suppressed; project continues	LM #17; EJOLT (2022c); Clean Sugar Campaign (2013)

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	(EJOLT 2022c); Clean Sugar Campaign 2013)					of better opportunities				
<b>Kho Kong, Cambodia; (investor: China)</b>	Forced eviction of 500 families; formal complaints/lawsuits; violence against civilians (villagers beaten and shot at (EarthRights International 2022)); farmland and house demolition and livestock confiscation; 1 person assassinated; threatening of lawyers and journalists; protest marches (The Mekong Butterfly 2020; EJOLT 2022g); with support from NGOs, villagers filed lawsuits in Cambodia and the UK;	Contract size 9,400 ha; sugar cane; no contract farming	Before investment, rice and cash crop cultivation and cattle raising; most people do not have land titles	Ly Yong Phat, Cambodian ruling party senator and business tycoon, co-owns the company; the legal limit per company is 10,000 ha, which led the owners to create 2 separate companies with land holdings close to the limit; investment strongly motivated by the EBA agreement	Clearing started without prior notification of the local population	Cattle that “trespasses” onto the plantation caught, detained, sometimes shot; financial compensation insufficient; child labour			Bonsucro excluded Tate & Lyle, the UK importer; the EU agreed to revise the EBA agreement; plantation remains operational; UK importer paid out USD 2,000 to some families (EJOLT 2022g)	LM #67 The Mekong Butterfly (2020); Saing (2011); EJOLT (2022g)
<b>PT Mustika Sembuluh (Wilmar International), Central Kalimantan, Indonesia; (investor: Singapore)</b>	Disputes over land rights and water pollution (Forest Peoples Programme 2012); forced evictions and intimidation (Mongabay 2017); protests; capture of company property (bulldozers, tractors, etc.); demonstration in front of the regency parliament or by blocking a bridge; “confrontation” of company workers (Chao et al. 2013); “social conflicts triggering repressive action by companies and security forces” (LM)	22,011 ha in operation; oil palm; minor share of contract farmers (plasma agriculture via cooperatives, 128 ha)	3 villages within the plantation with more than 6,000 indigenous Dayak; logging had been going on since the 1970s; livelihoods from smallholder shifting agriculture, hunting, fishing, and gathering	The <i>bupati</i> (regent) Darwan Ali was the main driver of the immense OP expansion in a short time span	Some sources say there clearly was FPIC, others that there was not enough consultation	Destroyed graveyards; lacking documentation of agreements; no monitoring of High Conservation Values; water pollution leads to decreasing fishing harvest and considerable outmigration		Plasma farmers have received too little land; no or too little compensation; fewer people employed than promised	LM #178; Chao et al. (2013); Forest Peoples Programme (2012); Mongabay (2017); EJOLT (2022h)	



Case (investor, country)	Type(s) of conflict(s)	Characteristics of the investments	Socio-economic context	Characteristics of institutions	Consultation	Deprivation (relative to status quo)	Deprivation (relative to other groups)	Deprivation (relative to expectation)	Conflict consequences	Sources
<b>First Resources, East Kalimantan, Indonesia; (investor: Singapore)</b>	Imprisonment / criminalisation of indigenous people over palm theft allegations (Mongabay 2021; Forest Peoples Programme 2021); villagers reclaim their forcefully taken land by replanting; intimidation by riot police; complaint to and acceptance by RSPO (by UK-based NGO EIA; World Rainforest Movement 2014)	Oil palm; sontract size 100,000 ha (in operation 8,907 ha); palm and rubber; inti-plasma scheme (plasma size unknown)	A large part of the village Muara Tae is already covered by a coal mine, which is why the community refused all attempts by the OP firm		No FPIC obtained; company asked for access, village rejected, company forcibly implemented plantation	The 5 affected communities claim they were forced to sign over large tracts of ancestral land; river pollution and forest destruction affect traditional communities (Dayak)			Plantations remain operational	LM #187 Mongabay (2021); Forest Peoples Programme (2021); Indonesia Nature Film Society (2014); World Rainforest Movement (2014); EIA (2012)
<b>PT Dwie Warna Karya, Central Kalimantan (investor: Malaysia)</b>	Villagers blocked access roads to the plantation (Save Our Borneo 2017) Attack on a company security post (Kaltengnews 2021)	Oil palm; contract size 12,500 ha (intended 15,109 ha); inti-plasma scheme; planned for 2017: inti 10,000 ha and plasma 3,000 ha (with plasma farmers from outside the plantation concession)	One-third of the concession was forest, the remainder community land	Communal land rights predominant; majority indigenous Dayak	Fulfilled according to RSPO standards (RSPO 2014)				Project was abandoned in 2013, restarted in 2018, and again abandoned in 2019 (reason unknown; LM); however, it seems the plantation is still operational (Kaltengnews 2021)	LM #188 (Save Our Borneo 2017) (RSPO 2014) Genting Plantations (2014)
<b>Socfin Socapalm, Cameroon (investor: Luxembourg)</b>	Peaceful demonstrations (LM); 1 registered complaint for violence against women of local communities; president of a national NGO intimidated, threatened; defamation lawsuit by Socfin against military personnel employed in	Palm and rubber; contract size 58,063 (in operation 34,651 ha, intended 63,763 ha); created in 1968, privatised in the year 2000;	“Prior to the arrival of SOCAPALM, the region was covered with a Guineo-Congolese rainforest with an exceptionally rich biodiversity. Loss		Overall limited; no consultation with the forest-dwelling Bagyeli people	Land rights; poor housing for workers; pollution; little employment of locals; locals are forced to sell their own palm nuts to the			Plantation expansion stopped	LM #1151; React (2019); Ngeunga (2018) EJOLT (2022f)

Case (investor, country)	Type(s) of conflict(s)	Characteristics of the investments	Socio-economic context	Characteristics of institutions	Consultation	Deprivation (relative to status quo)	Deprivation (relative to other groups)	Deprivation (relative to expectation)	Conflict consequences	Sources
	plantation security; accusations of palm theft, especially against women (security personnel entered homes accusing women of theft); in 2007, a woman was raped and killed by plantation security personnel while she was fishing in the bordering river (React 2019)	in total, almost 1,000 contract farmers on and off concession	of traditional livelihoods, especially for the indigenous Bagyeli people near Kilombo, as they no longer have access to forest" (LM)			company / are not allowed artisanal processing of oil from their own palm groves; threatening presence of military personnel				
<b>Smart Oil, Ghana (investor: Singapore)</b>	Arbitrary arrests and harassment (LM); tensions between settlers (pre-plantation) and indigenous population; inter-communal conflict: "In 1 community the inability of plantation employees to participate in the required communal labor activities caused a conflict that escalated to require police intervention" (Schoneveld, German, and Nutakor 2011)	Corn, jatropha, yam, pepper; Contract size 6,750 ha (in operation 1,400 ha, intended 10,000 ha); mainly jatropha for biofuel production with some additional crops (corn, vegetables); no outgrower scheme or similar; low workforce integration of locals; contract farming on 1,000 ha planned	Land belongs to customary chiefdom; about half of the area was used in bush-fallow agriculture; 69 households from 3 villages claimed usufruct rights to this land	Negotiations by paramount chiefs and chiefs; the local community was not involved	Local community was not involved; the traditional council was very receptive	Displacement of indigenous farmers (to more distant and less fertile land), leading to smaller farm sizes (22% reduction on average) and land-tenure insecurity (Cotula et al. 2014); loss of livelihood; land loss without adequate access to replacement land; vulnerable groups (women, migrant workers) hit most severely; lack of support by firm for affected smallholders	See group-specific comments on the left	Verbally agreed employment of locals was not sufficiently realised (Schoneveld, German, and Nutakor 2011)	None, because conflict very low-level; investment continues	LM #1322; Aha and Ayitey (2017); Cotula et al. (2014); (Schoneveld, German, and Nutakor 2011); Ahmed, Abubakar, and Gasparatos (2019)

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						(Schoneveld, German, and Nutakor 2011)				
<b>Bedford Biofuels, Kenya (investor: Canada)</b>	Threats of violence by the investor; “local resistance” to move from land (LM); development of a network / collective action; involvement of national and international NGOs; lawsuits, court cases, judicial activism; media-based activism / alternative media; objections to the Environmental Impact Assessment; official letters of complaint and petitions; public campaigns (EJOLT 2022b)	Jatropha, cattle ranching, and food crops; contract size 160,000 ha (10,000 ha pilot plot realised); small-scale out-grower scheme; investor made concessions to the locals: 60% of ranches left jatropha-free, ranching allowed close to plantations, protect live-stock routes and millions of dollars pledged for community projects; no contract farming	Herders and farmers in coexistence	Land-tenure status complex and unclear, customary land rights overlapping with statutory ones; highly ethnically diverse area with different land rights systems	Took place, with reported irregularities (people hired to support the investments during consultations, bribes paid to elders); very large number of jobs promised				Project abandoned after 1 year of operation; main resistance from environmental NGOs (Krijtenburg and Evers 2014)	LM #1363; Smalley and Corbera (2012); Krijtenburg and Evers (2014); EJOLT (2022b)
<b>Golden Veroleum, Liberia; oil palm (investor: Singapore, with many others also involved)</b>	Legal action; riots; violence against civilians (villagers beaten and detained by police for protesting, 1 person died in prison); “Villagers stole company and personal property of employees to the value of \$736,509.58” (LM); protests over working conditions	Oil palm; under contract 220,000 ha (in operation 18,800 ha, intended 220,000 ha); contract farming 40,000 ha	Rural; livelihood a mix of (forest-dependent) shifting cultivation, hunting, and gathering	Customary land law prevails	Insufficient; illiterate rural population was urged to sign an MOU which they did not understand; “Contain[s] mistaken and misleading descriptions of FPIC as concerning a community decision about	Loss of land and livelihood; sacred sites destroyed		Promises of clinics, schools, handpumps, and employment have not been fulfilled; surrendered land size larger than agreed to (Global Witness 2015)	Clearing was halted in 2012, 2 years after its start by way of an RSPO process initiated by community complaints	LM #1396; Global Witness (2015); Golden Witness (2016); Forest Peoples Programme (2015)

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					whether to accept 'development' and 'modernisation' or not" (Forest Peoples Programme 2015)					
<b>JTF Madagascar SARL, Madagascar (investors: Belgium, Finland, Italy)</b>	Official complaint to the prime minister; petition with 350 signatures to stop the expansion; chiefs received "a warning letter from the State not to disrupt the expansion" (LM); street protests (EJOLT 2022d)	Contract size 6,558 ha (in operation 5,425 ha, intended size 100,000 ha); jatropha, corn, peas, and soybeans; no contract farming	Former use: smallholders and mainly pastoralists	Customary land law prevails, with pastures without fixed borders; new land laws came into effect during the investment (and caused confusion among stakeholders)	Not consulted; mayor gave permission without consideration of the wider community (LM)	Households with minimum 1 employed worker were better off regarding dietary quality, food security, and resilience; contract households (attention: from another investment!) were disadvantaged in terms of food security; non-engaged households living in the area not different from those on outside	Suggestive evidence that female-headed households are worse off (regarding getting employed, and therefore in terms of food security)	Clinic was built, but only people who surrendered land were attended to	Remains operational; one could interpret the developments in a way that the expansion was slowed down	LM #1454; Fitawek et al. (2020); EJOLT (2022d)
<b>Oil Palm Uganda Ltd. – OPUL (BIDCO, Wilmar), Uganda; oil palm (investor: Singapore, with many others also involved)</b>	Lawsuit (LM); increase in domestic conflicts; intra-communal conflict: "The rising price of land as a result of the development has increased tensions and led to rising conflicts, particularly as some absentee landowners have begun to return" (Thorpe and Maestre 2015)	Oil palm; contract size 7,591 ha (in operation 6,225 ha, intended 40,000 ha); contract farming outside leased area (3,864 ha) supported by IFAD; nucleus: land-use changes from forest and	Region had been in economic decline before arrival; increasing population, migrants hoping to live off fishing, timber, and charcoal production; particularly poor area	There are 4 land-tenure systems in Uganda (mailo, freehold, leasehold, and communal); decentralised local governance structure	2-year sensitisation campaign; unequal power and knowledge positions between farmers and government	38 people displaced (LM; seems rather low); exorbitant fines for cattle trespassing; very small compensation amounts for farmers; mixed and contradictory reporting; produce and income diversity	Most workers and even out-growers are immigrants; locals reported to be reluctant to work for the plantation; land owners are mostly from the mainland while the island smallholders			LM #1976; Santiago (2019); Thorpe and Maestre (2015)

Case (investor, country)	Type(s) of conflict(s)	Characteristics of the investments	Socio-economic context	Characteristics of institutions	Consultation	Deprivation (relative to status quo)	Deprivation (relative to other groups)	Deprivation (relative to expectation)	Conflict consequences	Sources
		grasslands, yet smallholder farmers only marginally affected; for the outgrower area, smallholders transformed their farms to oil palm (80%) (on 2 islands of Lake Victoria); produce is processed on mainland and for local market (cooking oil and soap); company became the third-largest payer of corporate tax in Uganda; contract farming on about 4,000 ha, for about 1,600 farmers				reduced and dependency/monopsony	are mere occupants			
<b>ScanFarm, Ghana (investor: Norway)</b>	Employee murdered by a herder (LM); chiefs suppressed resistance; protests and violence against civilians (street protests struck down by police)	Contract size 13,058 ha (in operation 1,367 ha, intended 400,000 ha); started with jatropha, then switched to corn, rice, soya, teak; no contract farming	Smallholders and pastoralists	Matrilineal; customary (stool) land	Inadequate consultation regarding type of production, land to be used, individual plots, legal agreements, compensation; chiefs took decisions without consideration of the wider population		Women disadvantaged (fewer employed and more so in casual labour)	Corporate Social Responsibility activities poorly documented and differ from community needs (LM)	Norad funding for training and consultants	LM #2241; Wisborg (2012); Kuusaana (2016)

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<b>PT Dongin Prabhawa, Papua, Indonesia; corn, oil palm, rice, soya, sugar (investor: South Korea)</b>	<p>“Boycotts of official procedures / non-participation in official processes</p> <p>Creation of alternative reports / knowledge</p> <p>Development of a network / collective action</p> <p>Involvement of national and international NGOs</p> <p>Official complaint letters and petitions</p> <p>Street protests / marches</p> <p>Property damage / arson</p> <p>Submission of ‘Request for Consideration of the Situation of Indigenous People in Merauke’ to CERD” (EJOLT 2022e)</p>	<p>Contract size 16,772 ha; located within the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) (1.6–2.5 million ha); no contract farming</p>					Malind indigenous people most affected	Oil palm and sugarcane were initially agreed to comprise together 50% of the MIFEE area, but now cover almost all of it		LM #3513; EJOLT (2022e); Franky and Morgan (2015)
<b>Green Future Innovations, The Philippines (investors: China and Japan)</b>	<p>“militant struggle” – militant groups destroyed company equipment and plants (LM; EJOLT 2022j; Global Forest Coalition 2012); people reclaimed 1,400 ha to plant rice and corn (Bayefsky 2012)</p>	<p>Sugar cane; contract size 10,000 ha (in operation 7,000 ha, intended 11,000 ha); land acquisition through a mix of lease, contract farming, and self-financing; contract farming covers around 200 ha</p>	Area important for local and national food security		Insufficient – “Reports suggest that GFII and Ecofuel did not engage affected communities, particularly the local indigenous peoples, in genuine consultations” (Bayefsky 2012)	Air and environmental pollution, plus related health effects; displacement; inadequate compensation; water is expected to become scarce; increased food insecurity	Women disadvantaged in land rights / titling, but have better access to informal land markets; indigenous populations affected by loss of forest	People were promised free land-titling procedures, but later faced high fees and received titles not issued under their names	Bioethanol plant shut down (temporarily?; the LM entry is potentially not up to date)	LM #8261; Global Forest Coalition (2012); Alano (2015); Bayefsky (2012); EJOLT (2022j)

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