



# **Emerging Land Issues in African Agriculture: Implications for Food Security and Poverty Reduction Strategies**

## **Q & A Transcript**

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*Female:* Thank you so much, Tom and Karol, for moving briskly through your presentations. To everyone here today, a PDF of these presentations will be up on Agrilinks this afternoon, so if you couldn't quite grab anything or would like to review it, we'll let you know - we'll also send you an e-mail with the post-event products, including the recording of this webinar. So, we will open the floor to questions. We'll take them from both online and in person, and please state your name and organization.

*Audience:* I'm Erik Streed from USAID Forestry Team. There was an allusion there, or you both alluded to the fact that the demand for arable land is rising up prices, and you look at land in the Midwest of the United States, which has gone up 500 percent in the last 15 years or something. What is the net view at this point in the research about is this demand for increased rising prices of land a good thing or a bad thing, because on the positive side, these people that only have a hectare or a quarter hectare, they can sell their land to others and have enough money to move to the cities, and so forth. On the negative side then, poor people can't buy land, and so on and so forth. So, what is the overall opinion on what this trend is going to do?

*Female:* I may just very quickly jump in because it gives me an opportunity to say something I didn't have a chance to say clearly during the presentation, and that is that smallholders oftentimes can't sell their land and move on. In areas where customary norms prevail, sale is the one stick you don't have in your bundle of property rights, and so this is part of the challenge of rising prices should lead to particular actions, and those particular actions should be transfer the land to someone who values it more highly than you do, but that's not an option legally in most sub-Saharan African countries. So, it would be important to empower smallholders and communities to make transfers like that if they voluntarily choose to make those transfers.

*[Side Conversation]*

*Male:* That's a great question, and there are so many income distributional changes that occur from the fact that land prices are rising. Okay, this is ultimately responding to increased demand for food, so the demand for land is really following that. If we can achieve greater food production through yield growth and productivity growth on existing farms, then the stress of the demand for land being manifested in mowing down forests, converting grassland into agriculture and kind of the environmental impacts that occur from that, then I think most analysts believe that that's the way to go. So, I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing that the demand for farmland is rising and that prices are rising. It's good for some people who are going to benefit from that, and

then it has other effects that are going to affect all of us, especially if that demand for farmland ends up encroaching on forestland, and so forth, that's kind of keeping our global environmental system intact. So, I guess that's my initial cut at it.

*Female:* We have a question from online.

*Male:* Yes, this question is from Jerry Wolgin with USAID. He has two questions directed at Tom Jayne. One, "Do we actually know how to increase productivity of the bottom 40 to 60 percent of smallholders?" and two, "Does contract farming work for the smallholders?"

*Male:* Okay. Hi, Jerry. Okay. Yes, I think we know how to improve productivity for the bottom – I don't know where he is – the bottom 40 percent of farmers. This question about input subsidies, well input subsidies are certainly going to be in the picture for a while to come. That's just a political reality. But if they could be targeted more effectively to that bottom 40 to 60 percent, then it would not only have agricultural productivity, aggregate productivity growth impacts, but it would do so in a way that would reduce poverty where poverty is concentrated. So, I think the answer to Jerry's question is reallocating public resources in a way that's more targeted towards where poverty is concentrated. There's no magic bullet. It's just a reallocation of existing funds, and having policies that are pro-poor rather than policies that really are kind of focused on how to deal with allocating land to larger farmers.

There really is an elite capture problem, the political economy problem that's plaguing many of this development challenge, and it's going to be a very tough one to deal with. I really like the slant that you gave to this, that really talks about kind of the legal dimensions of how to develop a more pro-poor development strategy in protecting land rights, and so forth. So, that also needs to be a big part of it, but the part that worries me so much is the political capture of how public expenditures are allocated. It worries me in this country, as well. It's not just unique to Africa. But if there could be a more – a distribution of public funds that would be supportive of poor, rural households, I think that that would be an effective response to Jerry's question, how to reach the bottom 40 percent.

*Audience:* I'm \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_, and visiting at IFPRI. Thank you so much for all your presentation. I would like to go back to the diagnosis that we currently use in our presentation, and at the beginning, we often say that a lot of land is under-cultivated, and I think maybe we can think again about the way we have to describe the land use in some land as Africa, because what we saw

in Madagascar \_\_\_\_\_ Madagascar following the \_\_\_\_\_ affair in 2009, sometimes you have \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ 92 percent of land is free, and yeah, you can go. I think it could be legitimate the long-grabbing strategies, and what we saw is \_\_\_\_\_ and some information that we built with people, actually it was 15 percent of land that was available. I think that may be one way to protect and to slow down long-grabbing strategy, is to think again, to think about new methods to actually measure the real land that is available for agriculture, because we used to see that with our western tools and methods that is \_\_\_\_\_ what we see from the plane or from the picture. I think it could be completely different if we figure out some \_\_\_\_\_ to make sure there is real land available. Thank you.

*Female:* Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I mean just because we don't see people down on the land plowing a field doesn't mean that there aren't a whole set of use rights to that property, so you could have pastoralists moving through an area and you don't see them at a given time. You could have rights to collect forest products and you don't necessarily see that, and so investors and governments may think land is unused, but as Tom said earlier, in most places there are claims, some kind of claim over virtually all the land.

*Male:* Yeah, even in Zambia, which has so much, apparently, unutilized land, if you were to start using that and doing something with it, very quickly somebody would be tapping you on the shoulder saying, "Hey, this is allocated."

*Female:* We have another online question.

*Male:* Yeah, we have an online question from one of our 94 online participants. This is a question for Karol. \_\_\_\_\_ in Ethiopia comments, "Customary systems are good but sometimes not as inclusive in terms of gender. How do you see it, and how do you address that situation?"

*Female:* Yeah, I mean that's exactly right, customary systems represent a kind of evolved solution for dealing with particular problems. I always think about customary legal systems like the common law, the Anglo Saxon common law. It's the African version of common law. It's a common law, though, that doesn't, at the moment, provide a lot of strong protection for women's rights. So, yeah, I think there are needs to engage with customary dispute resolvers, customary authorities in order to help them to understand the role that women and girls play in communities, and the importance of providing strong protections to the property rights of women and girls for the benefit of everybody, not so that women and girls succeed and flourish at the expense of men and boys, but rather so that the community as a whole is able to grow so that you create a bigger pie rather than a smaller pie. So, we actually work in Kenya, for example,

with customary authorities to try to go through this exact process with them, engage in community conversations around the roles women play, and the kinds of contributions women make on a daily basis to the community.

As a result of these community conversations, customary leaders near Nakuru have created new constitutions for their communities that provide more robust protections for women in the communities. They are thinking about whether it might be possible to have women become elders in the communities, and one of the exciting developments for the land tenure office over the last month has been these new constitutions were just publicly read and announced at a justice day in Kenya. So, that's a kind of remarkable social change, if you want to think about it that way, that has come from just discussing and sort of shining a light on what it is that women contribute to the community, and how empowering women and giving them opportunities to use their resources benefits everybody.

*Audience:* My name is Bill Feebick. I'm a retired – just retired.

*[Laughter]*

Have lived and worked in Africa for 35-plus years. I would just caution expectations of messing with traditional land tenure systems. I started, after the Peace Corps in the '70s, a fish and cattle farm that I still manage that my grandmother – my wife is Congolese, kids were born there – she said, " \_\_\_\_\_, you can have from that tree to that tree." You know, that's part of her traditional landholdings, and they have structures at community and at other levels to deal with land tenure issues. I do not believe that African governments will ever have the capability of really managing a legal system for management of and selling land, and what not. So, that's why I came down here today. I was just interested \_\_\_\_\_, but I'm a firm believer in the traditional structure of land management, land tenure. They know how to do it. They've been doing it for decades, if not centuries. That's my comment.

*Male:* Yeah. Well, I largely agree with you, if I can jump in there, but I think the policy question that we all have to be dealing with is how to persuade the state. I mean they do have the power to mow right over it, and, in many cases, they are mowing right over the – you know, they're taking over. So, I think the development policy challenge is how to make the case that, in the long run, even they, the governments, are not going to benefit from that kind of decision making in the long run. It's a very seductive thing. It seems to me that in the 1990s, the way governments would stay in power were to dole out input subsidies, and do things that one votes through providing benefits through input

subsidies and for marketing board activities. But now, they've discovered that it's really effective to use land, and get control of land and allocate land out \_\_\_\_\_ patronage activity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Female:*

Yeah, I mean I would just say I think Bill is right. We need to be very careful messing with evolved systems that have evolved for particular reasons, and so, oftentimes, what we're doing is thinking about how can you formalize what exists on the ground, maybe give it nudges, if you familiar with the – you know, maybe nudge a bit here and there, especially around the gender issues, but formalize what is and not try to do a wholesale change of what exists on the ground, because that's not a good path to success.

*Audience:*

I just want to make one more comment on your opening statements about flying over and seeing so much – the last time I went out to visit my farm and everything, I couldn't believe the number of villages that were, if not vacant, really under – you know, people had left, and I think urban agriculture is – you know, folks are moving into urban areas, and that's why you see so much land available. I mean I think that's going to become the bigger topic down the road, is how do we deal with – FAO says in 2050, 60 percent of the world is going to live in urban areas. That just means all that land is out there.

*Male:*

Okay, as I said before, I agree. As I said before, the rate of migration from rural areas to urban areas is something, again, that public policy can influence. There's a story I'd like to tell about something that I think actually Robert Mugabe did quite effectively.

*[Laughter]*

There may be one or two things that we can say something good about him. In the early 1980s, after he took over, and this actually was started before him, but he helped follow through on eradicating tsetse fly in this Zimbabwe, the Gokwe area was what it was called. It was a very fertile area, but no one lived in that area because of tsetse fly, and so after that tsetse fly was eradicated, he laid down the infrastructure, the road development, sunk the boreholes, built schools, health facilities, and all of the population from southern Zimbabwe that was overcrowded on degraded soils, much of that population migrated into this new area, and within five years or so, it became the center of the white gold rush, which was the cotton boon in Zimbabwe, a very, very productive smallholder-led system.

I would like to think that that model could be replicated in many places in the region. You rightly said it's not just a problem of infrastructure, it's laying down

the legal foundation, so I totally agree with that, but trying to find areas where this kind of model could be replicated as a way of not just stemming the tide of migration off the farm into urban areas, but to make it attractive for people to migrate into and settle fertile areas that have been underdeveloped up until now. I think that model has merit in it that we need to deal with.

*Female:* We'll jump back to our online audience.

*Male:* Yes. We have a question from \_\_\_\_\_ from the technical center for Ag and Rural Cooperation in the Netherlands. She's directing this one at Tom Jayne. "How is the shift to bio fuels affecting land in Africa?"

*Male:* Okay. There's controversy about that. I think the latest U.S. government position I've heard on that is that it's not much, but I've heard and seen other reports that have shown that bio fuels has increased the demand for food greatly, and I'm inclined to go along with that second position, although I'm not an analyst who's looking at that question. But the studies that have been done show a ranger of impacts of the effect of bio fuels on world food prices with I think the majority of them indicating that there is a significant upward pressure on world food prices because of bio fuels. So, you can kind of crank through what that does. It relates to the first question about increasing the price of farmland, increasing the demand for farmland, increasing the incentives to expand land into forest areas with environmental impacts, and so forth. So, when you kind of think holistically about the impact of bio fuels, there are adverse environmental effects that we have to think about, as well as the often cited, positive ones, too. I hope that answers \_\_\_\_\_.

*Audience:* Good morning. My name is Marcie, and I'm from the Food for the Hungry. I just wanted to ask a question about the new alliance that was announced a couple weeks ago. I know there's a list of some very prominent companies that are going to be supposedly helping food security, and who are already working in the area of food and agriculture. Now, my question is given the whole discussion around land and rights to land in Africa and other regions of the world, where poor people may or may not have access to the land that they are living on and working on, I just wanted to know, and I don't know if you can answer this question, but is there going to be a mechanism or a way in which these countries, who are supposed to be a part of this partnership – or, sorry, not the countries, the companies, rather, who are parts of these partnerships cannot add to the problem of land grabs or any other land issues. Is there going to be some way to provide oversights and what have you, or what do you think their influence will be in the issue of land grabs in Africa?

*Male:* Go –

*Female:* Shall I?

*Male:* – ahead.

*Female:* Okay. Thank you very much for that question. Yes, I think that companies that have made pledges to be involved in the new alliance effort are companies that are wanting to invest very responsibly, and the U.S. government is working with those companies to ensure that investments won't impose harms on people on the ground. I mean part of the new alliance effort may involve something like an experiment to implement the voluntary guidelines on the ground, and the voluntary guidelines place obligations upon non-public sector actors, so private sector investors, as well as host governments, and so sure.

I mean the sort of guidance that we would hope we can provide to companies is to be mindful about the very complicated legal environment, customary and formal legal environment on the ground in these countries, be very mindful of the kinds of rights that communities have, and be aware that it can be relatively easy inadvertently to engage in policies or actions that harm some of the rights, and so no. I mean efforts will be taken to ensure that what companies do on the ground will be in compliance with the kinds of obligations and the kinds of policies that the voluntary guidelines and other safeguards have already provided. The whole point of the effort is to be working in union with countries and communities, not to be working against the communities on the ground.

*Male:* I'm still trying to understand the details of the program, but I think the questions that you ask are very relevant questions, and the one thing that worries me a little bit, I'm not saying that it hasn't been addressed in the program design but I think it's worth asking this question, when you support particular firms to get into a sector to do certain work, does it crowd out other private firms who are not supported? So, in other words, does it provide an unlevel playing field that actually could adversely affect competition in that particular area? I think that's something that maybe it's been addressed already, but that worries me.

*Female:* We have one last online question.

*Male:* This question comes from John Burtell. His question is, "Is it an assumption that if we move towards privatizing land rights that those assets would be used more effectively or efficiently?" He says, "I would think that land use at that point would go to those with deep pockets, and then possibly move towards idleness or land scale-ups, not necessarily taking into consideration the environment, social concerns, et cetera. How does the current discussion and policy formation take into consideration these other effects?"

*Female:* So, thank you. Let me point out something that I think is really important to point out at the beginning of my answer to this question. Communal land is private land. Communities are private owners of land. They own jointly and severally, if you want to think about it what way, but the problem with community lands, oftentimes, is not that they're private as opposed to public lands, it's rather that they're private but rights to the lands are not recognized, communities don't have the ability to enforce their rights against others, particularly the public sector in a lot of cases. So, privatization, providing rights to communities, is not the same thing as individualization. There are countries where there have been extensive efforts to individualize property rights, and sometimes those have unintended, harmful consequences, as for example in terms of disempowering women, if you only recognize heads of households when you individualize a property right, and the head of the household is a man and not a woman. But what we're really focusing on is providing and securing rights to communities so that they can make choices about what they do with their valuable and increasingly valuable asset, which is land or other natural resources.

*Male:* Would you mind just repeating the question, because I think it was a good question but it had several dimensions to it.

*Male:* Sure, so the question again, "Is it an assumption that if we move towards privatizing land rights, that those assets would be used most effectively or efficiently?"

*Male:* Yes.

*Male:* He's saying, "I would think that land use at that point would go to those with the deepest pockets, and then possibly move towards idleness or large scale-ups, not necessarily taking into consideration the environment, social concerns, et cetera. How does the current discussion and policy formation take into consideration these other effects?"

*Male:* Okay, so on the last one, I guess we have to ask whose policy. I think both of us have tried to emphasize this morning that national government policy needs to grapple with this in a way that aligns its position on land allocation with its position on poverty reduction and development more generally. Right now, it seems to me that many governments' positions on land, there's rhetoric that it's aligned to poverty reduction, but in reality, it's not. So, I think that in response to the last part of that question, "What does policy need to do to kind of get – " it needs to recognize that its land policy needs to be more explicitly focused towards achieving its other national policy objectives of reducing poverty, promoting broad-based income growth, and so forth. If it were to do that, I

have a feeling that it would have more transparent recognition of customary land rights, and something that would deal with the problem of increasing concentration of rural populations in places that are no longer going to be able to support them.

*Female:* Thank you very much for all of your questions. We have a few closing words from Julie Howard of the USAID Bureau for Food Security, but first, I would just like to ask you, if you have the chance, to please fill out the surveys that were on your seat. We take them seriously, and they help us shape future events. If you're online, the survey will be on your screen and in the chat box.

*Female:* Thanks very much. I know we're running over, so I'll be brief. I'm Julie Howard. I'm the chief scientist and senior advisor to the administrator from the Bureau of Food Security; first of all, to thank both Tom and Karol. Tom and the Michigan State Food Security Group are among USAID's most important thought partners in this space, and we very much appreciate, of course, your papers and your presentations, and all the work that you do, and Karol, you, Greg and your team, of course, all of us at USAID are very proud of your work. I mean you are really global thought leaders in this space, and you're too humble to say this, but really have played such a major role in elevating the voluntary guidelines, so thank you for that.

I just wanted to comment on a couple of things I was thinking as I was sitting here and listening to this enormously useful and helpful discussion – timely discussion, really – interesting, I mean how you both have pointed to the paradox that we see, especially in rural Africa, so with increasing population densities and in a few areas of rural space, and growth apparently not reaching rural areas. Tom, I think, I mean you've sort of laid out a dichotomy that you can have public investment that reaches smallholders, or you can have large-scale, private investments. So, I want to challenge you a little bit on that, especially with the point you raised on the success of Robert Mugabe on the tsetse fly example, about whether it's just public investment that can create those opportunities for having growth reach into new areas. I think that's the question.

Our reputation with guiding that growth through only public investment over the past 40 or 50 years hasn't been so great, I would say, and in fact, even with all the public investment, not only by governments but by development organizations, we haven't really cracked that. So, I think, really, the question for us all now is what is the combination of private sector energy and investment with the right kind of public policies to create that nirvana of broad-based smallholder growth, and growth that reaches all segments of the population and

lifts up the poor. Several of you asked the question about the new alliance, and I think it's really telling that the top line goal for the new alliance is lifting 50 million people out of poverty. So, the leaders, the G8, as well as the African government leaders, are pointed towards investments at the public sector and private sector level, and they will be held accountable. We will all be held accountable to results that way.

Karol, in your presentation, you really pointed to I think this middle ground, right? So, it's a paradox, it's about access; it's mostly about rights, and we can broaden that to, again, sort of look at the importance of institutions, of economic institutions, of legal institutions as a key pathway for ensuring that a broad part of our populations in Africa are able to access resources or able to effectively monetize their resources. So, I'm excited as you are, I think, by the challenge and the opportunity that we have with the new alliance, but really with all the Feed the Future programs to figure out, "Well, how do you operationalize this?" and Thomas, I think in the same vein, we have a challenge in saying, "Well, what do we know about some of the other ways that we have sought to democratize development?"

Jerry Wolgin asked a good question about contract farming. It's probably time to look at that, because I know that many of the private sector partners are thinking, "Well, this is not just about going in and claiming land." I think very few of the agreements really are about that, if any of them, but how do you create a core investment that then serves as a magnet for enabling smallholders to participate in the investment. So, once again, I sense this is a topic that we will return to. I hope we will. I thank you for the food for thought and for all of your great work –

*[End of Audio]*