

TRANSNATIONAL LAND DEALS, AGRARIAN CHANGE AND LAND GOVERNANCE IN CENTRAL UGANDA

PhD Thesis

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Abstract

The global outbreak of the food and financial crises starting from 2008 is widely understood to have generated an exponential rise in foreign commercial interest in, and acquisitions of arable land in developing countries, particularly in Africa. The rationale for this research was in part, premised on the high level of public attention on what came to be known as the global land-grab. The proliferation of high-profile global debates and increased public attention initially drew on anecdotal media reports expressing concerns about potentially adverse socio-political and environmental consequences. However empirical evidence and detailed knowledge about the actual characteristics, processes, and effects of transnational land deals at the local level remained scant. Some of the glaring gaps that persisted in the start of this research included questions as to whether the phenomenon was more hype than reality: Under what circumstances and in what ways did these land deals occur? What were their characteristics and how did they unfold at the local level? Who were the principle actors involved and what were their roles? Ultimately, what were the effects of these land deals? Many studies have since explored various dimensions of these questions and this book seeks to add to the growing body of knowledge on the multi-dimensional complexity of process and location-specific dynamics of transnational land deals.

Based on multisited empirical ethnographic research spanning a period of five years, this book examines historical and contemporary trajectories of socio-political relations about land in Central Uganda and argues that transnational land deals are embedded within long-term historical processes of social formation in Buganda and post-colonial state building, contemporary patterns of decentralised (land) governance, and processes of agrarian modernization in the rural hinterland. Using a comparative interdisciplinary study of Chinese, Norwegian, and Indian owned farms in in Nakaseke District in central Uganda, this research explores the role of contextual socio-economic factors such as conflict, poverty and vulnerability, the political economy of state-society relations and elite use of discourses of legitimation for land control, and the role of patronage in stakeholder relations that shape process of inclusion and exclusion and unequal distribution of the outcomes of land deals at the local level.

Juxtaposed between dominant discourses depicting transnational land deals as defining a new era of increased foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa's hitherto neglected agriculture sector, and those that see in it the dominant power of transnational capital in the globalization of local commons through adverse incorporation and dispossession, this book presents a detailed empirical basis upon which to explore critical discourses, understand everyday practices, and question broader policy choices about the possibilities and differentiated effects of contemporary land reforms, agrarian change and rural development in central Uganda.