"The Bitter Fruit of a New Agrarian Model: Large-Scale Land Deals and Local Livelihoods in Rwanda"

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ABSTRACT

In a context of globalization and liberalization, Africa is increasingly confronted with the commercialization of its space. Various large-scale actors, including international private investors, investor states and local entrepreneurs, are constantly seeking to expand their land holdings for the production of food crops or biofuels. This paper presents two Rwandan case studies, and analyzes how large-scaled land acquisition by foreign and local elite players impacts on local livelihoods. On this basis, it identifies broader agrarian and social changes taking place in Rwanda and Africa. By way of conclusion, it provides clues as to how the tables might be turned in order to protect local livelihoods in the further evolution of Rwanda’s agriculture.

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Abstract: In a context of globalization and liberalization, Africa is increasingly confronted with the commercialization of its space. Various large-scale actors, including international private investors, investor states and local entrepreneurs, are constantly seeking to expand their land holdings for the production of food crops or biofuels. This paper presents two Rwandan case studies, and analyzes how large-scaled land acquisition by foreign and local elite players impacts on local livelihoods. On this basis, it identifies broader agrarian and social changes taking place in Rwanda and Africa. By way of conclusion, it provides clues as to how the tables might be turned in order to protect local livelihoods in the further evolution of Rwanda’s agriculture.

1. Introduction: The Place of Small-Scale Peasants in Large-Scale Land Deals

In October 2009, the Rwandan news media euphorically reported that the country’s government had sealed a major deal for the production of biodiesel. The signing of the USD250 million contract was witnessed by former British PM Tony Blair. In addition to the Rwandan government, two major private companies were involved: Eco-Fuel Global, a US-based company charged with the technical aspects, and Eco Positive, a UK-based company entrusted with managing the financial side. Under the agreement, 12 million Jatropha Curcas trees would be planted on around 10,000 hectares (1/250th of Rwanda’s total surface area) of ‘marginal’ land in the Eastern Province, where food crops cannot be sustained. Within three to six years, the plantations should yield enough for the production of 20 million liters of biodiesel annually, covering roughly 13% of Rwanda’s current fuel consumption and providing 6,500 jobs (Rwandan News Agency, 2009; Hitimana, 2009). The project fits neatly into the Sustainable Growth for Jobs and Exports project, the flagship program of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which aims at a ‘big push’ public investment program that will ‘create strong incentives for the Private
Sector to increase its investment rate in subsequent years’ (Government of Rwanda - GoR, 2007:1).

Rwanda is not the only country where large-scale land acquisitions by major investment projects are taking place. In the first twelve months after the 2008 commodity boom, investors acquired more than 40 million hectares of land, over 75% of which was located in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2010). Even before the commodity boom, interest in Africa’s natural resources was growing. Van Braun and Meinzen-Dick (2009) provide an extensive overview of deals since 2006 under which foreign governments, actors operating in the private sector, and agricultural investment funds have acquired access to thousands of hectares in developing countries. It should be noted here that investors are not necessarily interested in using this land for purely agricultural purposes. Zoomers (2010) and Merlet & Jamart (2009), for example, mention the rise in (eco)tourism in developing countries; land-use for the exploitation of mineral, energy and forestry resources; the designation of protected areas and nature reserves; and land requirements for infrastructure projects and urban expansion. Nonetheless, most investors are attracted by the enormous potential of land for the production of food crops (specifically staple foods) and biofuels.

While the phenomenon of large-scale land deals is not new, the scale at which it is presently manifesting itself is unprecedented (see Cotula et alii, 2009). A paradoxical combination of two discourses has developed around this recent trend: accounts of growing land scarcity and increasing land conflicts coincide with a narrative in favor of attracting investors with a view to developing marginal, un(der)exploited, idle and degraded landholdings (Borras & Franco, 2010). Thorough analyses of the costs and benefits of such capital injections through large-scale acquisitions are, however, still rare. Indeed, as noted in the recent World Bank report on the topic, ‘with little empirical data about the magnitude of this phenomenon, opinions about its implications are divided’ (World Bank, 2010: ix).

The World Bank report analyzes the risks in great length, but overall it is rather optimistic about the potential contribution of large-scale actors’ involvement in sub-Saharan African agriculture to achieving economic growth and poverty reduction. The
report links most risks of failure to weak institutional capacity and a lack of transparency, and makes several recommendations for improvements in both areas. It further acknowledges the potential of large-scale investment in agriculture for improving access to technology, to capital markets, to infrastructures, and to institutions that allow increased productivity and effectiveness in the utilization of these assets (World Bank, 2010).

This discourse - acknowledging the potential of large-scale private investments in African agriculture - contrasts quite strongly, though, with the World Bank’s related discourse on the importance to Africa of smallholder farming. Indeed, the 2008 World Development Report puts forward the notion of a ‘Green Revolution’ for Sub-Saharan Africa, which it argues must differ fundamentally from the Asian Green Revolution because of ‘Africa’s unique agriculture and institutions’. Given that a large majority of the poor survive on subsistence agriculture, the report emphasizes the need to create ‘a productivity revolution in smallholder farming’. It further analyzes in depth the many challenges with which smallholders are confronted and proposes institutional innovations in order to improve their competitiveness (World Bank, 2007).

So is there an inherent contradiction in the World Bank’s view on the agricultural future of Africa? Not necessarily. In fact, critics of the 2008 World Development Report point out that the report ‘does not support smallholder farming per se, but commercially-oriented, entrepreneurial smallholder farming’, which applies to just a minority of African farmers (Akram-Lodhi, 2008). Moreover, the report concedes that ‘not all smallholders will be able to farm their way out of poverty’ (World Bank, 2007: 234); it is implicitly assumed that (only) those who are capable of acting as small-scale rural entrepreneurs have a sustainable future in the agricultural sector.

In short, the dominant view on a ‘new agriculture’ for Sub-Saharan Africa focuses on the adoption of commercially-oriented production approaches, either through the involvement of large-scale investors or by a transformation of (a particular group of) innovative smallholders into agricultural entrepreneurs, or, better still, through a combination of both.
The World Bank’s view is shared by many agents in the development business. What it fails to do, however, is to move beyond conceiving land purely as a commodity, a commercial tool for achieving maximum productivity. Land is after all also a social, cultural and political space with great relevance to not only the economic but also the social, psychological and emotional wellbeing of smallholder farmers (see for example Merlet, 2007). Denial of access to land therefore not only represents a loss in terms of economic opportunities; it also translates into a loss of social ties, of identity, of physical, and of social and emotional belonging.

The maximal productivity view is often substantiated by the argument that worldwide demand for food has increased sharply. However, the challenge for agricultural production systems in the foreseeable future is not only about producing enough food to feed the world (i.e. the aspects of production and productivity; it is pre-eminently also about ensuring that the purchasing power of different population groups is sufficiently strong to guarantee access to that food (i.e. the aspects of equity and distribution). Furthermore, it is about making sure that the agency of more vulnerable population groups is enhanced through securing and enlarging the livelihood strategies available to them (i.e. the aspects of agency and power relations).

Indeed, policy documents rarely distinguish adequately between divergent subgroups within rural populations. Most analyses merely differentiate rather crudely between the ‘poor’ and the ‘non-poor’. However, Krishna (2009: 948) rightly claims that “‘the poor” does not constitute a valid category for analysis or action: it is no more than an article of speech’. Subgroups of poor have different identities, different material interests, different degrees of agency, and different priorities with respect to land and natural resources (Vermeulen & Cotula, 2010). Hence, they have different needs in terms of policy design. Policy documents reflecting on the opportunities and risks associated with large-scale land deals on the one hand and, on the other, on institutional innovations that will supposedly transform (some) smallholders into rural entrepreneurs rarely take adequate account of this diversity of rural actors.

A thorough assessment of the ‘new agriculture’ should not be limited to an estimation of the effects in terms of productivity, job creation, and – at best – overall income distribution. A much more detailed analysis is required that also reflects on
opportunities and threats to the socioeconomic circumstances and livelihoods, the agency, and the cultural identities of different local interests groups. Such an analysis should moreover consider the dimensions of time (short, medium and long-term) and space (local context, regional context, national context, supranational context). This type of approach can provide policymakers with insight into the diversity of interests involved, so that they could weigh them against each other, and against the overarching objective of poverty reduction. This way, the debate of the organization of agricultural production is lifted to a much broader level, whereby due consideration is given to the likely impact on local livelihoods.

This paper studies the effect of large-scale foreign and local elite-led land grabbing on the livelihood of local populations. Section 2 presents two Rwandan case studies, and identifies broader processes of agrarian and social changes taking place in Rwanda’s rural context. Section 3 discusses different approaches to reversing the impacts of the prevailing agrarian model with a view to benefiting local livelihoods. Section 4 concludes.

2. Large-Scale Land Acquisitions and Local Livelihoods in Rural Rwanda

All too often, land is conceptualized purely as an exchangeable commodity. In reality, however, land-use involves social relations that are embedded within the wider political economy and are shaped by the relative bargaining power of various interest groups within society (Merlet, 2007). The divergent groups of rural actors in the African countryside see land as a social, cultural and political space with great relevance not only to their economic livelihoods, but also to their social identities. Large-scale actors (be they foreign or local) striving to acquire control over large areas of land insert additional competition in an already tight market. Moreover, thanks to their connections in the national (and sometimes international) political arena, they often find themselves in a privileged position to advance their own interests.

The two Rwandan case studies presented in this paper both concern large-scale land deals, but the respective circumstances are very different. The first case relates to a foreign business group that has acquired a concession for the exploitation of 3,000
hectares of land, and, in this sense, it ties in with how large-scale land acquisitions are commonly framed in the media. However, land grabbing may also take place at a local scale, as in the second case study, where local elites have made use of national policy priorities to gain control over a vast area of land.

Data on both cases were collected as part of a larger research project on rural policies and local livelihoods (for methodological details, see Ansoms, 2010). In both settings, the author conducted around fifteen focus group interviews in 2006 and 2007 involving a variety of socioeconomic groups. In the course of the interviews, the respondents shared their views on the impact of rural policies on local living conditions. One of the issues discussed was the authorities’ approach to the redevelopment of nearby swampland in the two locations.

Around 10% of Rwandan territory consists in swampland. Originally, such land was used mainly for hunting, fishing and cattle grazing, but with the pressure of population growth it has increasingly been turned into farmland for food crops. Inclusion or exclusion used to be based upon the inherent capacity of a household to undertake the heavy preparatory work necessary to make savage swampland arable. The practical side of such spontaneous ‘invasions’ was often regulated by the commune (Jeffremovas, 2002). However, by the mid-1970s, in the face of mounting ecological pressures, the Habyarimana administration had set its mind on developing the marshlands, all of which were designated as state property. Although in many cases individual peasants continued to cultivate their plots, land tenure on marshland was uncertain, as the commune could suddenly take away such rights and transfer them to cooperatives or development projects, or to functionaries for their personal use (Jeffremovas, 2002). Hence, current land-use evolutions in Rwanda are inscribed in a long tradition of (marsh)land acquisition by the authorities in the name of agricultural development and reclamation, even though in practice such policies were to the personal benefit of those in power (either directly or through the reinforcement of their relationship networks).

After the war and 1994 genocide, the ‘haphazard use’ of marshlands and wetlands came to be deemed undesirable by the Rwandan authorities. The government worked out a swampland ‘valorization’ approach, inspired by the objective of maximizing
agricultural output through efficient and productive land use. However, the approach adopted for the swamplands was fundamentally different from that applied in the hills, where the authorities strive to register all land through individual property titles. Article 29 of the land law states that, ‘swampland belongs to the state. It shall not definitively be allocated to individuals and no person can use the reason that he or she has spent a long time with it to justify the definitive takeover of the land’ (GoR, 2005).

As no property rights on swamp plots can be granted to private individuals, the government assumes the role of principal swampland developer. This approach may take two forms. In some locations, the government makes swampland available in concession to private investors, as in the first case study. In other instances, the national government mandates local authorities to allocate marshland plots to farmer groups that use collective cultivation systems. In the second case study, local elite actors have used this policy discourse to gain control over access to marshland plots. Their role as ‘coordinators’ or ‘managers’ of the marshland has resulted in the de facto appropriation of land rights.

Furthermore, national policymakers rigidly impose a uniform technical solution (i.e. monocropping) upon all local settings, as they consider this method to be more productive than the traditional system of combining different food crops. The authorities have also introduced specific regulations that enforce the cultivation of very particular crop types (e.g. ‘high-value’ market-oriented crops such as rice, sugar cane and maize). In a sense, the current cultivation practices in the marshlands are a pilot experience with agrarian commercialization policies that the Rwandan authorities wish to implement in the hills. However, historical evidence is apparently ignored, for similar experiments with obligatory crop cultivation were undertaken in the colonial era (Newbury, 1988) and under the Habyarimana administration (Newbury & Newbury, 2000; Pottier, 1992; Pottier, 1989). As Pottier (1992) points out, agronomists and vulgarisateurs already promoted monocropping (and combined cropping of beans and maize or soya and maize) as the only appropriate cultivation method back in 1986 (the year of agricultural intensification), in a ‘top-down’ approach with negative consequences. Newbury and Newbury (2000) similarly criticize such state-induced practices, which have tended to give precedence to
technical insights over climatic conditions and to land suitability over local knowledge and the capabilities of the peasants concerned, often with counterproductive impacts on local livelihoods. Moreover, the rigidity with which the policy is implemented now is not new either: a top-down, state-centered governance approach appears to be a structural feature of elite-peasant relationships in Rwanda (Desrosiers & Thomson, 2011).

Hence it is questionable whether the development outcomes of the current large-scale ‘productivity-enhancing’ land deals are sufficient to support the claim that they contribute to pro-poor development. In order to assess this properly, due account must be taken of how these projects impact not only on productivity, but also, and even more importantly, on the livelihood strategies and social mobility of local populations as well as on opportunities for local empowerment.

2.1. Land Acquisition by a Foreign Private Actor

In 1997, Kabuye Sugar Works (KSW) became the very first company to be privatized in post-conflict Rwanda. It was acquired for USD 1.5 million by the Madhvani Group, a conglomerate with Indian roots that has been conducting business in Uganda for over fifty years. It is currently the largest private sector business group operating in Uganda and is involved mainly in sugar production. At the moment of sale, the Madhvani business group was granted a fifty-year land lease on approximately 3,150 hectares (of the 24,698 hectares of Nyabarongo swampland), much of which had to be expropriated by the Rwandan authorities. By 2008, Madhvani had invested about USD 13 million in KSW. It is active in various locations within a 45-kilometer radius from Kigali. At the time of the research (2007), the sugar cane plant employed 5000 to 6000 manual laborers to work the approximately 3000 hectares that KSW holds in concession. However, quite a large part of this land was prone to flooding, so that only around 1750 hectares were cultivated. In addition, KSW processed the sugarcane of some 1200 to 1500 smallholder farmers spread across a territory of 2200 hectares (information based on an interview with Mr Rao, General Manager of the Kabuye Sugar Works, in June 2007).
Overall, the Kabuye Sugar Works privatization is regarded as a success by the Rwandan government (see for example Privatization Secretariat, 2001): ‘The land issue [referring to the 3000 ha of dispossessed land] isn’t relevant anymore, the planters tell us – they understand now that the valley belongs to the State [who allocated it to the Madhvani Group], and that they can’t claim anything. But it doesn’t matter that much, as long as the people have work. And they do [...], they all have a job, be it in Kigali or in the plantations. There are even planters who come from neighboring sectors’. However, our own field research paints quite a different picture of this so-called ‘panoramic scenery’.

Gaining access to swampland plots in the Nyabarongo valley – as in many other places in Rwanda - used to depend on families’ physical ability to prepare the land for cultivation. With time, however, the exploitation density in the swamplands increased. Some peasants owned larger plots than others, while those without property cultivated land under a *metayage system*. Some peasants grew food crops, others cultivated cash crops. Other plots yet were used for clay extraction for brick baking. Many of the informants described the Nyabarongo swampland as an important safety-net that provided protection against the risk of harvest failure in the hills.

It is important to note that the status of swampland – including in the Nyabarongo valley – is different to that of hillside land. As mentioned above, whereas peasants’ informal land rights on hillside plots had generally been quite well respected by the public authorities, all marshland plots were claimed by the state under the Habyarimana administration (Jeffremovas, 2002). Hence, land-use rights for swampland plots depended on a combination of sometimes contradictory formal and informal claims. In the case study setting, for example, there were several hundred hectares on which Kabuye Sugar Works (which at that point was a public company) had acquired user rights, yet peasants continued to exploit these plots whenever Kabuye Sugar Works failed to cultivate them (e.g. shortly after the 1994 war).

In 1997, however, the contradiction between formal and informal interests became much more blatant, as the massive land claim by the Madhvani Business Group, supported by the national authorities, clashed with the locally perceived legitimacy of
informal historically-embedded land rights. Virtually all local peasants in the wide vicinity of the research setting lost their user rights to swampland plots in the Nyabarongo valley. No compensation whatsoever was offered for dispossessed land, as it was, officially at least, state property anyway\textsuperscript{vii}.

The peasants perceived their user rights on swampland plots as legitimate, despite the lack of either formal or informal property titles. They were not (immediately) prepared to give up these rights and displayed open resistance\textsuperscript{viii}. Those who did not relinquish ‘their’ land voluntarily faced strong intimidation by the police and by local defense forces. Interviewees made mention of peasants being imprisoned or driven from the swampland at gunpoint. Only a small group of peasants was able to maintain their user rights on marshland plot(s): those who were already producing sugarcane and those cultivating bananas at the periphery of the swampland. These peasants were mostly better-off peasants who did not use the marshland plots to complement their subsistence production in the hills.

At the time of research, a considerable part of the swampland near the umudugudu or village\textsuperscript{ix} was not maintained and cultivated, and, as a result, was overgrown with papyrus. Making this swampland arable would require drainage and subsequently irrigation. It was a matter of debate whether this was a task for the public authorities or for Kabuye Sugar Works – and thus the Madhvani Group. The manager of Kabuye Sugar Works felt it was up to the Rwandan government to provide the necessary infrastructure. Informants from the rural setting, pointed out that sugarcane ‘does not work’ in the location, and that local peasants had knowledge about marshland reclamation techniques that Madhvani lacked. They added that Madhvani cultivated only in the easily accessible areas, while local peasants were used to working in more challenging circumstances.

Local peasants had hoped that the district authorities might be able to mediate between themselves and Madhvani in order to secure access for them to the non-used parts of the marshland. However, these attempts failed. One respondent felt that Madhvani may have been scared that the peasants would occupy a larger part of the marshland had they been able to acquire access to some of the flooded land. Another respondent mentioned that they were in any case unable to turn to the local authorities
as the latter had chased them from the land in the first place. Peasants perceived the role of local authorities as one of ‘complying with national policy’ with total disregard for local living conditions.

Interestingly, very few focus group members worked as wage laborers for the company. This was due to various reasons, according to the participants. First and foremost, the peasants generally lacked the time to be able to work for a third party for whole days. Even those with insufficient landholdings preferred to combine temporary or occasional jobs with cultivation activities on their own plots. Second, at RWF400 (2007 prices) for a seven-hour day, pay was low. Despite high inflation, wages had remained unchanged since 2001. An additional problem is that workers were paid at the end of the month, while the main incentive to work for a third party was immediate cash payment. Furthermore, no salaries were paid for periods of sickness or when work was impossible due to flooding of the swamps, which is a frequent occurrence during the rainy season. Finally, most respondents were unaware of the job application procedures at Kabuye Sugar Works, which complicated gaining access to such jobs.

Overall, the local peasant community seemed rather unanimous in their assessment of the privatization of Kabuye Sugar Works as highly problematic to their own livelihoods. However, when assessing the overall gains versus losses from the privatization, due account should be taken of the larger picture. A crucial question in this respect is whether the privatization and the large-scale transfer of land from small-scale peasants to the business group has paid off in terms of overall productivity and employment creation. What has been the net effect on local livelihoods from a more general viewpoint?

To make this assessment, three scenarios are considered regarding the allocation of swampland plots (see table 1): 1) the situation at the time of the research; 2) a hypothetical situation where the 3000 hectares of swampland held in concession by Kabuye Sugar Works are cultivated instead by small-scale peasants growing sugarcane; 3) a hypothetical situation where the 3000 hectares of swampland held in concession by Kabuye Sugar Works are cultivated instead by small-scale peasants growing a variety of crops.
Table 1: Alternative allocations of 3000 hectares of swampland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Held in concession by Kabuye Sugar Works</th>
<th>Peasant households cultivating sugarcane</th>
<th>Peasant households cultivating various crops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Productivity per available ha (3000 ha): 26.7 – 30.0 tons/ha</td>
<td>Productivity on 2200 hectares covered with sugarcane currently cultivated by peasant households: 50.0 – 54.5 tons/ha</td>
<td>Monetary value of ‘unconstrained’ crop production per ha is comparable to that of sugarcane production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity per cultivated ha (1750 ha): 45.7 – 51.4 tons/ha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment creation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5000-6000 jobs for agricultural laborers, paid RWF 400 per day</td>
<td>3000 ha (-20% less suitable land) accommodating: 5000-6000 independent sugarcane producing producers with an average income of over RWF 900/day / more than 14,000 producers instead of 5000-6000 with an average income of RWF400/day</td>
<td>Swampland cultivation without sugarcane requirement results in similar earnings per hectare, but with easier access for poorer categories of peasants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local livelihoods</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local peasant communities have lost access to 3000 ha of swampland -&gt; implications for food security</td>
<td>Organization of sugarcane growers in a democratically functioning cooperative would enhance their bargaining power in price negotiations and reinforce the local capacity for collective action</td>
<td>Access to marshland plots and freedom of crop choice would be beneficial to poorer categories of peasants (not capable of investing in sugarcane); it would also make peasants more resilient to climatic and market fluctuations (marshland functions as a safety-net).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based upon detailed calculations presented in Ansoms, 2009.

As indicated in Table 1, the productivity of individual small-scale sugarcane farming is similar to that attained by KSW. Moreover, one may assume individual peasants not to leave fallow more than 1000 hectares of swampland (only 1750 ha of the 3000 held by KSW were cultivated at the time of interview of the manager in 2007). Therefore, overall sugarcane production could have been considerably higher had the land held in concession by KSW remained in the hands of individual peasants. Next to productivity, there is the issue of employment creation. As mentioned, KSW
provides jobs to between 5000 and 6000 wage laborers, earning RWF 400 per day. It is highly speculative to estimate how much earnings the 3000 hectares of swampland might have generated had they been allocated to independent small-scale peasant households instead of KSW. However, based on productivity rates and earnings of the 1200-1500 peasants currently producing sugarcane, and assuming a linear relationship between land size and overall output in swampland plots, one may assume the 3000 hectares of swampland to have provided an income comparable to the current daily wage rate paid by KSW for over 14,000 independent sugarcane-producing peasant households. Or put differently, the 3000 hectares of swampland could have provided 5000 to 6000 independent peasant households with an income that is double to triple the amount presently earned by 5000 to 6000 wage laborers.

Under a second alternative scenario, individual small-scale peasants would continue to cultivate a variety of crops rather than just sugarcane. Ansoms (2009) shows that the productivity rate (monetary value per ha) of ‘unconstrained’ crop production is comparable to that of peasants engaged in sugarcane production. This is not necessarily an argument against the latter. Regional crop specialization could be beneficial to local peasants if their bargaining capacity with the buyer were improved through the establishment of collective action structures. On the other hand, crop diversity (including sugarcane) as such does not stand in the way of setting up such structures. Moreover, free choice of crops offers the considerable advantage that – while still allowing better-off peasants to combine subsistence and commercial farming – it enables poorer peasants lacking the means to invest in sugarcane production to complement their hillside production with swampland yields. Hence, swampland cultivation can be an important risk-coping mechanism against famine. In addition, farmers can adapt their crop choice according to climatic conditions and market fluctuations. Flexibility thus allows for risk-diversifying cultivation patterns that play a very important role in ensuring food security.

To conclude, the large-scale land deal between the Rwandan government and Madhvani Business Group has been far from optimal in terms of securing local livelihoods. As the Privatization Secretariat (2002: 6) concedes, ‘the privatization of Kabuye Sugar Office and its purchase by KSW in 1997 has been cited explicitly as an example of an operation which instead of benefiting to the population, has made
people poorer in taking their fields’. In consequence of the deal, thousands of peasant families lost access to their swampland plots. For those cultivating cash crops or extracting clay for brick-baking, this meant a loss in terms of their monetary income-generating capacity. Growers of subsistence crops on swampland plots and peasants to whom marshland plots provided a safety-net against hardship lost an important risk-coping mechanism. Interestingly, though, the allocation of 3000 hectares of land to the private investor was not optimal either in terms of output and productivity maximization (see Table 1). In short, the pro-poorness as well as the macroeconomic benefits of the large-scale land deal are highly questionable.

2.2. Land Acquisition by Local Elites

The term land grab usually refers to ‘large-scale, cross-border land deals or transactions that are carried out by transnational corporations or initiated by foreign governments’ (Zoomers, 2010: 429). Zoomers proposes other, less traditional examples (e.g. large-scale infrastructure works, urban extensions, etc.) whereby land is transferred to ‘long-distance actors’xii. She calls this the ‘foreignization’ of space. Interestingly, though, land grabs also occur at the local level, with well-connected locally-embedded actors as protagonists. Such mechanisms are of course not new, but today elite networks make use of the opportunities provided by the new discourse on agriculture as a motor for development to secure their control over space.

The second case study presented here provides an illustration of such a process. The setting is a relatively flat and fertile area in central Rwanda (Southern Province), traditionally an important local centre of commerce. Prior to the 1990-1994 war, substantial parts of the marshland were left unexploited, but some were developed and cultivated by whoever was willing and able to do so. Under the metayage system, peasants worked the land and the authorities collected taxes at harvest time. The marshland was referred to locally as ‘Saudi Arabia’, in reference to its natural richness and its importance to local people’s livelihoods.

During the war and genocide, the marshland turned into a wilderness. It provided a hiding place, first for the genocide victims and subsequently for those persecuted by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (which later became the Rwandan Patriotic Party that
continues to dominate political and military life in the country). In 1997, the RPF decided to develop the unexploited part of the marshland in order to boost food production and, perhaps more importantly still, to clear the hiding places of its opponents. Eugene (pseudonym), a member of the military group in charge of the undertaking, launched a food-for-work project with the aid of the World Food Program (WFP). The project employed local peasants to develop the marshland and prepare it for cultivation. At a certain point (the research participants were not clear about when exactly), the WFP terminated its funding. Eugene tried to continue the project for a while, but around 1999, after severe rainfall and flooding, he decided ‘to leave the marshland to the people of the umudugudu’ (according to one of the respondents). The flooding had caused the marshland to become overgrown with papyrus again, so that it needed to be redeveloped in order for agricultural activity to recommence. Local peasants returned and started cultivating plots of land according to their physical and financial capabilities.

Around 2002, however, another entrepreneur called Alphonse (pseudonym) was given permission by the district authorities to launch a new project in the marshlands reoccupied by the local population. He also received backing from an NGO that provided him with maize seeds and manure. Alphonse imposed himself as the marshland manager and demanded that peasants working on ‘his’ land would cultivate maize. The locals described him as an agricultural entrepreneur who was very familiar with marshland cultivation. In an effort to enhance his social status, our respondents recalled how Alphonse boasted of his (real or fictitious) high-level political connections at the highest level. Alphonse seems to have claimed that the maize produced on ‘his’ part of the marshland was destined for the ‘President’s grenier’ in Nyanza. Whether or not this was true, clearly he did have connections at the district level.

According to our research participants, Alphonse took ‘everything he wanted’, both plots previously ‘owned’ by Eugene and plots that had always been cultivated by individual local peasants. When Eugène returned in 2003, he found that some of his space in the marshland had been taken by Alphonse (according to one of our respondents). Proving his case on the basis of old maps, Eugène took the matter to the district authorities and successfully reclaimed ‘his’ marshland plot (approximately
120 hectares), which several research participants implicitly attributed to his military connections. He quickly re-established himself as the manager of ‘his’ section of marshland, i.e. the part he had previously managed under de WFP.

The two ‘entrepreneurs’ took different approaches to organizing agricultural production. Alphonse chose to allow people to cultivate the marshland plots they had previously occupied, but forced them to grow maize. He provided them with seeds, manure and fertilizers. At harvest time, however, the peasants were obliged to sell their maize to Alphonse at below-market price. This system was severely criticized as exploitative by nearly all of the informants in the 2006 research. An often-cited anecdote was that Alphonse deployed local defense forces to stop peasants from ‘smuggling’ maize out of the marshland and sell it ‘illicitly’ on the market.

Subsequently, as the Rwandan government began to promote collective cultivation systems for marshland development, Alphonse grouped people into ‘phantom’ associations, these were associations that only existed in name but did not function in reality. Although many farmers retained their user rights on marshland plots, a significant proportion of local peasants (approx. 30%) lost access, either because they refused to cultivate maize, or because they were unable to adhere to the imposed rhythm of cultivation and harvesting, or as a result of having been excluded from a particular association.

In 2006, the odds turned against Alphonse as ‘he was chased from the marshland by the district authorities’ (according to one of our informants). After his departure, people continued to cultivate the plots they considered their own and which they had occupied before and during Alphonse’s time, but now they were free again to cultivate whichever crop they saw fit. Shortly thereafter, however, in October 2006, the district authorities entrusted the management of the marshland to a cooperative.

Interestingly, the local perception of the merits and shortcomings of Alphonse’s system changed quite substantially over time, with a widening gap appearing between the opinions of different socioeconomic groups. During the 2007 research, the better-off peasants (i.e. those who were able to secure access to a marshland plot under the new cooperative system; see below) generally portrayed Alphonse as having
‘exploited’ the population and tended to emphasize the many ‘injustices’ under the previous system. However, the poorer categories of peasants in 2007 – in stark contrast to their responses in the 2004 and 2006 interviews – referred to Alphonse as a ‘benefactor’, ‘a wise man’ who had ‘taken care of them’. One respondent mentioned how, in a period of scarcity, Alphonse had imported beans and sold them on credit to the local peasants. Others recalled how Alphonse provided credit for educational or health expenditures. In the words of one respondent, they had ‘wept’ when Alphonse left, as he was seen to ‘take care of the poor’, whereas ‘today we are left with nothing’. Another focus group participant referred to Alphonse as a ‘saint’. After his departure from their umudugudu, ‘many children had to quit school’.

This radical shift in the appreciation of Alphonse’s marshland management system can be explained by the evolution of access to the swamp after his departure. In 2007, with the transfer of the marshland’s management to a cooperative, the rules of the game determining access to or exclusion from it altered quite fundamentally. The cooperative divided the marshland into plots of approximately equal size and set an access fee (initially RWF 3,000, increased first to 5,000 and then to 6,500). Whereas poorer peasants had previously been able to assert their marshland access rights, the financial requirement imposed by the cooperative now led to the de facto exclusion of many. Several participants described the impact of their exclusion from the marshland in no uncertain terms: ‘if they do not let us exploit the marshland, we are dead’; ‘we will die if the current situation continues’.

Eugene adopted a very different approach to organizing cultivation in ‘his’ section of marshland right from the moment he returned (in 2003) and reimposed himself as the manager. He set up a cooperative and ‘motivated’ people to work in associations under the umbrella structure in which he served as the coordinateur or ‘spokesperson’. Each association had to concentrate on a particular crop type, in line with the official monocropping policy. In the 2007 research, the focus group participants estimated the number of marshland associations operating under the cooperative structure at around 60, with members coming from all the nearby imidugudu.
Access to or exclusion from an association under the cooperative depended first and foremost on finances, as each association was required to contribute RWF 100,000 to the cooperative\textsuperscript{xv}. Additionally, candidates for marshland plots had to be physically able to cultivate the plot in question. Those suffering from ill-health and lacking the resources to pay others to work in their place were forced to leave. Apart from financial and physical resources, eligibility for working the marshland managed by Eugene was a matter of having the right social connections as this guaranteed access to crucial information. Indeed, some farmers were better informed about the inevitable evolution from individual to collective marshland user rights (in this context, certain focus group participants referred to themselves as ‘those who were aware of the utility of the marshlands’). They formed associations with a limited number of members early in the collectivization process and received user rights for substantial plots. By the time the other peasants began to realize the importance of forming associations in order to retain access to marshland plots, most of the available land had already been taken. Associations formed later in the collectivization process typically consisted of more members and obtained user rights for smaller plots of marshland. The ‘early’ associations, for their part, were not keen to expand their membership, as they were concerned mainly with ‘preserving their plot sizes’.

Moreover, the polarization in respect of marshland access was accelerated by the fact that certain influential peasants (referred to as capit\textsuperscript{a}s) - well-connected to local authorities and to Eugene’s cooperative - ‘bought’ user rights to considerable parts of the marshland to subsequently ‘gather an association around them’. Local peasants were obliged to pay high financial contributions of between RWF 5,000 and 6,500 in addition to annual taxes. Several research participants mentioned that the way people enter into the associations in ‘Eugene’s marshland’ these days is ‘a secret’. One participant openly accused the association authorities of receiving bribes in the form of tips (pour-boire). Be that as it may, the forming of associations and the distribution of the marshlands clearly had the effect of consolidating or even aggravating existing power imbalances.

Overall, one may summarize as follows. Whereas poorer peasants found opportunities to occupy marshland in periods of ‘disorganization’, the rearrangement of the institutional landscape with the introduction of new formal policy guidelines had the
opposite effect. Initially, the most influential entrepreneurs served as gatekeepers at the interface between the local setting and the outside world. They extracted power from their position to negotiate with external donors and from their socio-political contacts with local and higher-level authorities. In the process, they reinforced their position by acquiring greater control over the use and distribution of marshland plots.

The ‘associational requirement’ in combination with agrarian commercialization policies - as promoted by the Rwandan authorities - further enhanced existing categorical distinctions. Better-off peasants were able ‘to buy their way into the marshland’. Some peasants with sufficient financial means and the necessary social networks even managed to become intermediaries between Alphonse and Eugene on the one hand and the association members on the other. For poorer peasant categories, however, the marshland became yet another political arena in which they ended up ‘at the losing end of the bargaining process’ (this is how poverty is defined by Bastiaensen et al. 2005). As such, the introduction of new institutional arrangements and the aggravation of existing power imbalances only added to the persisting inequality among peasants. Elite capture of the opportunities offered by the reforms resulted in the reproduction and reinforcement of structural forms of poverty and existing patronage networks.

3. Smallholder Farming Versus Commercially-Oriented Large-Scale Agriculture

Both case studies show how a state-engineered project to modernize and professionalize the agricultural sector can provide extensive room for maneuver to elites (be they foreign actors capable of acquiring land concessions or local elites using their brokering role in the collectivization process) to instrumentalize the developmental discourse in order to reinforce their own power base. The resulting polarization takes the form of fundamental social changes through shifts in control over resources (capital) and in the division of labor, as well as in the division of decision power of various socioeconomic categories. The small-scale peasants typically end up in a more vulnerable position, facing additional difficulties in trying to secure access to (marsh)land. This adds to a more general trend whereby smallholder farmers are pushed out of the agricultural sector in favor of commercially
oriented rural entrepreneurs operating on a larger scale (see Ansoms, 2010; DesForges, 2006).

Merlet & Jamart (2009) warn that the impact of such a trend – once fully set in motion - is irreversible. The new agriculture, based on commercially-oriented entrepreneurship, will lead to the destruction of diversity in terms of agricultural production systems, ecosystems, knowledge, cultures etc. It will result in the gradual winnowing out of family farming, even when located far from the directly implicated investment areas. Small-scale farmers will increasingly face difficulties in dealing with market and price fluctuations. They will encounter growing problems in trying to secure their land rights in an increasingly competitive land market. It is therefore important to assess the opportunities and risks implied by the new ways of organizing agriculture before engaging in blind experimentation.

In the case of Rwanda, for example, the macroeconomic picture looks rather bright, with a projected agrarian growth of 6% in 2010 and 2011, in line with the average over the past five years (IMF, 2010). On the ground, however, one sees that those peasants who are not able to secure their land rights in an increasingly competitive market for land become part of a rural ‘proletariat’. They work primarily as agricultural wage laborers in temporary, poorly paid jobs, and they face a daily struggle for survival. The off-farm sector (both rural and urban) is not capable of creating sufficient alternative employment opportunities to absorb this growing mass of unskilled wage laborers. As a consequence, the growing competition for and commoditization of land – in combination with limited options outside of the agricultural sector – has a strongly negative impact upon the livelihoods of a large majority of the rural population (Ansoms, 2010).

How can the tables be turned in order to protect local livelihoods in an African context of increasing commercialization and commoditization of land? A 2010 World Bank document formulates several policy recommendations, focusing mostly on the combination of enhancing good land management on the part of governments and promoting responsible corporate behavior on the part of investors\textsuperscript{xvi}. Both sets of recommendations can, however, be framed as a way of narrowing the terms of debate.
First of all, the elaborate focus on the promotion of principles for responsible corporate behavior is problematic not only because of its voluntary nature (Borras & Franco, 2010); even more worrisome is its implicit acceptance of the fact that an evolution towards large-scale agricultural production systems is unavoidable (White, 2010). Indeed, despite its discourse in favor of small-scale farming, the 2008 World Development report also states that ‘economies of scale in the “new agriculture”’ often are the key for obtaining inputs, technology, and information and in getting products to the market. As agriculture becomes more technology driven and access to consumers is mediated by agro processors and supermarkets, economies of scale will pose major challenges for the future competitiveness of smallholders’ (World Bank, 2007: 91–92).

Akram-Lodhi (2008: 471) denounces the way in which smallholder agriculture is now declared unviable, after ‘having systematically undermined smallholders by disinvesting and exposing them to “free” market forces on an uneven playing field’. He criticizes the almost implicit acceptance of the World Development Report that smallholders’ dispossession of farmland will continue and even gain speed. Likewise, Veltmeyer accuses the lead authors of the report (2009: 395) of ‘view[ing] the peasantry by and large as an anachronism, seeking to defend a way of life and an economy that is inherently non-viable’. Borras and Franco (2010: 515) argue that the focus on Codes of Conduct for large-scale investors fits into that same view, as it ‘a priori dismisses the possibility of other development pathway options [next to those associated with mega land deals] and ignores the clamor of those who believe that other pathways are possible’. According to Borras and Franco, those alternative pathways - departing from an a-priori supposition of a corporate-led transnational capitalistic development model - are based upon a categorical protection of the land rights of poor people.

Another set of policy guidelines in the 2010 World Bank report focuses on the responsibility of government. The document proposes several guidelines to improve the policy, legal and institutional frameworks for land management (World Bank, 2010). It does however not call into question the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to land management (see for example World Bank, 2006; de Janvry et al. 2001) based upon private, formally registered, property titles. The market-led agrarian reforms
(MLAR) that have been implemented in many developing countries imply the introduction of a system of private exclusive property rights that are freely transacted on a ‘willing-buyers, willing-sellers formal land market’ (Bryant, 1996: 1543). The MLAR model foresees in only minimal involvement of the state and is opposed to the imposition of any ceilings on land holdings. Altogether, this should result in a self-selection process of the most productive producers; accordingly, productivity and agricultural efficiency should increase (for the main arguments of the MLAR literature, see Deininger & Feder, 1998 and Deininger, 2003).

In line with the MLAR model, securing land rights has been regarded as a legal issue that needs to be regulated by statutory law allocating official land titles, guaranteed and managed by central authorities. Formally recognized private property titles are seen as a prerequisite to enhancing rural agents’ incentives for investment and to settling land conflicts that have emerged in a context of institutional confusion (Deininger and Feder, 2009). In reality, however, ‘gaining “title” to land has never been a “simple” recognition of unused capital but has always involved severe social struggles with distinct winners and losers’ (Peters, 2009: 1322). These struggles take place in whichever system of land tenure arrangements, both communal and individual, both formal and informal. Therefore, the introduction of a system of centralized title registration should not be perceived as a technical solution, but as connected to social, economic, cultural and political arenas in which various actors have different power resources (see also Borras & Franco, 2010).

The fact that many small-scale peasants never register their titles – and in the case of the Rwandan marshes are not even able to make land claims despite their (often intensive) use of the land – has facilitated the emergence of a discourse of ‘vast areas of non-used land’ waiting for development through a capital injection by private investors, or an engagement by local elites. In the new context of growing competition and commoditization of space (see Zoomers, 2010), the already ongoing formalization of land rights – combined with the lack of recognized customary land titles – is opening up an interesting window of opportunity for more powerful actors to negotiate over land rights with the relevant authorities in order to exploit the productive potential of ‘un(der)utilized’ land.
Furthermore, the relevant authorities have a particular agenda in negotiations over land rights. Personal connections between policymakers on the one hand and interested large-scale actors or local elites on the other may definitely play a role in this respect. Vermeulen & Cotula (2010: 914) point out that ‘when tested within real negotiations, government agencies invariably align with the investor rather than the local land users’. This political economy dimension is however totally unacknowledged in the World Bank reports. Indeed, as pointed out by Scoones (2010), ‘the World Bank’s hyped report on land grabbing is confusing and disappointing, because its analysis lacks an understanding of what drives investments, what politics surround land deals, and the socio-political dynamics shaping livelihood outcomes’.

Whereas the 2010 World Bank report (2010: 93) focuses on good land management and corporate responsibility to increase the chances for ‘host countries [...] to use investor interest to help them utilize the resources at their disposal in a way that can [...] improve local livelihoods’, Borras and Franco (2010) argue in favor of a human rights-based approach that takes the right to food and the right to land as a starting point. This completely calls into question the current practices of the agro-industrial food industry and proposes an entirely different agrarian model based upon the productive potential of small-scale farmers. Borras (2008) links this with the idea of ‘food sovereignty’, a right proclaimed by the Vía Campesina that is based upon the recognition of the potential and capacity of family-based farming.

4. Conclusion

In a context of globalization and liberalization, Africa is increasingly confronted with the commercialization of its space. Various so-called large-scale actors – international private investors, ‘investor’ states, and local entrepreneurs – are keen to acquire large areas of land for the production of food crops and biofuels. However, the discourse in favor of a modernized and professionalized agricultural sector is also instrumentalized by local-level elites to gain control over land.

This paper has presented two case studies involving respectively large-scale foreign and local elite-led land acquisition in the Rwandan swamplands. It has identified the
deep-rooted social change these forms of land grabbing have entailed through shifts in control over resources (capital), shifts in the division of labor, and in the division of decision power of various socioeconomic categories. Smallholder peasants in particular tend to end up on the losing side in the bargaining game over access to marshland and hence face increasing difficulties in trying to secure their livelihoods. This evolution is embedded in a larger process of agrarian change in Rwanda and elsewhere characterized by a gradual winnowing out of smallholder farming in favor of large-scale commercially-oriented farming.

The current trends in agrarian change are taking place in a context of layered realities and actors operating at different levels. Therefore, an efficient counterweight can only be organized with the participation of actors at these different levels. Indeed, ‘the challenge is not to look for alliances of undifferentiated entities [...] , but to forge alliances between reformist initiatives from above [through state and inter-governmental institutions] along with widespread, consistent mass mobilizations by affected rural poor and movements and allies among civil society from below’ (Borras and Franco, 2010: 523).

Such mass mobilization is not straightforward in an African context where democratic values and freedom of expression are often absent. Local-level initiatives commonly lack leverage to provide a counterweight to public-corporate partnerships that have already concluded their land deal. Moreover, national authorities may try to capture local-level initiatives to neutralize their power to resist. In the Rwandan context, for example, the government is seen to push small-scale peasant associations into ‘coordinating structures’ (cooperatives) managed or controlled by the public authorities. This severely limits their capacity to provide a counterweight to decisions taken by that very same government.

Rwanda - and Africa at large - therefore need transnational agricultural movements that can bridge the gap between North and South, while also enhancing partnerships within the South. The ultimate goal must be to evolve towards a Pan-African wave of connected social movements defending the rights of small-scale peasants. However, to achieve this, small-scale peasants must first organize themselves locally and nationally. Development agents could play a role by providing support to what Borras
& Franco call ‘a multi-level sandwich strategy’. We would rather frame it as forging the corridors that link pools of agency at the local level with pools of agency at the (inter)national level. Such corridors are crucial in order for African small-scale peasants to be able to collectively raise their voices and provide a counterweight to the process whereby the ‘new agriculture’ is winnowing them out.

References


The process of urban modernization of Kigali often pushes more marginal groups to the outskirts, involving the appropriation of space by local actors. The Rwandan authorities, for example, plan to build a multi-storey shopping mall on the space that used to accommodate the main traditional market until it was forcefully closed down in 2004. Shopkeepers were displaced without receiving any compensation. Research in 2007 revealed that the Rwandan authorities had, in their desire to modernize, actually deprived them of their space in the urban centre (Michelon, 2009). Also in rural markets, private actors are increasingly taking control. Under the 2007 Village Revitalization Policy, the authorities to protest against Alphonse’s behavior, the authorities decided to drive him away. Others referred to the disputes between Alphonse and the local peasant population as a trigger for the authorities to intervene: ‘his perverse actions were noticed at the district and at the provincial levels’. Other interviewees claimed that ‘the contract between Alphonse and the district had expired’. Still others asserted that the authorities had found out that the associations were a front, and that this is why

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1 For a historical overview of land grabbing in the Kenyan context, see for example Klopp, 1999; for a historical overview of land grabbing in the Ethiopian context, see Puddu, 2010.

2 The World Bank further sees potential synergies between such small-scale agricultural entrepreneurs and the presence of large-scale private investors. The 2010 report on the potential and risks of large-scale land acquisitions mentions that ‘when done right, larger scale farming systems can also have a place as one of many tools to promote sustainable agricultural and rural development, and can directly support smallholder productivity’ (World Bank, 2010: vii). The 2008 World Development Report asserts that ‘the private sector drives the organization of value chains that bring the market to smallholders and commercial farms’ (World Bank, 2007: 8).

3 The frustration created by increasing landlessness was probably an important factor leading up to the 1994 genocide. Des Forges has pointed to the fact that frustrated poor peasants did not only kill because of ethno-politico-ideological reasons; they were also driven by the possibility of increasing their wealth and acquiring the property of their victims. By cooperating in attacks, the farmers showed their ‘commitment’, which opened up the prospect of rewards in the form of land or livestock (Des Forges, 1999).

4 A commune is the old name for the administrative unit known since 2001 as a ‘district’.

5 At that point, other exclusion mechanisms started to play. Among those not active in the swampland were the newly established households, as well as households who had previously had to sell the user right on their marshland plot in times of hardship and had been unable to recover the land subsequently. Poorer peasants cultivated land ‘owned’ by others in a metayage system.

6 Under a metayage system, peasants cultivate land for a proprietor and the produce is shared. In the Rwandan case, the land user ‘pays’ the landowner up to a third of the harvest.

7 Later, this principle was inserted into the land law (Article 29) (GoR, 2005).

8 Musahara and Huggins (2005), for example, mention how some farmers set fire to the sugarcane crop as an indication of how ‘discontent led to confrontation’.

9 Rwandan households are typically scattered over the hills. The umudugudu (plural: imidugudu) is the administrative division that corresponds with one or a few hills. The term was originally reserved for “villages” by the post-1994 villagization policy to house returning (mostly Tutsi) refugees. Under this policy, non-refugees (often Huts) also were required to leave their houses in the hill to settle in a structured village. The policy was highly contested by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch. Now the term is used to indicate the administrative division that previously was referred to as a “cellule.”

10 A physically fit man can earn up to RWF 500 per day (morning to 1PM) working on someone else’s plots as a wage laborer. For women and physically less capable men, the rate is RWF 300 per day.

11 In reality, this relationship may not be linear. The inverse relationship between farm size and productivity suggests that the trend may be exponential (with diminishing returns). On the inverse relationship, see Ansoms, 2008. On the other hand, poorer households may be constrained in their capacity to engage in sugarcane production without having access to risk-insurance and credit facilities.

12 These less-traditional land grabs do not necessarily transfer land to long-distance actors, but may involve the appropriation of space by local actors. The Rwandan authorities, for example, plan to build a multi-storey shopping mall on the space that used to accommodate the main traditional market until it was forcefully closed down in 2004. Shopkeepers were displaced without receiving any compensation. The process of urban modernization of Kigali often pushes more marginal groups to the outskirts, depriving them of their space in the urban centre (Michelon, 2009). Also in rural markets, private actors are increasingly taking control. Research in 2007 revealed that the Rwandan authorities had, in various locations, privatized the exploitation of local rural market infrastructures. Private investors had been granted the right to collect taxes, which immediately led to an inflation of taxation on sales of small quantities of food. Peasants with only small surpluses preferred to not sell, or to sell within the local setting at below-market prices. Local entrepreneurs benefited financially by accumulating surpluses of small-scale peasants and bringing them to market in larger quantities (at less burdensome tax rates). Interestingly, the system was abandoned after just one year following intense protest by the local population, but has again been reintroduced in some settings by 2011.

13 Divergent accounts were given of what had happened exactly. According to some, Alphonse had become involved in a dispute with the NGO that supported this project, and when the latter called upon the authorities to protest against Alphonse’s behavior, the authorities decided to drive him away. Others referred to the disputes between Alphonse and the local peasant population as a trigger for the authorities to intervene: ‘his perverse actions were noticed at the district and at the provincial levels’. Other interviewees claimed that ‘the contract between Alphonse and the district had expired’. Still others asserted that the authorities had found out that the associations were a front, and that this is why
they moved against Alphonse. Finally, some suggested that it was Eugène who was behind the removal of Alphonse from the marshland.

One of the objectives of the Rwandan government is to stimulate monocropping, whereby peasants cultivate one particular crop type per plot. In addition, each region is supposed to specialize in certain crops based on agro-bio-climatic conditions and in accordance with market needs. Article 63 of the land law specifies that productive land use ‘shall be based on the area’s master plan and the general structure on land allocation, organization and use and [the adoption of] specific plants certified by relevant authorities’ (GoR, 2005).

This amount was due regardless of the land allocated to the association and regardless of the number of members. The manner in which the required amount was raised could differ (one-off payments, harvest time payments, monthly payments). At the time of the research, not all associations had made their payments. The precise destination of the payments was unclear to most focus group participants. Some mentioned that part of the money would remain at the associations’ disposal; others said that the payments would be used to cover the financial needs of the cooperative (i.e. operating costs); still others claimed that it would disappear into the pockets of the associational presidents and the cooperative coordinators, unknown to the local peasants. The financial requirement was described by one participant as ‘a delicate problem, as many people were unable to raise the necessary funds’.

Other international agencies, such as IFPRI and FAO, also actively promote the establishment of Codes of Conduct in large-scale land deals.