



## The land of our ancestors

Property rights, social resistance, and alternatives to land grabbing in Madagascar

Benjamin D. Neimark

LDPI  
Working  
Paper

26

# **The land of our ancestors: Property rights, social resistance, and alternatives to land grabbing in Madagascar**

by Benjamin D. Neimark

*Published by:*

**The Land Deal Politics Initiative**

[www.iss.nl/ldpi](http://www.iss.nl/ldpi)

[landpolitics@gmail.com](mailto:landpolitics@gmail.com)

*in collaboration with:*

**Institute for Development Studies (IDS)**

University of Sussex

Library Road

Brighton, BN1 9RE

United Kingdom

*Tel: +44 1273 606261*

*Fax: +44 1273 621202*

*E-mail: [ids@ids.ac.uk](mailto:ids@ids.ac.uk)*

*Website: [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)*

**Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS)**

**International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)**

P.O. Box 29776

2502 LT The Hague

The Netherlands

*Tel: +31 70 426 0664*

*Fax: +31 70 426 0799*

*E-mail: [iss.icas@gmail.com](mailto:iss.icas@gmail.com)*

*Website: [www.iss.nl/icas](http://www.iss.nl/icas)*

**The Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS)**

School of Government, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535, Cape Town

South Africa

*Tel: +27 21 959 3733*

*Fax: +27 21 959 3732*

*E-mail: [plaas@uwc.ac.za](mailto:plaas@uwc.ac.za)*

*Website: [www.plaas.org.za](http://www.plaas.org.za)*

**The Polson Institute for Global Development**

Department of Development Sociology

Cornell University

133 Warren Hall

Ithaca NY 14853

United States of America

*Tel: +1 607 255-3163*

*Fax: +1 607 254-2896*

*E-mail: [ta12@cornell.edu](mailto:ta12@cornell.edu)*

*Website: [polson.cals.cornell.edu](http://polson.cals.cornell.edu)*

© March 2013 *All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher and the author.*

*Published with support from the UK Department for International Development (DfID), Atlantic Philanthropies, Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), Ford Foundation and Miserior.*

## Abstract

Across the continent, Africans are witnessing their most fertile agricultural lands being sold-off for the global biofuel industry at unprecedented rates, fueling social anxiety and unrest. In Madagascar, unrest intensified so much in 2008 that populist protests against a government land deal with South Korean multinational Daewoo Ltd. led to a military coup. In response to the crisis, a *Bloomberg Businessweek* reporter noted, "Africa has become a biofuel battleground." How are Africans reacting to recent large-scale land deals, with wide-spread resistance, or general acquiescence? What is the nature of social resistance and emerging politics? Are adequate land tenure policies and institutions in place to protect Africans from land seizure?

This study focuses on a well-known biofuel battleground in Madagascar, highlighting the first case of successful social resistance against contemporary land grabs. Given recent critique of biofuels, producers have begun to shift away from large-scale commercial acquisitions and towards smaller integrated production alongside social and economic development. Parallel to this new wave of agrofuel capitalism, there is a push to secure tenure and stimulate agricultural investment in land and markets, and while foreign aid projects are beginning to address land rights in Madagascar, most of its agricultural zones remain under extremely complex tenure systems of overlapping state and customary claims. As competing visions of land securitization take hold, significant questions remain regarding whether new laws are an adequate alternative for protecting rural Malagasy from dispossession of livelihood resources under agrofuel capitalism. I demonstrate how new land reforms have helped to create an environment of confusion and mistrust around land reform and have facilitated access to land and labor through the fracture of tenuous social relations and promotion of rural differentiation.

## About the Author

**Benjamin Neimark** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Geography at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, USA. His research on agrarian studies and peasant labor coalesce around themes of land tenure, resource property rights, and agrofuel production in Africa and Madagascar. His previous research focuses on the political economy of biological prospecting on the island nation of Madagascar. Bioprospecting involves search for, and commercialization of, useful natural compounds in new pharmaceutical and industrial products. His work examines studies of drug discovery and development and analyzes the politics of access to some of the most valuable global biogenetic resources endemic to Madagascar. Two recent publications on this work includes: "Subverting Regulatory Protection of 'Natural Commodities:' The *Prunus africana* in Madagascar" in *Development and Change* (2010), and a co-authored piece with Dr. Richard Schroeder, "Hotspot Discourse in Africa: Making Space for Bioprospecting in Madagascar" in *African Geographical Review* (2009).

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Land Deal Politics Initiative (LDPI) for their small grant award and Old Dominion University (ODU) for a summer research fellowship. This generous support made possible a site visit to Madagascar during the summer of 2012 to conduct data collection. A special note of appreciation goes to Ruth Hall and Jun Borrás for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. The research in Madagascar was facilitated by a number of colleagues, including Perrine Burnod, Rivo Andrianirina-Ratsialonana, Yolande Razafindrakoto, Eric Rijanantenaina, and members of Solidarité des Intervenants sur le Foncier (SIF) - Madagascar, Eric Hermann Raparison and Heriniaina Rakotomalala. This work was also made possible with the help of two outstanding undergraduate researchers, Sherry Beeler and Terrance Ratliff. Help on the timeline was given by Don Emminger. Lastly, I would like to thank Sidonie Emerande for her translation, Sara Keene for copy-editing, and logistical support provided by Richard Hughes.

## Table of Contents

<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Methods and rationale for study.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3 Access and control to productive resources in rural decentralized “grey zones” .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4 Background: The political crisis creating the ‘enabling environment’ for accumulation .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5 Madagascar land tenure in an era of FDI .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6 Agrofuel capitalism in Madagascar.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6.1 A summary of the biofuel/agrofuel industry in Madagascar .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>7 Discussion and conclusion .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>16</b>

## 1 Introduction

Across the continent, Africans are bearing witness as their most fertile agricultural lands are sold-off at unprecedented rates for use by the global biofuel industry and for grain exports, feeding social anxiety and unrest (Kugelman and Levenstein 2009; Dauvergne and Neville 2010). In 2008, unrest in Madagascar grew until populist protests against a government land deal with the South Korean multinational Daewoo Ltd. led to a military coup and ignited a subsequent political crisis.<sup>1</sup> In response to such large-scale land deals, a reporter for *Bloomberg Businessweek* noted, “Africa has become a biofuel battleground” (Knaup 2008).

Once seen as an environmental panacea, biofuels have lately been on the receiving-end of strong critique by activists, academics, and non-governmental organizations who claim it is a primary driver of global land grabbing, rainforest clearance, and competition with food crops (GRAIN 2013; OXFAM 2012; McMichael 2009; Shiva 2008). In Madagascar, this critique has not gone unnoticed, as many operators have either suspended operations or shifted from high profile commercial farms to more rural production.<sup>2</sup> Firms have also begun highlighting their role in income generation and pro-poor social development programs in these environmentally-sensitive, yet highly productive agricultural plots. How are Malagasy reacting to recent land deals and shifts in production, with wide-spread resistance, or general acquiescence? What is the nature of social resistance and emerging politics? Who is incorporated in the local land deals and subsequent development projects? Are adequate land tenure policies and institutions in place to protect Malagasy from any future land seizures that may occur in these new rural sites of biofuel production?

Recent scholarship has provided a theoretical framework for viewing recent shifts in agrarian change, particularly those addressing contemporary land and resource grabs (Fairhead et al. 2012; Borras et al. 2011), the political economy of land control (Peluso and Lund 2011) and the corporate structure and scale of new enclosures (White et al. 2012; De Shutter 2010). Much of this work has drawn on David Harvey’s well-cited expression, “accumulation by dispossession,” to view the elements of land-grabbing’s speculative nature and spatial-temporal fixing of capital (2006, 155).<sup>3</sup> More instrumentally, Harvey’s theory articulates the ongoing processes of commodification through the disjuncture of peasants from their means of production and the creation of a peasant labor force (Kelly 2011; De Angelis 2001). Within this expanding literature, Tania Li (2011) insightfully places the labor question back into debates concerning large-scale investment and dispossession. Centering labor here within agrofuel production in Madagascar sheds light on how rural inhabitants are now being incorporated as wage workers and the emerging politics that eventually surfaces under associated land reform.

Well before the 2009 political crisis in Madagascar, many in the international donor community were advocating for policies of individual property rights as a way to stimulate agricultural investments and increase Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In theory, development economists and land policy specialists hold that property rights can secure land tenure, protect local environments, and at the same time create vibrant land markets for rural producers (Broegaard 2009; Deininger and Jin 2007). Yet, up to this point, there has been little empirical work to demonstrate the effectiveness of

---

<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that the 2009 political crisis was seen as a power grab influenced by both domestic politics and also external political forces, in particular pressure and support from France to overthrow the Ravalomanana government and replace it with a someone more aligned with their economic interests (for more see Deltombe 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous interview (July 6, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Harvey’s work here builds on Marx’s original historical theorization on primitive accumulation, albeit he departs from Marx’s theorization of ‘primitive.’

property rights to accomplish these lofty development goals in Madagascar, and moreover, protect against large-scale land acquisitions and dispossession of natural resources (Jacoby and Minten 2005). Furthermore, given the history of politically-charged divisions concerning land ownership, tenure claims may fracture along class, gender, and ethnicity, exacerbating tenuous social relations and promoting rural differentiation and dispossession (Evers et al. 2011).

In rural areas of Madagascar, historical dispossession is observed through ongoing agrarian and environmental “shocks” to the peasantry beginning in the colonial period and reinforced with the introduction of austerity measures under structural adjustment and the retreat of the state (Sodikoff 2005; Jarosz 1993). More recently, skyrocketing grain prices, a global demand for agrofuel production, the desire to remake and territorialize landscapes for conservation schemes, and the unprecedented seizure of its prized farmland by foreign multinational mining (Seagle 2011) and agribusiness firms (Burnod et al. 2013) have exacerbated the vulnerability of Malagasy peasants through periodic food crises and agrarian dislocation.

Yet, outward resistance to local level land dispossession has been fairly muted (although not silent) and rural Malagasy are cautiously welcoming foreign investment, particularly in areas in which development aid has been essentially shut off due to the political crisis. This period of agrarian change is characterized by an increasing number of rural areas out of the reach of state services and /or lacking financial disbursements by multilateral and bilateral agencies. In such spaces of *dead aid*,<sup>4</sup> private sector firms operating in rural Madagascar do not just replace aid, but become development agents in the process (Mitchell 2002; Li 2007). It is within this milieu that the private sector is subsidizing the state development apparatus by building roads and schools, providing health and education services, and fostering local environmental projects in lieu of traditional aid platforms. Results of this study show agrofuel capitalism’s unique ability to both circumvent and ameliorate resistance through different social and political mechanisms of access, most namely, providing social services and small-scale development projects and thereby creating the enabling environment for foreign investment to flourish.

While much has been written about the transformation of land into capital and peasants into a labor force through primitive accumulation (Baird 2011), less attention has addressed the institutional and legal dynamics of emerging land politics in the bio/agrofuel industry.<sup>5</sup> I illustrate below how historical processes of dispossession compounded with current dynamics of *dead aid* and uneven development of land reform has facilitated unfettered foreign agribusiness investment. I argue that agrofuel firms’ access to land and labor is facilitated by: (1) international pressure to formalize individual property rights alongside parallel neoliberal policies advocating increased land-intensive FDI such as mining and agribusiness; and (2) prolonged rural instability and insecure peasant land tenure rights— both of which have produced an “enabling environment” for capitalist penetration in the rural countryside (Büscher 2009, 91).

In the following four sections of this article, I address questions surrounding the agrofuel industry’s access to land and labor and the emerging politics. The first section provides a brief background to how and why the study was conducted in order to historicize the present circumstances of dispossession in Madagascar through land acquisitions. Following this, I introduce the pre-existing tenure systems, its problems, the new law, and its current implementation. The second section

---

<sup>4</sup> Discourse surrounding “dead aid” has been particularly powerful in neoliberal policy and academic circles, including Diambisa Moyo (2010) and others within policy circles of the World Bank and IMF.

<sup>5</sup> Although commonly referred to as biofuels, for this paper I use the name agrofuels as defined as the production of alternative energy through growing or collection of crops for use in the domestic and international export market.

builds on recent theories of access, power, and authority in order to provide a theoretical grounding for the contradictions found in the promotion of formal property as a lever for sustainable economic and environmental development (Lund 2006; Berry 1993). Here, I build on Sikor and Lund's (2009) "grey zones" as a way to view decentralization policy as an administrative tool to control rural land for rent opportunities and facilitate access to productive resources for foreign investors. The third section examines opportunities and drawbacks in large-scale efforts to formalize land tenure rights in Madagascar. In this section, I provide background to the 2009 political crisis in Madagascar and subsequent regime change, and how the new efforts to formalize land have opened up opportunities for the state and non-state actors to maintain and control access rights in areas of Madagascar. I then build on existing foundational analyses of this bellwether case of global land-grabbing (Burnod et al. 2013; Teyssier and Andrianirina-Ratsialonana 2010; Teyssier et al. 2008) and provide a review of current land tenure practices and agrofuel capitalism in Madagascar. And finally, I conclude with a way forward for future questions surrounding emerging politics of large-scale agribusiness investments and land deals.

## 2 Methods and rationale for study

This project uses an institutional ethnography to investigate how the various actors operate in the agrofuel industry in Madagascar. During the months of June and July of 2012, I carried out 10 in-depth interviews with leaders of the biofuel and associated industries within the capital of Antananarivo and the western region of Mahajanga. Twelve follow-up interviews were then conducted in 2012-13 with land policy organizations, government officials, and those working in land tenure and reform. I then performed an extensive review of the economic data, collecting both primary and secondary sources on FDI and agribusiness projects.

Madagascar's comparative advantage of low-wages, a mobile labor force, and a year-round growing cycle is attracting a growing number of foreign multinationals and governments looking to cash in on the grain and agrofuel "green rush" across Africa (De Schutter 2011). Although small in comparison with agrofuel operations in Asia and the Americas, the island's alternative energy agribusiness production sector is growing. A recent survey by the International Land Coalition (ILC) found that since 2005 agrofuel operators in Madagascar have roughly three million hectares of land under some sort of production or planning (Andrianirina-Ratsialonana et al. 2011). This figure becomes particularly troubling because it represents anywhere from 15 to 37 percent of Madagascar's arable farmland. It is also estimated that up to two-thirds of these projects are run by foreign operators, which is particularly concerning given the history of poor land governance and the potential for future dispossession in rural areas across the country.

Madagascar, as with many African countries, has maintained registration procedures for private holdings since 1960. The implementation of such laws is not only expensive, but time consuming as well (Bruce and Knox 2009). As foreign aid projects continue their attempts to address the complexity of property rights, many agricultural zones in Madagascar remain under extremely complex and overlapping state and customary claims. International donors' copious funding of land tenure – including the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) and World Bank – has in the past pushed for mechanisms for transparent property rights. Because of this and a significant push by civil society, the state has responded with new Malagasy-generated land laws in the past few years. The first ("Law 2005-019") declares that untitled private property can now be legally recognized and it is not subject to state claims of ownership, and a second land law ("Law No. 2006-031"), certifies customary claims (Teyssier et al. 2008). Both of these laws have immense grassroots support, mainly because of their goals to recognize local customary claims and open municipal offices (*guichet foncier*) to guide them through the process. The initiative is meant to provide land security at the commune level through a *certificate foncier* (local land certificates) and possibly to combat

land seizures and forced evictions (Bruce and Knox 2009; Andrianirina-Ratsialonana et al. 2011; Teyssier 2010). However, even with decentralization measures in place, titling and leasing of land for agrofuel production still resides at the national level within the Land Administration offices in Antananarivo – which are notoriously slow to act on registration of local land claims (with 400,000 titles given within its 110 year history of establishment (Teyssier 2010)), yet have been historically more welcoming to provide land leases for agribusiness. Providing titles for local level claims is also an extremely expensive and time consuming process far exceeding the resource means of rural Malagasy, again favoring larger land holders and agribusiness firms.

Madagascar is primarily an agrarian society, with roughly 72 percent of its population of 18.5 million inhabitants relying on some form of subsistence rice or pastureland agriculture (see Table and Figure 1). Many of these inhabitants do not hold official titles to land they cultivate but rather rely on customary claims leaving them in a particularly precarious position in terms of land security (Evers et al. 2011). These customary connections to land should not be underestimated within a Malagasy context, as anxiety over land seizure is of paramount concern (Kleinbooi 2010). In response, peasants in Madagascar have over the years developed *de facto* customary land tenure claims based on historical lineage, kin-based rights, and cultural observance (McConnell 2002).

Land holds immense cultural and social value for many Malagasy who see their surroundings as a direct line to ancestors through family burial tombs, upland and patty rice fields, and pastures, providing authenticity against any counter-claims (cf. Berry 2009). Sometimes, however, customary claims to land, which are generally interpreted by investors as vacant or “unused,” conflict with official state titles and increasingly with land allotted for foreign agribusiness investment (Burnod et al. 2013; Andrianirina-Ratsialonana et al. 2011). This policy tension between the locals and national land administration is causing confusion and misinformation at the local level and ultimately mistrust in the land reform process overall (Evers et al. 2011; Kleinbooi 2010).

It is only through the examination of opportunities and drawbacks in large-scale efforts to formalize land tenure rights that we have seen the lasting effects of destabilizing economic livelihoods and rupturing moral economies in rural areas. Recent case studies of land dilemmas in South Asia by Hall et al. (2011) are helpful to theorize the exclusionary terrain of land titling and tenure projects that add to the destabilization of rural livelihoods and confusion of ownership, access, and use rights, especially in times of political crisis. For example, in Madagascar pressure on agrarian societies through global farm policies favoring larger land holders and cash crops, unfavorable land management decisions, lack of extension services, and exorbitant fuel costs have historically begun the act of dispossession for rural farmers in the global south to leave rural areas for off-farm labor in urban settings (Gibbon 1992). This dynamic is noted by McMichael as a food regime predicated on futuristic visions of where food is produced in “agriculture without farmers” (2010, 612).<sup>6</sup> Yet in Madagascar, domestic production still remains vital in supplying food to an increasing population, especially in urban settings. For example, in the capital Antananarivo it is estimated that local peri-urban and urban farmers grow the majority of the foodstuffs consumed in the capital each year, demonstrating that even with shifts in population to towards urban centers, agriculture still remains a vital activity in Madagascar (see Figure 1).

---

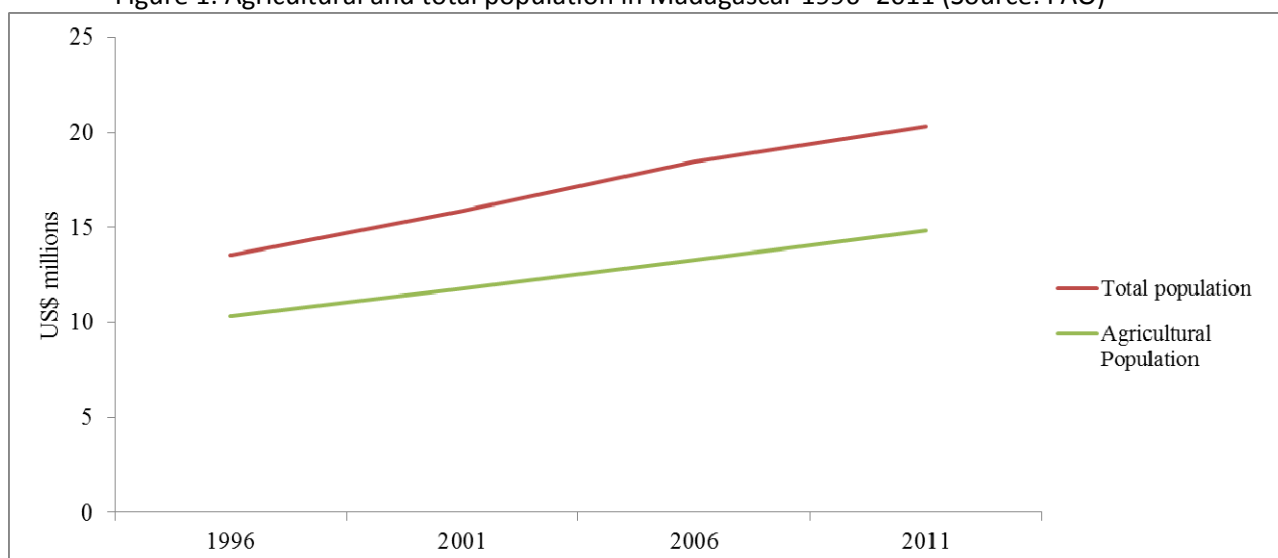
<sup>6</sup> This term is borrowed from the NGO, La Vía Campesina.



**Table 1: Agricultural population as percent of total population in Madagascar 1996- 2011** Source: <http://faostat.fao.org/>

	Total Population (millions)				Agricultural pop. (millions)				Agricultural pop. as percent of total pop. (%)				Agriculture, value added as percent of GDP (%)			
	1996	2001	2006	2011	1996	2001	2006	2011	1996	2001	2006	2011	1994	1999	2004	2009
<b>Years:</b>	1996	2001	2006	2011	1996	2001	2006	2011	1996	2001	2006	2011	1994	1999	2004	2009
<b>Amount:</b>	13.55	15.85	18.43	20.32	10.36	11.79	13.30	14.84	76.49	74.41	72.16	69.63	25	30	29	29

Figure 1: Agricultural and total population in Madagascar 1996- 2011 (Source: FAO)



Today, however, Malagasy farmers are again subject to another round of agricultural shocks including skyrocketing grain prices, a global demand for agrofuel production, and the unprecedented seizure of its most prized farmland by foreign multinationals and governments (Hall 2011). This global land grab for fuel, food, and conservation represents a pivotal moment of agrarian change, vaulting issues of national sovereignty, livelihood security, and environmental sustainability into the fore. As competing visions of land securitization take hold, significant questions remain regarding whether the land property law is an adequate alternative to protect rural Malagasy from dispossession of livelihood resources, especially under the recent wave of land acquisitions witnessed across the global south (Borras and Franco 2012; White and Dasgupta 2010). Moreover, the widespread confusion and lack of transparency of the implementation of these new laws have produced an environment where some institutional forces, such as the land administration, still remain dominant in land decision making, yet new players, such as local mayors and private firms, are also emerging as powerful political economic actors. How is access to land, labor, and productive resources defined in Madagascar’s agrofuel industry, and to whose benefit?

### 3 Access and control to productive resources in rural decentralized “grey zones”

Current scholarship focusing on land politics highlights the complexity of individual property claims and decentralization as mechanisms for rural development (Peluso and Lund 2011; Sikor and Lund 2009; Agrwal 2005). Unfortunately, policy prescriptions concerning *inclusionary* land rights are generally geared towards building institutions’ monetary and material resources without delivering the decision-making power over natural resources to rural stakeholders. Furthermore, within land reform policy, notions of “capacity-building” of tenure institutions and “formal” property rights get muddled within contradictory development discourse favoring foreign investment as the main mechanisms to stabilize livelihoods, create new markets, and protect environments. These notions,

however, are simplistic at best and severely contradictory at worst, missing the complexity of social relations and realities embedded within local contexts.

Scholars have been keen to point out that decentralization policies facilitated by international governance institutions are many times devoid of specific contexts of implementation localities (Ribot 1998; Berry 2009; Ribot and Larson 2005). Decentralization policies – defined by Ribot “as the devolution of central State assets or power to local or private decision making bodies...” (1999, 4) – stemmed from a post-independence development ideology (mainly natural resource management) which focused on participatory management, indigenous knowledge, and community welfare through the influence of market-driven approaches. States, which were observed as being corrupt, inefficient, and obfuscating of local management of resources, were rolled back in lieu of both civil society and local communities. The latter were held up as better means to improve capacity, efficiency, and create a pathway to equitable sustainable development. Yet, as case studies have shown, decentralization policy is not such an easy fix, as many community-based natural resource programs’ results are mixed (Dressler et al. 2010).

Property claims that derive from such policies must be viewed not as conceptual and abstract notions of formal rights, but part of the larger picture of customary and historical claims. Property is just one way that powerful actors are able to access and control benefits that derive from productive natural resources. Historically in Madagascar, tensions arise when those institutions and actors who control access and benefits that derive from natural resources are the same people who are charged with fully decentralizing use and access rights to local users (Neimark 2010). It is through such economic and political relationships that keep powerful institutions from fully devolving full property rights through decentralization (Ribot and Larson 2005). As Ribot notes, “...property is fetishized to the exclusion of inspecting the many other dynamics involved in the devolution of benefits to local communities” (2000, 136). In selective sites in Madagascar, weak decentralization policy characterized as having little community participation and little local decision-making power at times leaves rights remaining in the hands of more powerful state actors, business elites, and foreign investors to exercise their control over benefits (Ribot 2000; Dressler et al. 2010).

Building on the historical relationship of access and property, Sikor and Lund rightfully note that rights over resources rely also on authoritative (either social or politico-legal institutional), reciprocal, and at times conflicting claims. They term the space between peoples’ rights to resources and merely their access and the institutions that exercise power and authority over those resources operating within a “grey zone” (2009, 2). The different individual and organizational forms operate in the grey zone between what people might have rights over and access to, and mediated by customary authorities (Ribot 1998; Berry 2009), environmental organizations (Corson 2011), and scientific research institutions (Neimark 2012b). Nonetheless, outcomes are indeterminate and contingent upon power relations embedded in these institutions and negotiated thought resistance and possible alternative outcomes.

Yet, Sikor and Lund also designate a second “grey zone” in which one might have the authority over resources but lack the power to undermine certain claims. In their analysis about contested claims of land, they define property as “...legitimized claims, in the sense that the state or some other form of politico-legal authority sanctions them” (2009, 4). In attempts to secure rights to resources, they seek out legal recognition of property claims through some sort of authoritative institution. Inversely, through granting such rights, institutions gain legitimacy as recognizing authoritative claims. One may have formal rights to resources but not be able to access them as also one may access resources to which they do not have formal rights. Thus, access and property, and power and authority are two sets of relationships that must be characterized as key in the formation of governance claims at the local, regional, and international levels. I argue that in Madagascar

particularly, a grey zone is a powerful institutional space where the state and other non-state actors might make claims of decentralization while continuing to control access and use rights, in effect without the devolution of institutional state power to local resource users.

As contested claims over land become more apparent it is important to distinguish how various actors – international NGOs, the state, multinational corporations, foreign-run companies, regional elites, and local peasants – access resources through both formal (titles, deeds, contracts), customary, and informal or *extra-legal* (political pressure, bribery, coercion) means to derive benefits within the agrofuels economy (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Here, I specifically make the distinction between access and property in attempt to disaggregate the “bundles of power” that tend to crystalize within the different nodes of social and political relations.

As a spectrum of land tenure projects take hold, concomitantly in Madagascar many are still reeling from the effects of neoliberal economic policies and “peasant shocks,” such as unregulated FDI, agrarian land reform, and changes in resource access due to the creation of protected space for biodiversity conservation. These shocks have led to a mix of overlapping and contested access rights and social unrest in fertile agricultural zones and near resource-rich protected areas (Sodikoff 2007; Kull 2004). Büscher, building on Marx and Harvey, calls such dispossession a way to create an “enabling environment for capital accumulation” (2009, 91). My study demonstrates how as agrofuel firms look to penetrate more rural areas in order to seek out a cheap labor force, it is conflicting land reform policies alongside the retreat of foreign aid and lack of state services that compounds an already vulnerable rural population in Madagascar that is now observed as rather acquiescent to capital.

#### 4 Background: The political crisis creating the ‘enabling environment’ for accumulation

In March 2009, many in Madagascar woke to reports of armored tanks roving the quaint cobblestone streets of the capital city of Antananarivo. In the midst of the political crisis and manning the armored vehicles were dissent army troops who switched allegiances from President Marc Ravalomanana to the former mayor and radio disk jockey Andy Rajoelina. The standoff led to what many in the media were calling a “bloodless” *coup d’état* and effectively transferred power over to Rajoelina’s new High Transitional Authority (HAT). Yet, after the tanks returned to their depots and the crisis subsided, over one hundred lay dead and many more wounded along with extensive property damage.

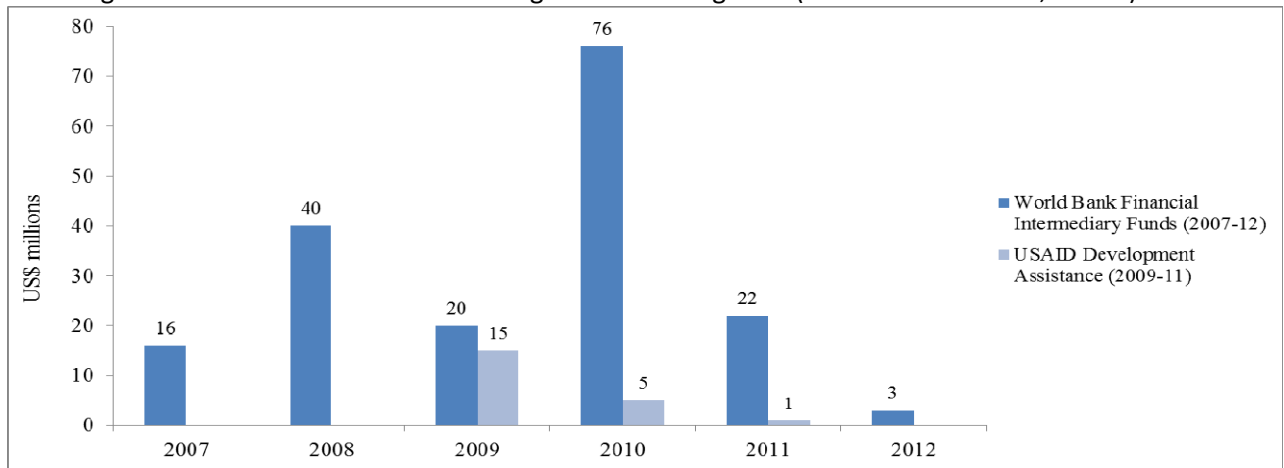
Although tension between the two politicians was mounting for over a year, the thrust of the crisis emanated from a wave of populist anger over a controversial land deal made public. The land deal in question was awarded to the South Korean transnational Daewoo Ltd. – a 99-year lease to convert over 1.3 million hectares of Madagascar’s most fertile agricultural land to export rice and palm oil for agrofuel production. Stories of the land lease were followed by reports of a second deal with an Indian company, Varun, for beef production on 460 thousand ha (this deal was subsequently canceled alongside Daewoo). In the interim, Rajoelina successfully mobilized waves of populist opposition by depicting Ravalomanana as “selling off” land to foreigners. Evidence of this rhetoric filled the airwaves:

*Madagascar's land is neither for sale nor for rent,' vowed Mr. Rajoelina, who promptly cancelled the deal...And as another reported, '[t]he [sold] land is sacred for the Malagasy people,' said Hajo Andrianainarivelo, the Land Reform Minister in the new military-backed*

*government. Even the country's national anthem sings of the need to protect 'the land of our ancestors...'"*<sup>7</sup>

The politically charged populism quickly abated to neopatrimonialism as Rajoelina took power, however.<sup>8</sup> Rajoelina's skill in luring in a diverse cohort of domestic support, including military and political leaders, fell short in the face of the international community who condemned the coup as undemocratic and unconstitutional. As Madagascar's biggest trading partners, France and the U.S. cut diplomatic relations; multilateral donors such as the World Bank and IMF canceled foreign aid commitments leaving the new government bankrupt and isolated (see Figure 2).<sup>9</sup>

Figure 2: World Bank and USAID Foreign Aid to Madagascar (Source: World Bank; USAID)



In response to the international censure, Rajoelina expanded his economic and political network to non-traditional trading partners, such as China, renewing contracts and making new deals for agricultural and industrial investment.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, to fill the aid vacuum, which is close to 40 percent of the country's budget, Rajoelina began to export valuable hardwoods (rosewood and ebony) and precious gems and minerals at alarming rates (Draper 2010; Schuurman and Lowery 2009). Paradoxically, foreign investment deals which led to the political crisis and ousting of the president were now being brokered to keep his own regime intact (see Figure 3).

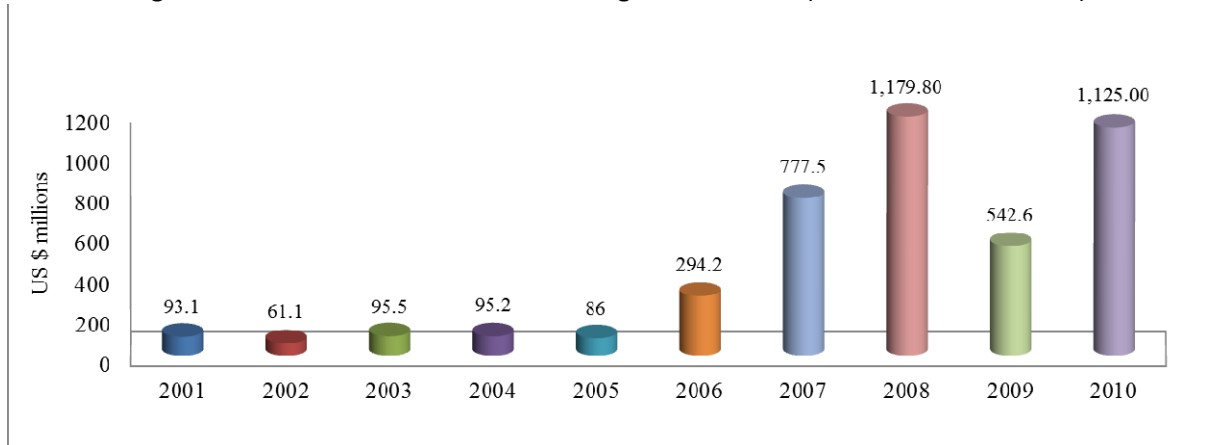
<sup>7</sup> York 2009.

<sup>8</sup> See Marcus and Ratsimbaharison (2005) for a detailed discussion of political populism in Madagascar.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank funding in 2010 represents a shift of funding towards a grant Madagascar received from the Financial Intermediary Funds (FIFs) for Global Funds to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria in 2010 for the sum of \$76,493,027, Accessed at: <http://go.worldbank.org/D41QD46W10> on: Dec 5, 2012.

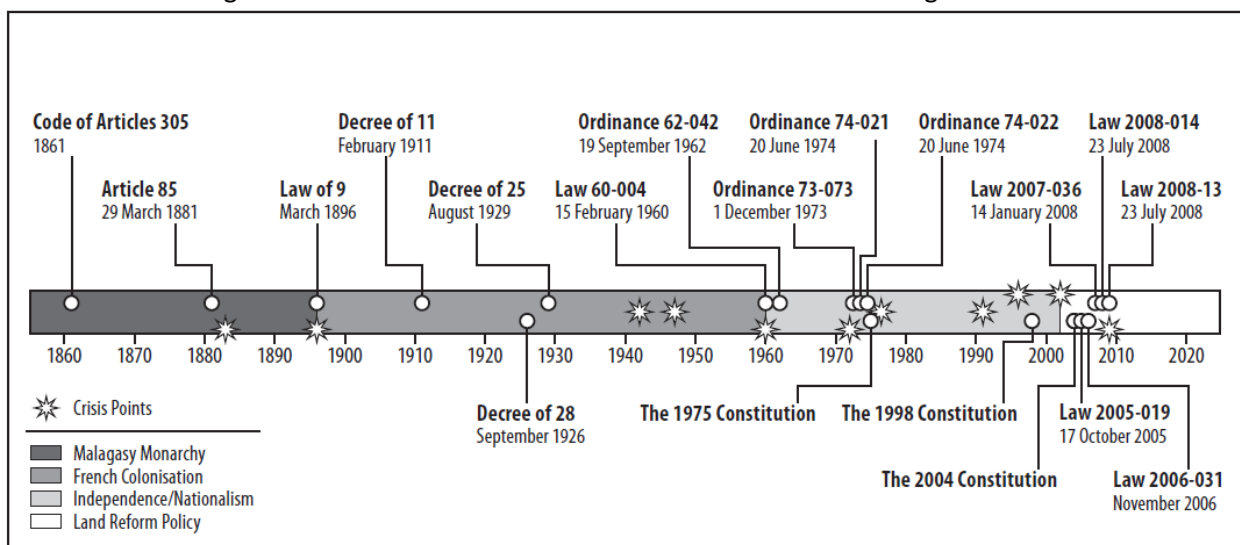
<sup>10</sup> One such deal includes the exporting of nickel cadmium.

Figure 3: Increase of FDI inflows to Madagascar 2001-10 (Soucre: UNCTAD 2011)



If anything, the rhetoric and social upheaval that predicated the political crisis places the centrality of land, in particular, tenure and property rights, on the front lines of the political spectrum. As James Scott notes, “[t]he gulf between land tenure facts on paper and facts on the ground is probably greatest at moments of social turmoil and revolt” (1989, 49). This is evident in the historical timeline of land reform where major land tenure policy changes attempting to provide formal property rights to local Malagasy are preceded by major civil, political, and economic crises (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Timeline of land tenure and tenure reform in Madagascar



Furthermore, many of these policies are to set in place corresponding laws to retain certain forms of centralized state control of land, thus rendering any reform useless (see clusters on the timeline above). These *grey zones* of quasi-legal and formal rights to access land filtering down from national institutions provide cover for an emerging group of powerful regional and local actors (made up of mainly mayors and local elites) to make decisions on land deals with little consent from rural peasants. These elites broker biofuel deals with foreign investment groups on land that may or may not be legally theirs to do so.

## 5 Madagascar land tenure in an era of FDI

Even before the 2009 political crisis, there has been a groundswell of initiatives by government agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors, and international NGOs that were put in place to address land tenure and property rights. Over the past decade, the World Bank has made significant investments in land reform promotion across Africa and Madagascar (Teyssier 2010; Lund 2009; Jacoby and Minten 2007). The largest U.S. bilateral project launched under the auspices of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) included a coupled \$109 million project for financial sector reform, land tenure, and agribusiness promotion.<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that 440 regional land offices have been opened in the past five years delivering over 71,000 land certificates resulting in over 58,500 ha now under local ownership (Burnod et al. 2011). Consequently, this outpouring of donor support for formalization of tenure in Madagascar paralleled a period of price spikes in grain and increasing demand for agrofuel crops, subsequently leading to a rush on premium farmland in the developing world (Borras and Franco 2012; Kugelman and Levenstein 2009). Given this current trend of large-scale land dealing by which such policies are embedded, many questions remain whether formal land tenure rights codified under large-scale investments and development projects are adequate to protect rural Malagasy from land seizure and forced evictions.<sup>12</sup> As noted by a new rural land holder:

*Before the political crisis, government changed legislation which made all land not titled automatically the property of the state, and made it easier for citizens to claim unoccupied land for agriculture or development, a reform that Rakotoarison described as 'a revolution.' However, the procedure for claiming land still involves a nightmare of red tape and the decentralization of decisions about land ownership to the communes is incomplete.<sup>13</sup>*

Preliminary research is currently addressing the effects of large-scale land acquisitions for agribusiness (Burnod et al. 2013; Andrianirina-Ratsialonana et al. 2011) and the role of development agencies in rural production systems (Neimark 2012a). This foundational work has begun to expose contradictions in government land laws and the tension that exists in policies promoting economic growth while also providing for local land rights as a way to ensure against displacement and land conflict. For instance, in Madagascar there exist two divergent land investment policies causing a significant amount of confusion in terms of land tenure. The first, Law 2007- 036, provides tax incentives to foreign investors accompanied with accessible fast-track land deals, while the second, the land reform and decentralization laws 2005- 019 and 2006-031, respectively, recognized customary claims to land and gives power to local mayors and safeguards protection of locals' land through the certification schemes (Burnod et al. 2011). However, these two divergent land investment policies are set up as oppositional forces causing confusion and mistrust in rural

---

<sup>11</sup> The Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC), or known in Madagascar as the MCA represents a 2002 President Bush initiative to deliver development assistance through financial reform, land tenure and agriculture business assistance. The MCC commitment signed in April 2005 and was entered into force in July 2005 and set to conclude on July 2010 after an additional year was subsequently added (Lucas 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Madagascar is not the only country subject to controversial large-scale land dealing. The extent of these land grabs should not be underestimated. For instance, a 2009 report by the IIED and FAO noted that 30 thousand hectares in Mozambique, 300-400 thousand hectares in Benin, and 400 thousand hectares in Tanzania have been allocated for grain and biofuel cultivation. The size of these plots is especially troubling since most rural inhabitants in sub-Saharan Africa occupy on average anywhere from 1-2 ha of subsistence farming (Kugelman and Levenstein 2009). From Madagascar to Mali, social anxiety and civil unrest surrounding land grabs has grown.

<sup>13</sup> IRIN News 2012.

landscapes (see Figure 4 for a history of land tenure projects in Madagascar). Evers et al. (2011) expresses that most rural inhabitants still do not fully understand the process of land reform and are unaware of the process of obtaining certificates, setting in motion a situation in which reform exists on paper and rural inhabitants can still potentially be removed or evicted without consent. This quasi-legal action demonstrates how land administrations are able to retain control of titling and long-term leases within rural areas and thus are unable or unwilling to devolve full rights to local institutions.

Such a large amount of land under different forms of tenure claims compounded with an increasing number of new claims through new land certification programs pushed by civil society groups and donors complicates the parallel push for new foreign investment, especially when much of this investment is agricultural and/or mining based. The investment law behind this push (2007-036) was originally driven by the Ravalomanana regime and the establishment of the Economic Development Board of Madagascar (EDBM). The EDBM was meant to fast-track foreign investment in the country. Investment increased 15-fold between the years of 2005-10 (Evers et al. 2011), and double the amount of Fortune 500 companies operating in the country (UNCTAD 2011). China's involvement in FDI in was meteoritic increase from US\$ 0.7 million 2005 to \$61.2 million in 2009. Although more than 80 percent of its FDI was in the mining sector, interest in particular types of agribusiness is also on the rise, namely speculation into agrofuels.

Two of the largest agrofuel projects, Daewoo Logistics and Varun, represented some of the larger initiatives started during this period with 1.3 million and 465,000 ha planned respectively for food and fuel crops.<sup>14</sup> The remaining smaller projects represent roughly 300,000 ha of arable land. Although somewhat smaller in overall size, this amount is still significant. First, throughout the country there is an estimated 2.5 million individual plots held by families representing roughly 2 million ha and second, the amount of total arable land is estimated at anywhere between 15 to 37 percent of total land.<sup>15</sup> Although the total amount of arable land is currently under dispute, with a small amount of arable land inhabited with millions of individual plots, any disruption to access land places a very vulnerable population in difficult circumstances in terms of food access and security.

## 6 Agrofuel capitalism in Madagascar

In the past 15 years, donor interest for agrofuels has remained fairly high coinciding with the promotion of public-private partnerships surrounding alternative fuel production as a method for sustainable development. Ruth Hall (2011) of the Future Agricultures Consortium notes that most recent large-scale investment schemes are driven by an increase in global grain prices and recent pressure on developed markets and emerging countries to stock up on staple foods. Furthermore, increasing global demands for alternative energy and land for carbon off-sets under REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), has subsequently fuelled a speculative market for agrofuel crops, as well as a push to buy up prime agricultural land – observed as a more stable investment compared to the insecure financial markets (Hall 2011; see also De Shutters 2010).<sup>16</sup> Such institutions involved in biofuel promotion at this time include the World Bank, USAID, and the European Commission. For a while, the World Bank, albeit cautiously, became an advocate for biofuel production in the global south (Deininger and Byerlee 2011). Emerging markets, such as

---

<sup>14</sup> The Daewoo deal was canceled in 2009 and the Varun deal shortly thereafter.

<sup>15</sup> Estimates range from about 15 to 20 million ha by the FAO and 8 million by the Ministry of Agriculture (Evers et al. 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Global demand for agrofuels in Africa has substantially increased since the declaration of the EU's target goals of committing 10 percent of fuel use from renewable sources by 2020.

China, India, and Brazil were also beginning to invest domestically and also seeking available investment opportunities in other developing countries (*Economist* 2012).

It was not until the first global food shocks in late 2007 when global skepticism begun to set in on the biofuel rush. Oxfam observed that during this period global food prices rose by more than 80 percent, pushing an estimated 100 million under the poverty line (Oxfam 2012). It was not just competition with food crops, but also reports of rainforest clearance in Indonesia for palm oil and Brazil for sugar cane and soy production (Butler 2006). Both the competition for food crops and the environmental consequences caused many in the alternative fuel industry to seek out new crops that did not compete with food and/or could decrease the environmental impact (Scharlemann and Laurance 2009). Some of those alternatives included second-generation biofuels, including cellulosic plants such as switch grass and *Jatropha* sp. – a low-lying shrub which grows on disturbed low-nutrient soils with low irrigation – which at the time seemed like a silver-bullet biofuel.

### 6.1 A summary of the biofuel/agrofuel industry in Madagascar

Agribusiness firms have been involved in Madagascar in many different levels of operation since colonialism. Yet, even after colonialism ended, there were still quite a number of small and medium sized French firms kept in place continuing operations with the newly installed independent government. In a more contemporary context, the majority of firms today range from medium to small companies and individuals with a variety of financing and production schemes. The first of these firms can be characterized as “start-up” agro-firms which have their own financing or are independently financed. The second type, are medium companies which rely in some way on private and/or public financing, with much of the latter coming in the form of development aid, social and economic programs, and also individual businessmen who are seeking to attract international funding. The last group is comprised of large agribusiness operators who are sometimes linked to multinationals companies operating in the country in either mining operations or other sizeable industrial sectors (Evers et al 2011). These multinationals are generally not coming to Madagascar to conduct agribusiness projects, but are involved in sizable mining or fishing operations and look to supplement earnings through subsidiary businesses.

The growth of agrofuel agribusiness in Madagascar began during the period of Ravalomanana, following a veer towards public and private initiatives as a new model of development. In the late 1990s, as the global interest in alternative fuels was on the rise, private agribusiness companies and development agencies entered into partnerships to promote agricultural programs in rural areas in conjunction with market-driven conservation initiatives (Freudenberger et al. 2011). For their part, the private sector received start-up funds from aid agencies to subsidize the heavy initial cost of materials, seeds, land, and labor. Development agencies saw agrofuels as a proverbial “win-win,” – economic rural development through an alternative to carbon-heavy fossil fuels addressing global climate concerns with private industry taking on much of the expenses, these schemes were another ‘silver-bullet’ strategy to combat poverty while saving the planet in the process.

A 2011 survey conducted by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) found roughly 56 projects for agrofuels either in preparation or in production, or in some sort of temporary suspension (WWF 2011). Each of these agrofuel projects produces agrodiesel, agroethanol, and/or biogas. Thirteen of the 18 ethanol companies are registered as Malagasy companies and three are foreign owned (3 company origins are not available). Foreign ownership is different in the diesel industry where only 3 of the 28 companies surveyed were Malagasy. This may have to do with market demands, whereas European firms are no more interested in diesel for *jatrophia* than ethanol (Andrianirina-Ratsialonana et al. 2011). What is important to understand about the agrofuel industry is that more than half of all the projects are in some state of suspended production or have been halted altogether (*ibid* 2011).



In terms of their overall size, projects announced range roughly from 880,000 to 1.1 million ha in scale (WWF 2011). However, out of this wide range, less than 60 thousand ha are under some level of active cultivation. For example, ethanol producers have roughly 330 thousand ha proposed, but only 225 thousand in preparation and less than 6 thousand in production. Yet, what is important to highlight here is that since the 2009 crisis, more than half of all the projects are in some state of suspended production or halted altogether. According to Evers et al. (2011), there are a number of reasons for the delay or suspended production. First, many producers do not know the state of land access, with many having to wait for the long drawn out process of getting official operation permits from regional and national authorities; with many of the national economic services, such as EBDM not functioning up to capacity since the crisis, there is a significant administrative backlog to receive the necessary environmental permits (Environmental Impact Statements) needed to begin production. Second, although it is not impossible to buy land, most firms are looking to obtain long-term leases from 50 to 99 years; with the political crisis, the land administration is slower than usual on dispersing these types of land contracts (*ibid* 2011). These leases, commonly known in Madagascar as *bail ernphyteotique*, provide assurance to the firms that they have security for long-term investments without having to go through the very arduous process of buying the land outright. On the surface, it seems that the main reason for this delay (or shutdown) is a mix of political uncertainty and global demand, as projects approved for biofuels have either collapsed entirely or are being reoriented towards other crops (a pattern now viewed across Africa).<sup>17</sup> One big reason for this shift may be attributed to the negative press biofuels have received through activist NGO networks and academia.

This backlash against biofuel production has not halted all projects in Madagascar, but rather has shifted the size and location of biofuel projects, with an increase of medium to small-scale biofuel operators setting up in areas that hold less commercial demand. Producers hold that they now can also provide income-generating work to a local labor force and deliver local social development along the way, with one producer claiming to deliver up to 500 jobs seasonally with a quick increase to 2000 in the near future within very rural areas of western Madagascar.<sup>18</sup>

According to the operators, rural inhabitants are quite welcoming of any chance of wage or seasonal labor opportunities; they are less concerned about who is delivering economic development, then how much and how quickly it can be delivered. As noted by a biofuel producer in the area:<sup>19</sup>

*While I agree there has been an increasing movement away from responsibility by the state... It's been placed upon the private sector; development is for anyone who is around and prepared to pay the bill.*

He continued describing the role of the private sector to deliver such aid:

*And most important of all, to actually help these peoples transform their lives. And that's what I can honestly say to you right now within the last 4 years, [the firm], and I'm very proud of it, we have saved many, many people's lives. People who would have died from starvation, through possible disease, through malaria, all of these are very fateful diseases when people are already very weak. And we're dealing with temperatures that can get up to 40 degrees in summer, in a plantation. Can you imagine, just close your eyes for a*

---

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Hall, personal communication 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous interview (July 7, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous interview (July 6, 2012).

*minute, you wake up in the morning and we are not there. You're living in a hut, not even a mud hut is what you've aspired to. These people are living under leaves, literally, that's it.*

Most involved in the projects also conclude that it is the speed that private sectors take to deliver aid that far exceeds that which public institutions, aid agencies, and even many large NGOs can. As one local Mayor noted, "The private sector is much more flexible, can make decisions at the local level, and allows for 'on the spot' decision making."<sup>20</sup> This flexibility to expand infrastructure and other decisions around production also opens the door for lack of transparency of their actions as many of their decisions do not filter too far from government administrators.

Delivering social and economic development to rural inhabitants eases access to areas where labor is accessible on a seasonal basis and sets up a scenario where local level resistance is ameliorated due to the power the firms now hold as their social mechanisms of access and power increases. However, it is not labor that is the main constraint; it is gaining and controlling access to land. For land policy specialists, reforms across the country have only opened up the possibility that what was once observed as "open" and fairly "accessible" plantation sites may become constrained by the new local certification procedures and regional land offices. However, once again agrofuel plantation owners' systems seem to be able to overcome issues of land in diverse ways, but it is not without its share of problems:

*I'm not interested in owning land in Madagascar. I'm interested in using the land to grow plants. That's what I'm doing, that's what I'm here for...Of course as soon as a devoted white man appears, with some money to invest, suddenly, you get a whole load of people suddenly showing up saying, "Oh, that's my land!" So where's the paperwork? Well, the paperwork of course, doesn't exist.<sup>21</sup>*

For many of the operators in Madagascar, the delivery of social services, such as health and education, and building of schools, roads, and much needed water is used as a conduit to access the resources needed. Another biofuel firm operator echoed this response talking about their new role as development agents:

*What do they ask for? They ask for many things. Everything! There is not enough of anything. They ask for us to build the school, because there is no roof, always infrastructure, such as a road, because the road every year is damaged. There are many, many, projects they need in the south. They see other projects and they want it. They are quite happy that we are bringing the UNDP with us. For the jatrophia project we are working with the EU, to plant and collect. Since the crisis, there is a lot less development aid around.*

However, in the north some rural Malagasy are not receiving this new attention equally. The uneven development of new FDI in the rural countryside may have to do with both the peasants' livelihood strategies and firms favoring one group as a labor force over the other. For example, in a case study of Medernach et al. (2011), Sakalava cattle herders set fire to Betsileo homes in attempts to drive the firm out and reclaim some of their pasture displaced by the plantations. The Betsileo and immigrant migrant workers not having to travel long distances to find work, the plantations provide a viable opportunity, even at a low wage. It was estimated that for the initial plots of jatrophia, the firm hired 160 seasonal jobs (for a 3 month time period). They work long arduous hours lasting 8

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous interview (July 7, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous interview (July 6, 2012).

hours per day at a wage of roughly 3,500 MGA per/day and many times work up to 6 days per week, which provides 91,000 MGA per month (*ibid* 2011). Most are hired as low-wage employees, whereas much of the mid-range managerial work is placed in the hands of trained experts poached from either former development agencies and/or business in the capital of Antananarivo.

Plus there are a number of environmental and geographic factors that add to the uneven development of agrofuel production. First, where locals are operating on insecure property rights, both collectors of oil seeds and growers will not adhere to any conditions of tenure rights and will harvest on others' property as well as state controlled land (such as forests). In plantations crops, claims and counter claims to land access used by the firm has been shown at times to be violent, as shown in the case study described above. Second, the social relations between firms and their workers differ in terms of land ownership. The ability to buy and sell land and secure land affects how firms will operate. In areas such as the deep south of Madagascar, where customary rights are strong, firms tend to use out-planting schemes, because they know they will not be able to procure land by buying it. In northern Madagascar, there is a history of land sales and purchases, and plantations and wage work is more frequent. In out planting, there are less centralized locations for the firm to implement its social development programs, whereas plantations have direct visibility and the firms' operations can be shown to be tied to the sustainable development mission of road, school construction, medical and educational support. And last, plantations must maintain administrative support from local governance institutions (Mayors, District heads) which can lead, on one hand, to accountability of the firm's actions to deliver on its promised commitments to communities and workers, but on the other hand, opens the door for firms to maintain close ties with officials, corruption and less accountability.

## 7 Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to provide key perspectives from agrofuel firm operators, plantation managers, and government administrators on social relations and emerging politics as the industry shifts production to more rural areas in Madagascar. In this article, I show how the effects of new land policies, prolonged insecure tenure, and absence of foreign aid open up new spaces for capital to penetrate the countryside, and demonstrate the mechanisms of access used by powerful actors to seek out spaces with accessible land and cheap labor. I argue that these dynamics aid in setting up an environment for private sector actors to enlist local communities' participation in economic and sustainable development as a way to quell resistance and ease access. In other words, agrofuel firms are delivering aid to overcome political and social obstacles and thus facilitate unfettered access over land and surplus labor.

In this paper I argued that many of these emerging political issues arise due to conflicting and contradictory land tenure reform policies in Madagascar. For some time now, the act of formalizing tenure rights has been the backbone of development. The benefits of land tenure are promoted by advocates as increasing private investment, accountability and transparency, a steady stream of tax revenues, and land value; reducing conflicts; improving social cohesion and gender equality; and promoting agricultural intensification and sustainable management of natural resources (Teyssier et al 2008). These policies in Madagascar have been heavily influenced by international multilateral and bilateral funders push for decentralization, while at the same time promoting large-scale land intensive FDI. Such variations at times counter the intended purpose of delivering effective property rights to local farmers and resource users and resulted in confusion and poorly delivered information concerning agrarian reform in rural areas. Moreover, given confusion over the full implementation of these new laws, some institutional forces, such as the land administration, are able to remain as the dominant authority decision maker concerning land and land deals under FDI. As Sikor and Lund (2009, 2) note, grey zones exist between formal property rights and access, whereas within it,

negotiations and struggles concerning property are found somewhere between legitimizing strategies of land administration institutions and localized access held by a multitude of interested actors, from rural peasants, regional elites, and agrofuel firms.

Moving forward drawing from a recent critique of agrofuel capitalism and state relations, Dauvergne and Neville concede that the negative trend of rural change due to agrofuel production must be observed through a network of “emerging political alliances” between political, economic, and social actors relying on “institutional structures of the state, timing and entry into the biofuel market, and on historical state-society relations” (2010, 632). Here, the state, which now holds the role of gatekeeper of natural resources, must take profound steps to not continue the usual patterns of centralized rent-seeking observed in previous agricultural and forestry sectors, but to fully undertake the regulatory oversight and control which is currently lacking and which will be in more demand as the agrofuel sector grows. As agrofuel firms move further to the hinterland, the selective participation of wage workers in the name of environmental sustainability and social sensibility is sanctioned by state elites and foreign multinationals in the guise of sustainable development aids in attempt to attract rural labor and quell social resistance. However, under this scenario of inclusion politics, these rural peasants now run the risk of absorbing the potential burdens of agrofuel production, including environmental degradation, exclusion from livelihood resources, and shocks from agrofuel price fluctuations and market distortions.

## References

1. Agrawal, A. 2005. *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
2. Andrianirina-Ratsialonana, R. and Ramarojohn, L., Burnod, P. and A. Teyssier 2011. “After Daewoo? Current status and perspective of large-land scale acquisitions in Madagascar,” Rome: *Observatoire du Foncier à Madagascar*, CIRAD, ILC.
3. Baird, I.G. 2011. “Turning land into capital, turning people into labour: Primitive accumulation and the arrival of large-scale economic land concessions in Laos.” *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* 5 (1): 10-26.
4. Berry, S. 2009. “Property, Authority and Citizenship: Land Claims, Politics and the Dynamics of Social Division in West Africa.” *Development and Change* 40 (1): 23–45.
5. Berry, S. 1993. *No Condition is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
6. Borras, S.M., and J.C., Franco 2012. “Global land grabbing and trajectories of agrarian change: a preliminary analysis.” *Journal of Agrarian Change* 12 (1): 34-59.
7. Borras, S.M., Hall, R., Scoones, I., White, B., and W., Wolford. 2011. “Towards a better understanding of global land grabbing: An editorial introduction.” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(2): 209-16.
8. Borras, S. M., McMichael, P., and I., Scoones 2010. “The politics of biofuels, land and agrarian change: Editors' introduction.” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37 (4): 575-92.
9. Broegaard, R.J. 2005. “Land tenure insecurity and inequality in Nicaragua.” *Development and Change* 36 (5): 845-64.
10. Bruce, J. W., and A. Knox. 2009. “Structures and stratagems: Making decentralization of authority over land in Africa cost effective.” *World Development* 37 (8): 1360–69.
11. Büscher, B. 2009. “Letters of gold: Enabling primitive accumulation through neoliberal conservation.” *Human Geography* 2 (3): 91–94.
12. Burnod, P., Gingembre, M., R. Andrianirina Ratsialonana 2013. “Competition over authority and access: International land deals in Madagascar,” *Development and Change* 44 (2): 357–79.

13. Burnod, P., Andrianirina, N., Boue, C., Gubert, F., Rakoto-Tiana, N., Vaillant, J., Rabeantoandro, R. and R. Ratovoarinony 2012. "Land reform and certification in Madagascar: Does perception of tenure security matter and change?" Paper presented at the Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty, World Bank, Washington DC.
14. Butler 2006. Why is oil palm replacing tropical rainforests? Why are biofuels fueling deforestation? Accessed on: April 25, 2006 at: [http://news.mongabay.com/2006/0425-oil\\_palm.html#2f6Z4haX3mF8Hved.99](http://news.mongabay.com/2006/0425-oil_palm.html#2f6Z4haX3mF8Hved.99).
15. Corson, C. 2011. "Territorialization, enclosure and neoliberalism: Non-state influence in struggles over Madagascar's forests." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38 (4): 703-726.
16. De Angelis, M. 2001. "Marx and primitive accumulation: The continuous character of capital's enclosures." *The Commoner*, 2. Available from: <http://www.commoner.org.uk/02deangelis.pdf>.
17. Dauvergne, P. and K. J. Neville 2010. "Forests, food, and fuel in the tropics: The uneven social and ecological consequences of the emerging political economy of biofuels." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 37(4): 631- 60.
18. Deininger, K. and D. Byerlee 2011. *Rising global interest in farmland: Can it yield sustainable and equitable benefits?* The World Bank: Washington DC.
19. Deininger, K. and S. Jin 2007. "Securing property rights in transition: Lessons from implementation of China's rural land contracting law." *Policy Research Working Paper Series* 4447, World Bank: Washington DC.
20. Deltombe, March 2012, Les fantômes de Madagascar: La France, acteur-clé de la crise malgache, Accessed on July 20, 2012 at: <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2012/03/DELTOMBE/47470>.
21. Draper, R. 2010. Madagascar Pierced Heart. *National Geographic* 218 (3): 80-109.
22. De Schutter, O. 2011. "How not to think of land-grabbing: Three critiques of large-scale investments in farmland." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38 (2): 249-79.
23. Dressler, W., Büscher, B., Schoon, M., Brockington, D. Hayes, T. Kull, C., McCarthy, J. and Streshta, K. 2010. "From Hope to Crisis and Back? A Critical History of the Global CBNRM Narrative." *Environmental Conservation* 37(1):1-11.
24. *Economist* 2012. "A new Atlantic alliance: Brazilian companies are heading for Africa, laden with capital and expertise." Nov 10th 2012, Print Edition.
25. Evers, S.J. Burnod, P., Andrianirina-Ratsialonana, R. and A. Teyssier 2011. "Foreign land acquisitions in Madagascar: Competing jurisdictions of access claims." In: T. Dietz, K. Havnevik, M. Kagg and T. Oestigaard (eds.) *African engagements: Africa negotiating an emerging multi-polar world*. Brill AEGIS Book Series: Leiden-Boston.
26. Fairhead, J., Leach, M., and I., Scoones (eds.) 2012. "Green grabbing: A new appropriation of nature?" *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39 (2): 237-62.
27. FAOSTAT, 2012. Country profiles: Madagascar, Accessed on September 15, 2012 at: <http://faostat3.fao.org/home/index.html>.
28. Gibbon, P. 1992. "A Failed Agenda? African Agriculture under Structural Adjustment, With Special Reference to Kenya and Ghana." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 20 (1): 50-96.
29. GRAIN 2013. Against the grain: Land grabbing for biofuels must stop, February 21. Accessed on March 22, 2013, at: <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4653-land-grabbing-for-biofuels-must-stop>.
30. Hall, D., Hirsch P., and T. M. Li. 2011. *Powers of Exclusion: Land Dilemmas in Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
31. Hall R. 2011 2011, "Land Grabbing in Africa and the politics of Food." *Policy Brief* 041, June. Accessed at: [www.future-agricultures.org](http://www.future-agricultures.org) on February 14, 2011.

32. Harvey, D. 2006. *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*. Verso, London.
33. IRIN News 2012. "Madagascar: Small steps towards land reform." *IRIN News*, 13 April. Accessed on May 13, 2012, at: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/95283/MADAGASCAR-Small-steps-towards-land-reform>.
34. Jacoby H. G. and B. Minten, 2007. "Is land titling in Sub-Saharan Africa cost-effective? Evidence from Madagascar." *World Bank Economic Review* 21(3): 461-85.
35. Jarosz, L. 1993. "Defining and explaining tropical deforestation: Shifting cultivation and population growth in colonial Madagascar (1896-1940)." *Economic Geography* 69 (4): 366-79.
36. Kelly, A. 2011. "Conservation practice as primitive accumulation." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(4): 683-701.
37. Kleinbooi, K. 2011. "Madagascar," In: R., De Satgé, K., Kleinbooi and C. Tanner (eds.), *Decentralised Land Governance : Case Studies and Local Voices from Botswana, Madagascar and Mozambique*, Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, Pp. 48-82.
38. Knaup H. 2008. *Africa becoming a biofuel battleground*, Accessed online on November 15, 2009 at: [http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/sep2008/gb2008098\\_506787.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/sep2008/gb2008098_506787.htm)
39. Kugelman M. and S. Levenstein (eds.) 2009. *Land grab: The race for the world's farmland*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Washington, DC.
40. Kull 2004. *Isle of fire: The political ecology of landscape burning in Madagascar*: Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
41. Li, T. 2011. "Centering labor in the land grab debate." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 37 (2) 281-98.
42. Li, T. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
43. Lucus, S. 2006. "Madagascar field report- MCA monitor", Center for Global Development, Washington, DC.
44. Lund, C. 2006. "Twilight institutions: Public authority and local politics in Africa." *Development and Change* 37 (4): 685-705.
45. Mann, S.A. and J.M. Dickinson 1978. "Obstacles to the development of a capitalist agriculture." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 5(4): 466-481.
46. Marcus, R. R., and A. M. Ratsimbaharison 2005. "Political parties in Madagascar: Neopatrimonial tools or democratic instruments?" *Party Politics* 11 (4):495-512.
47. McCarthy, J., Vel, J.A.C., and S. Afiff 2012. "Trajectories of land acquisition and enclosure: development schemes, virtual land grabs, and green acquisitions in Indonesia's Outer Islands," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(2): 521-49.
48. McConnell, W. 2002. "Misconstrued Land Use in Vohibazaha: Participatory Planning in the Periphery of Madagascar's Mantadia National Park." *Land Use Policy* 19 (3): 217-230.
49. McMichael, P. D. 2010. "Agrofuels in the food regime." *Journal of Peasant Studies*. 37 (4):609-629.
50. McMichael, P. D. 2009. "A food regime genealogy." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36(1):139-169.
51. Medernach, K. Burnod, P. and H. Rakotomalala, H. 2011. *Large scale foreign land acquisitions: what interactions, opportunities and risks for different local farming systems? A case-study in Madagascar*. Thesis Report with the Malagasy Land Observatory, Antananarivo, and ISTOM, Paris.
52. Mitchell, T. 2002. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press.

53. Moyo, D. 2010. *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux- Macmillan, New York.
54. Neimark, B. 2012a "Green grabbing at the 'pharm' gate: overcoming the barriers of rosy periwinkle production in southern Madagascar." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39 (2): 423-45.
55. Neimark, B. 2012b "Industrializing nature, knowledge, and labour: The political economy of bioprospecting in Madagascar." *Geoforum* 43 (5): 580-90.
56. Neimark, B. 2010 "Subverting regulatory protection of 'natural commodities:' The Prunus Africana in Madagascar." *Development and Change* 41(5): 929-954.
57. Oxfam 2012, *The Hunger Grains*, Briefing paper No. #161. Oxfam International, Oxford, UK.
58. Peluso, N.L. and C. Lund. 2011. "New frontiers of land control: Introduction." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(4): 667-81.
59. Ribot, J.C. 2000. "Forest Rebellion and Local Authority in Makacoulibantang, Eastern Senegal," In C. Zerner (ed.) *People, Plants and Justice: The Politics of Nature Conservation*, New York: Columbia University Press. pp. 134-58.
60. Ribot, J.C. 1999. "Decentralization and participation in Sahelian Forestry: Legal instruments of central political-administrative control." *Africa* 69 (1): 23-65.
61. Ribot, J. C. 1998. "Theorizing access: Forest profits along Senegal's charcoal commodity chain." *Development and Change* 29 (2): 307-341.
62. Ribot, J.C. and A. Larson (eds.). 2005. *Decentralization through a Natural Resource Lens: Experience in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. London: Frank Cass.
63. Ribot, J.C. and N.L. Peluso. 2003. "A theory of access." *Rural Sociology* 68(2): 153-181.
64. Scharlemann, J.P.W. and W. F. Laurance "How green are biofuels?" *Science* 319(5859): 43-4.
65. Schuurman, D. and P. P. Lowry II. 2009. "The Madagascar rosewood massacre." *Madagascar Conservation and Development* 4: 98-102
66. Scott, J., *Seeing Like a State*. New Haven CT, Yale University Press: Routledge.
67. Seagle, C. 2012. "Inverting the impacts: mining, conservation and sustainability claims near the Rio Tinto/QMM ilmenite mine in Fort Dauphin, Southeast Madagascar." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(2): 447-77.
68. Shiva, V. 2008. *Soil not Oil: Climate Change, Peak Oil and Food Security*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
69. Sikor, T. and C. Lund. 2009. "Access and property: a question of power and authority." *Development and Change* 40 (1): 1-22.
70. Sodikoff, G. 2007. "An exceptional strike: a micro-history of 'people versus park' in Madagascar." *Journal of Political Ecology* 14:10-33.
71. Sodikoff, G. 2005. "Forced and forest labor in colonial Madagascar, 1926-36." *Ethnohistory* 52 (2): 407-435.
72. White, B. and A. Dasgupta. 2010. "Agrofuels capitalism: a view from political economy." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 37 (4): 593-607.
73. Teyssier, A. 2010. "Decentralizing land management, the experience of Madagascar." *Perspective* no. 4. CIRAD: France.
74. Teyssier, A. and R. Andrianirina-Ratsialonana 2010. "Large-scale agricultural investments in Madagascar: Lessons for more "inclusive" models," In: L. Cotula and R. Leonard (eds.), *Agricultural investment and collaborative business models, Highlights from an international lesson - sharing workshop - Maputo, 17th - 18th March*.
75. Teyssier, A., Andrianirina- Ratsialonana, R., Razafindralambo, R. and Y. Razafindrakoto 2008. "Decentralization of land management in Madagascar: Process, innovations, and

observation of the first outcomes.” Paper presented at the *Annual World Bank Conference on Land Administration*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

76. UNCTAD, 2011. *Foreign Direct Investment in LDCs: Lessons Learned from the Decade 2001–2010 and the Way Forward*. New York and Geneva: United Nations.
77. Freudenberger, M., Bruce, J., Mawalma, B., De Wit, P. and K. Boudreaux 2011. “The future of customary tenure, options for policy makers,” *Property Rights and Resource Governance Briefing Paper # 8*. USAID: Washington DC. Accessed on August 2012 at: <http://usaidlandtenure.net>
78. York, Geoffrey, 2009 “Land: Africa's last great treasure,” *The Globe and Mail*, Accessed on Nov 6, 2009 at: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/LAC.20090506.MADAGASCAR06ART2246/TPStory/International/?pageRequested=all>.
79. White, B., Borras, J., Hall, R., Scoones, I., and W., Wolford 2012. “The new enclosures: Critical perspectives on corporate land deals.” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(3-4): 619-47.
80. World Bank Country Brief, 2011, Accessed at: <http://go.worldbank.org/D41QD46W10> on November 2, 2011.
81. WWF, 2011. *Premiere Phase de L'étude Strategique du Development du Sector Agrocarburant a Madagascar?* Plateforme Agrocarburant Durable (PAD), Antananarivo, Madagascar.



## LDPI Working Paper Series

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 see unfolding worldwide a dramatic rise in the extent of cross-border, transnational corporation-driven and, in some cases, foreign government-driven, large-scale land deals. 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.

The Land Deal Politics Initiative launched in 2010 as an 'engaged research' initiative, taking the side of the rural poor, but based on solid evidence and detailed, field-based research. The LDPI promotes in-depth and systematic enquiry to inform deeper, meaningful and productive debates about the global trends and local manifestations. The LDPI aims 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, the LDPI uses 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 created? Two additional key questions highlight 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?' The LDPI network explores a range of big picture questions through detailed in-depth case studies in several sites globally, focusing on the politics of land deals.

### **The land of our ancestors: Property rights, social resistance, and alternatives to land grabbing in Madagascar**

This study focuses on a well-known biofuel battleground in Madagascar, highlighting the first case of successful social resistance against contemporary land grabs. Given recent critique of biofuels, producers have begun to shift away from large-scale commercial acquisitions and towards smaller integrated production alongside social and economic development. Parallel to this new wave of agrofuel capitalism, there is a push to secure tenure and stimulate agricultural investment in land and markets, and while foreign aid projects are beginning to address land rights in Madagascar, most of its agricultural zones remain under extremely complex tenure systems of overlapping state and customary claims. As competing visions of land securitization take hold, significant questions remain regarding whether new laws are an adequate alternative for protecting rural Malagasy from dispossession of livelihood resources under agrofuel capitalism. I demonstrate how new land reforms have helped to create an environment of confusion and mistrust around land reform and have facilitated access to land and labor through the fracture of tenuous social relations and promotion of rural differentiation.



landpolitics@gmail.com

www.iss.nl/ldpi