



## The Land Deal Politics Initiative

### Small grant competition: Call for applications

A convergence of factors has been driving a revaluation of land by powerful economic and political actors. This is occurring across the world, but especially in the global South. As a result, we are seeing a dramatic rise in the extent of cross-border, transnational corporation-driven and, in some cases foreign government-driven, large-scale land deals unfolding worldwide. The phrase 'global land grab' has become a catch-all phrase to describe this explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions revolving around the production and sale of food and biofuels, conservation and mining activities.

In-depth and systematic enquiry has become urgent and necessary in order to have deeper, meaningful and productive debates around this issue. This is the reason why the Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI) has been launched. It will be an 'engaged research' initiative, taking the side of the rural poor, but based on solid evidence and detailed, field-based research.

In the LDPI we will aim for a broad framework encompassing the *political economy*, *political ecology* and *political sociology* of land deals centred on food, biofuels, minerals and conservation. Working within the broad analytical lenses of these three fields, we will use as a general framework the four key questions in agrarian political economy: (i) who owns what? (ii) who does what? (iii) who gets what? and (iv) what do they do with the surplus wealth that has been created? We will add two additional key questions, highlighting political dynamics between groups and social classes: 'what do they do to each other?', and 'how do changes in politics get shaped by dynamic ecologies, and vice versa?' We will ask a range of big picture questions through detailed in-depth case studies in a number of sites globally, focusing on the politics of land deals.

Grants of up to US\$2000 (exceptionally more) per study are available to successful applicants who wish to undertake original field research, carry out follow up fieldwork on an ongoing related initiative, or write up a paper based on research that is being/has been undertaken on any of the following themes (or combinations).

Some of the most urgent and strategic questions here include but are not limited to:

- What changes in broad agrarian structures are emerging? Are these new forms of agrarian capitalism or repeats of the past?
- What is the nature and extent of rural social differentiation – in terms of class, gender, ethnicity – following changes in land use and land property relations as well as organizations of production and exchange?

- Have land deals undermined local level and national food security? How and to what extent? What have been the socially differentiated impacts on livelihoods by class, gender and ethnicity?
- To what extent have agrarian political struggles been provoked by the new land investment dynamics? What are the issues that unite or divide the rural poor, organized movements, and rural communities around the issue of land deals?
- What are the various competing policy and political narratives and discourses around the multiple crises of food, energy, climate and finance, and how have these shaped and been reshaped by the land deal politics? How and to what extent has (trans)national finance speculation played a role in land deals in the context of the convergence of food, fuels, climate and finance crises? What narratives exist around 'investment, growth and modernization' versus 'marginalization, displacement and impoverishment', and so on?
- How have competing frameworks and views on land property been deployed by various camps around the contested meanings of 'marginal lands' (or, 'idle', 'waste', 'unoccupied' lands)?
- What are the emerging trends around dynamics of power, elites and corruption; land as a source of patronage? How can we make sense of the politics of land deals in different contexts?
- Have development-induced displacement and dispossession occurred? How and to what extent and with what immediate and long-term outcomes and implications for rural livelihoods, including new rural refugees or internally displaced peoples (IDPs)?
- Have global land policies of different overseas development agencies (World Bank, FAO, EU, IFAD, and so on) contributed to facilitating/encouraging or blocking/discouraging land deals? What are the limitations of 'code of conduct', certification, regulation, information dissemination, and capacity-building strategies?
- What are the dynamics of international politics of land grabs in the broader context of energy, mining, forestry and conservation; and the role of big capital and powerful interests?
- What are some of the relevant emerging alternatives from key actors? Are some of the traditional policies such as land reform, and some of the more recent alternative visions such as 'food sovereignty' (and 'land sovereignty') relevant and useful in protecting and promoting the interest of the rural poor in the midst of these (trans)national commercial land deals?

The research must be original, policy-relevant and based on detailed, case-specific field study. General review papers will not be accepted. Final papers will be around 10,000 words long, and guidelines for their production will be issued to successful grant holders. The final papers will become part of an international series (the LDPI working paper

series) that will be published on the internet and widely disseminated among regional and international research institutions, donor community, policy maker's circles, NGOs, and agrarian movements – with the possibility of more formal academic publication, either in an edited volume or a special issue of a journal.

To be eligible:

- The applicant must a doctoral or post-doctoral (graduating within the last five years) researcher
- Non-doctoral/non-postdoctoral researchers may apply but will have a different requirement – see further below.
- The research must be based on recent (over the last 5 years), field-based, site-specific research

Applicants from Africa, or those working on African cases, are particularly encouraged to apply.

Short proposals (500 words maximum) for the research/paper must be submitted by email to [landpolitics@gmail.com](mailto:landpolitics@gmail.com) by 15 April 2010, together with a short CV (maximum one page, including the name of one referee). For non-doctoral/non-postdoctoral applicant, a longer proposal is required, at 1,500 words, together with the names of two referees. A review committee, drawn from the sponsoring institutions, will award small grants in May 2010. Successful applicants will have until 31 October 2010 to complete a paper. All papers will be peer-reviewed and final versions will be submitted before 31 December 2010. Papers will be published (electronic format only) in the LDPI working paper series by February 2011.

*The 'Land Deal Politics Initiative' (LDPI) is initially a joint effort of Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS) at Saint Mary's University in Canada (Saturnino 'Jun' Borras Jr. – the LDPI international secretariat), the Future Agricultures Consortium at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex (Ian Scoones), PLAAS at the University of the Western Cape (Ruth Hall), Resource, Environment and Livelihoods (RELIVE) at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Netherlands (Ben White) and the Polson Institute for Global Development at Cornell University (Wendy Wolford).*

More on the LDPI can be found at the LDPI website:  
[http://www.smu.ca/academic/arts/ids/ldpi\\_about.html](http://www.smu.ca/academic/arts/ids/ldpi_about.html)