

13 May 2025

Green grabbing (2): what policy changes to stop it?

Global calls for more climate mitigation funding have led to the development of what has been called ‘green land grabbing’.

In a first article [\[read\]](#), hungerexplained described some of the main characteristics of this phenomenon, its magnitude of late, its limited effectiveness in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the negative impact it has on locally affected communities in low- and middle-level income countries, as well as on the environment in which they live.



A recent article by Zoomers and Otsuki [\[read\]](#) explores ways in which this movement could be opposed through improved land resources governance based on modifications that would promote climate justice. Starting from the manner in which the land-related policy decisions are implemented and enforced, and from the fact that the way in which competing interests in land are managed does not lead to promoting climate justice, the authors sketch out how changes in land governance could effectively stop the current concerning trend.

Past efforts to combat land grabbing

In the wake of the 2007–08 food security crisis and the major land grabbing movement that followed, efforts had been made, at the global level, to develop guidelines that sought to achieve genuine consultation of populations concerned and the preservation of their interests.¹

Yet, write Zoomers and Otsuki, ‘in spite of these guidelines and land laws [that were supposed to protect local communities], top-down decisions without consultations have remained prevalent, resulting in insufficient compensations’. This, they argue, is because the legal frameworks and interventions ‘were meant to lessen the damage of large-scale land investments but not to stop land grabbing itself’. Guidelines were, in fact, largely based on the provision and protection of secure land rights to people, and this led ‘to the commoditisation of land, [that often resulted] in people having to sell land to capital-rich newcomers’.²

Reasons for changing land governance

With the new wave of ‘green land grabbing’, Zoomers and Otsuki see seven reasons why there is a need to change land governance. These reasons have to do with the negative impacts of both climate investments and climate change:

1. ‘The scale and speed of global land grabbing are rapidly increasing’, as the competition for land and other resources (particularly minerals and water [\[read\]](#)) are likely to intensify.
2. ‘Land transfers are increasingly sensitive and conflict-prone’ as the unstable geopolitical context exacerbates tensions [\[read pp. 5–7\]](#).
3. ‘Climate-based investments are relatively complex and transformative – with impacts moving beyond the immediate project area’, as they involve huge infrastructural changes that affect large stretches of space, including in previously unexplored areas, and they leave little room to the participation of local people and authorities.
4. ‘The power of communities and activists declines and donor funding decreases’ as investments made appear extremely urgent and high priority, and repression of popular resistance intensifies [\[read\]](#).
5. ‘De-investment and abandoned land generate new dynamics’. In some parts of the world (e.g. Europe), the aging of the population leads to a progressive abandonment of agricultural land, while in others land affected by mining or oil drilling becomes unusable. Also, conflicts make some areas dangerous because of their contamination by landmines and unexploded bombs, while other locations turn inhospitable, due to extreme conditions created by

¹ e.g. [The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security](#) [see our discussion [here](#), pp. 12–13].

² It is the development of individual land property rights that allows the emergence of a land market.

climate change and the extreme meteorological events that result from it [read [here](#) and [here](#)].

6. 'Environmental migrations increase with few guarantees for the lost land'. Those losing their land have very limited possibility to get compensation and have little assistance (or rights) to relocate elsewhere.
7. 'People in climate-risk-prone areas need support that goes beyond the land allocation' as 'vulnerable people are likely to suffer from the double burden of green colonialism and physical consequences of climate change'.

Which changes?

Zoomers and Otsuki argue that past land policies based on 'setting up new rules and regulations, while stressing the importance of tenure security and land registration' have been largely counterproductive and have facilitated the takeover of land by foreign 'investors'.

Rather, 'more attention [should] be given to landless groups in climate-vulnerable areas as they are losing rights to lost land, in order to support them to cope with climate extremes and environmental deterioration, or to obtain access to safe places', they write. This would mean that:

1. 'negotiating power of low- and middle-income regions needs to be enhanced to be able to attract the right type of investors to invest in the right localities so as to enhance climate resilience' so that investment in those regions are not just for compensating GHG emissions in high-income countries, but actually create 'virtuous' climate-friendly and income-generating jobs for local people.
2. Furthermore, these investments would gain to be linked to larger strategic programmes, rather than be limited to uncoordinated projects.
3. Their design should be based on **genuine** participation of local people.
4. They should not lead to population displacement.
5. They should rest on longer-term development visions for the areas concerned, rather than just meeting the short-term needs of investors.

What is needed for these desired changes to take place?

These recommendations make sense, evidently. The question, once more, is whether the political conditions for these changes can be created. On this key point, however, Zoomers and Otsuki do not say much.

What could prevent national and local authorities from accepting plantation projects that will generate immediate benefits (money inflow for the government – and sometimes for its leaders –, short-term jobs for local people duration the plantation phase) but negative impacts in the medium and long term?

What could 'oblige' the authorities (and investors) to spend time and negotiate for better designed long-term programmes with the participation of the local population?

What could convince authorities to take the risk of proposing to investors an investment that is not in conformity with what investors expected at first?

What could prevent investors from moving to other countries with more 'accommodating' authorities?

What could prevent countries from continuing with the 'race to the bottom' to attract investors as they do for investments in manufacturing, for example?

As long as there are no credible answers to these questions, green grabs are likely to further develop in the future.

If you have any suggestions, let us know...

To know more :

- Zoomers, A., and Otsuki, K., [Seven reasons why climate-induced land grabbing requires significant changes in land governance](#). The Journal of Peasant Studies, 1-20, 2025.
- Dell'Angelo, J., Rulli, M.C., and P. D'Odorico, [The Global Water Grabbing Syndrome](#), Ecological Economics, Volume 143, 2018.
- James Fairhead, J., Leach, M., and I. Scoones, [Green Grabbing: a new appropriation of nature?](#) The Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2012.

Selection of articles published earlier on [hungerexplained](#) and related to this topic:

- [Green land grabbing : money-spinning operations, dispossessed communities, little impact on CO2 emissions](#), 2025.
- [Understanding our world: end or new phase of capitalism?](#) 2025.
- [Politics, environment and climate: public awareness, repression and inaction](#), 2025.
- [Land: an unequally distributed, threatened but essential resource](#), 2013.