

Campaign: Stop international land grabs (Oxfam)

Response

January 2013

Thank you for your recent correspondence on the subject of international land grabs.

The UK Government welcomes Oxfam's campaign on governance and transparency of land acquisitions, which raises a number of important issues. The UK Government recognises that competing pressures on land for food and fuel risk impacting adversely on food security of the poorest. We believe that private sector investment in poor countries, and the growth of small and large commercial agriculture, are key to achieving global food security and economic growth in Africa. When done well, commercial investments in agriculture have the potential to be transformational, but it is vital that the rights and interests of the people living on the land are taken into account.

The importance of responsible investment of course extends to World Bank supported investments. But the UK government does not agree that a six-month freeze on agricultural lending by the World Bank, as proposed by Oxfam, is necessary or desirable. The UK Government is already actively engaged in discussions with the World Bank on the policies and procedures underlying the Bank's investments and supports the World Bank's current efforts to promote responsible agriculture investments, which involve land acquisitions.

The UK welcomes the successful negotiation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, concluded at the Committee on World Food Security in May 2012. The UK will push for the implementation of guidelines to help share best practice, and shape land laws, policies and programmes. The UK also welcomes the development of the Principles on Responsible Agricultural Investment and the on-going consultation process under the Committee on World Food Security.

This is an important year for the UK as we will host the G8 meeting. The Prime Minister has announced that the G8 Summit will focus on the golden thread of open economies, open governments and open societies to help advance trade, ensure tax compliance, and promote greater transparency and accountability. This should prove an important opportunity for the UK to get international engagement on these issues.

UK Aid is supporting efforts to secure land rights for individuals, businesses and communities in at least 8 countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa and through investments in key multilateral organisations. Our commitment is approximately £100m over this spending review period for programmes that improve land and property rights. Examples of on-going projects include supporting rural communities in Mozambique to register their land and helping at least 4 million landholders obtain formal titles in Rwanda. The International Fund for Agricultural Development, to

which DFID provides core funding, supports poor people to secure their land rights in about 45 countries.

I hope that this letter has been a helpful update on this important issue.

Best wishes,

Justine Greening
Secretary of State