



Land grabbing ten years on: a Call for Applications for small research grants

More than a decade ago, we launched the Land Deals Politics Initiative ([LDPI](#)) as a loose network of scholars and activists concerned about the rise of land, water and green grabs across the world and the consequences for rural livelihoods and agrarian relations. A massive wave of investment in land, resulting in expropriation and displacement had emerged following the financial, food and energy crises of 2008-09. We wanted to understand what was going on and how best to respond.

Between 2009 – 2019, LDPI organised a series of events to analyse the social, economic, political and environmental dynamics of large-scale land deals and their implications for policy and social movements. LDPI funded significant research and contributed to a considerable body of published scholarly research on land deals,¹ all of which shaped policy discussions and informed numerous initiatives such as the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines.

The global debate around land deals has diminished in the last several years, but important research and political questions remain. What happened to the hundreds of land grabs documented by researchers, non-governmental organisations, activist groups, news media, and aid agencies? What new configurations of land, labour and capital have emerged since? How has the rise of authoritarian, state-led populism and politics re-shaped the tensions between 'foreignisation' and extraction? This call invites applications for small grants to support research and writing around old and new themes related to land grabbing, aiming to understand the contemporary dynamics of land and resource 'grabbing'.

Twenty-five grants of \$3000 each are available to researchers based in the 'Global South' who have undertaken original empirical research and wish to write this up. Applications should include a short abstract (300 words), a profile of the applicant(s) (300 words), two names of references, in English (We will also accept some applications in Spanish and French). These should be submitted as one document to landdealpoliticsinitiative@gmail.com by **31 May 2023**.

Successful applicants will be informed by 30 June 2023 and full papers will be due by 15 January 2024. Full papers can be co-authored with others including with researchers who are not from the Global South. The aim is to publish the papers online in the LDPI Working Paper series and share them at a major international event to be held in Colombia in March 2024, which will include researchers, activists and policymakers from across the world. We hopefully can facilitate attendance of successful grant applicants at the event.

¹ Halifax, Canada (biofuels) in 2010; IDS, Sussex (Land grabs 1) in 2011; Cornell University, Ithaca (Land grabs 2) in 2012, Chiang Mai University in 2015 - and associated publications (in the form of journal special issues and special forums): Borras et al. (2010), Borras et al. (2011), White et al. (2012), Fairhead et al. (2012), Wolford et al. (2013), Edelman et al. (2013), Scoones et al. (2013), Hall et al. (2015), Schoenberger et al. (2017) and Park and White (2017). Of course, these are not the only important journal special issues and special forums, but these are the ones that directly grew out of LDPI.

In September 2023, there will be a separate Call for Papers for presentation at the conference that will be an *open call* and not limited to authors from the Global South. Also, we will encourage all conference participants (including the grantees) to develop their papers for journal publication at a later stage.

The proposed themes for this initiative are outlined below.

1. **What happened to failed large-scale land grabs?** Many large areas of land were claimed, some were cleared and others invested in, but many of these projects subsequently failed. What happened next? Who are the new owners? How have local populations adjusted to new land relations around ‘failed’ schemes? What are the consequences of these failed land investments on local politics and livelihoods? How has failure re-shaped gender relations and vice versa?
2. **Multiple, invisible domestic land grabs.** While the world’s attention was focused on the large-scale investments of foreign actors, much less visible processes of land expropriation and accumulation were on-going in many countries, driven by the same forces. In these cases, domestic capital and business/political/military elites were often more significant than international investors. How have these ‘pin-prick’ land grabs restructured rural areas, with what consequences?
3. **The implications for labour.** One of the main claims made of new land-based investments was that they would provide employment in poor rural areas. But how has this played out and who are the beneficiaries across different labour regimes – from contracting to estate farming? How have land investments influenced patterns of internal and cross-border migration, and what have been the consequences of restructuring rural labour on social reproduction, gender and age relations?
4. **The role of science.** How were scientific tools, from crop science to satellite imaging, big data resource optimisation models and economic growth analyses, deployed to make land and other resources available for investment? What has happened to the scientists and their tools in the wake of the global land grab—have they created the conditions for their perpetuation or are they bypassed or deployed for other purposes?
5. **Processes of financialisation.** Financialisation was an important feature of land grabs following the financial crisis of 2008. Land and other resources became a valuable asset class, and investments accelerated through a number of mechanisms. How does land act as an ‘asset class’ and a ‘hedge’ in the current conditions of global economic instability – including bank failures, high inflation, stagnant stock and bond markets, and war? How has capital continued to create new mechanisms to financialise land and other natural resources? Are crypto currencies and other digital assets being deployed for conservation and/or extraction, and to what effect?
6. **Green energy and climate change.** A big driver of infrastructure investment with implications for agrarian change has been global concerns around climate change and the need for ‘green energy’ transitions. Solar parks, wind farms, geothermal plants, alongside mining for lithium and other rare metals for batteries, have had major consequences. In contrast to agricultural investments, how have these played out and who are the winners and losers?

7. **Green grabbing, neoliberal conservation and market-based instruments.** A decade ago, ‘green grabbing’ was a still-emerging phenomenon as investors backed the expansion of conservation areas, the investment in tree planting and the backing of carbon offset arrangements. Since then this has exploded, with new market instruments for offsets, a growth in the voluntary carbon market and an increasing financialisation of nature. How is this process panning out, and with what consequences for agrarian relations?
8. **Growth as extra-territorial development.** The push for ‘growth’ in many countries has resulted in policies for ‘special economic zones’, investment areas and growth corridors. These have been central to state and international finance institution loans and investments, but their consequences for land control and rural livelihoods in their vicinity is often not assessed in the project appraisals and evaluations. What kinds of subsidies underly these types of territorial reorganisation and what are their distributional effects? What sort of political rhetoric and imaginaries are invoked in the establishment of these zones and how have these initiatives affected rural people, land rights and patterns of economic investment and labour relations?
9. **Land grabs and environmental change.** Land deals of different sorts have major consequences for environmental change. The footprints on water, carbon, pollution impacts and so on are poorly understood. What impact have land grabs had on the ability of local land and other resource users to navigate climate-related and environmental change?
10. **The national political context of land grabbing.** Many land/resource grabs have occurred in the context of various combinations of authoritarianism and populism in rural areas. How have struggles against land grabs overlapped with struggles against authoritarianism and populism? What is the ongoing relationship between the global and the national in the context of land claims, resource extraction, and calls for attention to local rural development.
11. **Violence, from the everyday to the spectacular.** Many land grabs have been violent or have unfolded in the context of violent conflict, pushing through investment imperatives and overturning the rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities. Land and environment defenders have been intimidated and even killed. What have been the consequences of the intertwining of violence and capitalist expansion through land investments in different settings? How have justice movements formed to resist such imposition? How can justice become central to debates over land rights?
12. **Resistance and mobilisation.** Many new social organisations and alliances came together to protest against land deals at the individual, regional, or global scale. Organising for or against a particular investor and land use development plan brought unlikely allies together in some cases and fractured local communities in others. What has happened in the wake of activist campaigns against land grabs? What can we learn from counter-movements, from the success of some and failure of other organised attempts to "grab land back"? When land is successfully re-claimed, what forms of tenure and economic cooperation foster the emergence of resilient, egalitarian agrarian communities? What narratives around which grievances resonated successfully at different scales and how did this organising re-shape political and social communities? What other forms of protest - from weapons of the weak to exit (migration) and otherwise - occurred?
13. **Policy and political change.** A range of policy efforts emerged following the post 2008-09 wave of land grabs aiming to provide a framework for regulation, informed consent and accountability around new investments. Most of these efforts were voluntary although in some

cases they spurred reforms of national legislation. How have these institutional, legal and governance processes fared? Have they been effective? What lessons can be drawn for the future? What recommendations can be offered for policy and action, based on insights from past waves of land and resource ‘grabbing’?

14. **Methodology.** Cutting across these themes, there are questions of methodology. How do we know about land deals and their implications. How can we combine different data sources (from databases, remote sensing, surveys, field observation, case studies) through mixed methods and integrative, cross-disciplinary analysis? How can a more transdisciplinary approach be fostered that links research insights with action through participatory, engaged approaches? What mapping, graphical and digital methods of representing and analysing land grabs are most effective in communicating with policymakers, advocacy groups and affected populations?
15. **Towards theorisation.** People studying land deals employ a range of theoretical approaches and concepts. Within the broad frame of political economy, are there theoretical advances that have helped shed light on land deals?

Collaborating institutions and projects

- RRUSHES-5, Commodity & land rushes and regimes: Reshaping five spheres of global social life International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague; European Research Council Advanced Grant
- PASTRES (Pastoralism, Uncertainty and Resilience: Global Lessons from the Margins), Institute for Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, Sussex; European Research Council (ERC) Advanced Grant
- SARChi, South African Research Chair in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, PLAAS University of the Western Cape, Cape Town; funded by the National Research Foundation
- CASAS, Collective of Agrarian Scholar-Activists in the South
- TNI, Transnational Institute, Amsterdam

International Organizing Team

Andrea Sosa (CONICET, Argentina), Rama Dieng (U of Edinburgh), Arnim Scheidel (UAB-ICTA Barcelona), Jacobo Grajales (U of Lille), Tor Benjaminsen (Norwegian University of Life Sciences), Jampel Dell’Angelo (VU, Amsterdam), Ye of COHD/China Agricultural University (Ye Jingzhong, Wang Chunyu and Liu Juan), Diana Ojeda (U de los Andes, Bogota), Barry Gills (U of Helsinki), TNI team (Katie Sandwell, Sylvia Kay and Jennifer Franco), Lorenzo Cotula (IIED), Diana Aguiar (Federal University of Bahia, Brazil), Marc Edelman (CUNY), Ruth Hall (PLAAS, Cape Town), Ben White (ISS, The Hague), Wendy Wolford (Cornell), Ian Scoones (IDS Sussex) and Jun Borrás (ISS, The Hague).

Colombia Organizing Team

U. Nacional (Francisco Gutierrez Sarin), U. Rosario (Rocío del Pilar Peña Huertas), U. los Andes (Angela Serrano), U. Javeriana (Julio Arias), U. Externado (Flavio Bladimir Rodríguez Muñoz, tbc.) and CINEP (Sergio Coronado) and the Colombian team of RRUSHES-5 (Itayosara Rojas and Lorenza Arango, ISS PhD researchers, Colombia-based).

Co-sponsors (initial list; not yet including Spanish and French language journals)

Journal of Peasant Studies

Globalizations

World Development
Antipode

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