



Editorial

From land grabs to inclusive development?



1. Questioning inclusivity of development

Inclusive development has become the latest buzzword in international development studies and practice. Originally mainstreamed in the social policy domain (e.g. Beall and Piron, 2005), the focus on inclusion began to surface in business and international development discourses in the late 2000s. The scholarly and activist communities recognized the adverse effects of large-scale land acquisitions, which development banks and business communities had initially promoted in order to help solve food and energy shortages and climate change problems following the 2007/2008 food and energy price and global financial crises. However, they turned out to result in “land grabbing” or land commodification processes more generally, leading to large-scale transformations of landscapes in frontier and peripheral areas of developing countries. For example, transformations have occurred involving conversion of forests, wetlands and smallholder croplands replaced with plantation monoculture, mining and associated infrastructure projects. Conversely, in other cases, conservation and carbon investments have sought to curb physical transformations of landscapes by establishing new no-go areas, thereby profoundly altering local resource access arrangements. More recently, rapid processes of urbanization are inducing a rise in land prices in peri-urban areas. All these transformations have turned to exacerbate marginalization of vulnerable populations.

We have thus learned over the last decade that large-scale investment flows caused social and environmental conflicts, and unequal distributions of the promised benefits such as employment, knowledge spill-over and improved services, even when investments were legitimized for serving sustainability and public good objectives. These adverse effects of land investments have highlighted how the pursuit of sustainable development might not automatically serve inclusive and equitable growth objectives (Hopwood et al., 2005). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which came into effect in 2016, illuminate this fact by emphasizing the pursuit of sustainable development while “leaving no one behind” (United Nations, 2016).

The emphasis on inclusion in investment and development projects is currently driving more participatory land and environmental governance processes with multi-actor platforms consisting of civil society, donors, investors, practitioners and researchers. These actors are adopting discourses of inclusive growth, inclusive cities and inclusive business models. These inclusive models are premised on the “productive” integration of vulnerable and marginalized groups into the market economy (Schoneveld and Zoomers, 2015). Yet, degrees and scopes of inclusivity in existing investment and development projects have remained elusive: Who includes whom in development? How are the decisions taken and followed up (Otsuki, 2016)? In many cases, roles and positions of the vulnerable and marginalized groups are not clearly outlined in the investment plans and throughout the monitoring and evaluation processes (Otsuki and Helvoirt, in press). The larger and more complex the development and investment projects are, the more elusive the question of what inclusive development actually means becomes.

This themed issue explores this elusiveness of inclusive development through analyses of empirical evidences on the state of the art of land grabbing ten years on. The case studies and overviews of case studies collected here show different types of investment flows into food and biofuel crops, wildlife, mining and city development in various developing regions and analyse how different types of marginalized groups actually experience the flows of global capital in their local places. The studies clarify different politics and changes involved in processes of place-making, that is, the iterative creation of production and living places through the interaction amongst multiple actors (Pierce et al., 2011). The studies confirm that the space for inclusion in the place-making processes wherein local, national and global actors fruitfully interact and negotiate their objectives and aspirations is rather limited due to historical and structural power asymmetries. In so doing, the articles in this themed issue engage in the search for a deeper understanding of new and complex situations created under the banner of inclusive development in the context of landscape transformations triggered by large-scale land investment projects.¹

2. Article summaries: approaching inclusive development in land-grabbing debates

Firstly, the articles by Schoneveld and Steel et al. give general overviews of the latest consequences of land grabbing in the rural and urban setting, respectively. Schoneveld's article titled: *Host country governance and the African land rush: 7 reasons why large-scale farmland investments fail to contribute to sustainable development* focuses on farmland investments in Africa, following up on the preceding debates on land grabbing for food and

¹ This themed issue is a result of an ongoing collective effort by established and emerging scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds and expertise with regards to sustainable and equitable development and large-scale land acquisitions. This collective effort has its roots in the International Conference of the Netherlands Academy of Land Governance for Equitable and Sustainable Development or, LANDac, held in Utrecht, the Netherlands in July 2015 (<http://www.landgovernance.org/landac-international-conference/>).

fuel productions that have widely taken place since the beginning of the 2010s. The article discusses the often neglected element of the national governance of recipient countries as the structural intermediary between foreign direct investors and local communities of farmers. It highlights how power imbalances amongst local, national and global actors, conflicts of interests, and lack of social cohesion frustrate the inclusive and consequently sustainable development potential of agricultural investments. The paper's results highlight how more attention should be paid to domestic rather than international governance systems in addressing structural inclusivity challenges.

Steel, van Noorloos, and Klaufus turn our attention to land grabbing increasingly observed in the process of rapid urbanization in Asia, Latin America and Africa. In *The urban land debate in the global South: new avenues for research*, they clarify three elements that make land acquisitions in an urban setting fundamentally different from land investments taking place in a rural setting: investments are made not only in land per se but in material properties, public services and images of turning a space into urban. Thus, to address inclusivity in urban land grabbing requires a set of analyses that look into actors and modes of governance that are specific to urban contexts (see also Zoomers et al., 2017). This argument sets up a new research agenda on what it means for land investments to be inclusive in the rapidly urbanizing world, especially in the global south.

Articles by Huggins et al. and Otsuki et al. zoom into cases of micro-politics and local livelihood activities that have been affected by land grabbing in Africa. The article: *A 'cartography of concern': place-making practices and gender in the artisanal mining sector in Africa* by Huggins, Buss and Rutherford details the world of artisanal mining in which formalization efforts keep on creating new contestations over mining spaces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya. The article reminds us of the important and yet often neglected aspect of land grabbing – the creation of gendered spaces emanating from the politics of formalization and place-making, which involves a wide variety of actors backed by different customs, regulations and power relations. After all, the space of *the local* to be included is extremely diverse, and the very effort to include local people and communities leads to a “multi-scale process characterized by contestation”.

In *After the consent: re-imagining participatory land governance in Massingir, Mozambique*, Otsuki, Achá and Wijnhoud present the ongoing processes of multiple land grabbing observed in and around the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique. The article pays particular attention to the process and outcomes of community consultations and consent-building when investment projects are introduced and developed. Currently, the community consultations and the so-called Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) are the dominant approach in making land grabbing inclusive and participative of local populations who are likely to be affected by the projects, but little is known about how actual experiences of this process lead to new contestations, not only within the consulted community but also in relation to surrounding communities and different social groups engaged in their own politics of place-making. The article highlights the importance of envisioning alternative plans emanating from the community experiences by following up the consequences of participatory consent building.

The article by Zoomers and Otsuki: *Addressing the impacts of large-scale land investments: re-engaging with livelihood research* draws our attention to the methodological aspect of addressing and further assessing the effectiveness of inclusive development models promoted in various types of land grabbing cases. It argues that existing assessment activities tend to focus on directly affected groups of target populations. This narrow focus leads to assessment procedures that overlook complex and changing realities, which unfold after the investment projects get underway involving multiple actors. Any investment projects can start to reveal new situations in unplanned ways and, therefore, investors and development communities must be able to follow-up these new situations. The article urges us to re-engage ourselves in using the concept of local livelihoods and paying attention to their sustainability in the face of investment flows. The livelihoods approaches enable us to shift our focus from how investors and governments try to include vulnerable populations into their production planning into how the people's everyday livelihood activities could include investment projects more fruitfully in their life project planning and development. In this way, the article addresses the *who-includes-whom* question and rethinks ways that the objective of inclusive development are discussed today.

3. Inclusive development as a wicked problem

The articles in this themed issue highlight the complexity and challenges of effectively delivering on contemporary inclusive development policies. In fact, they show that the concept of inclusive development has all the characteristics of a wicked problem by being more elusive than, say, poverty eradication or zero hunger or zero displacement.

For example, the proposed inclusive models do aim to reach a consensus by involving multiple actors in investment negotiations. However, the consensus-based solutions are not neutral, and solving local people's problems is not the prioritized goal in the first place. They are also often suboptimal when looked at from the perspective of individual and household goals. And, most of all, the consensus-based solutions are problematic for the simple fact that investment projects often lack the space and resources to involve *everyone*. Yet, as different groups of actors are invited to participate at various stages of project processes, they also begin to diverge in their views on and experiences of a problem, and therefore solutions become increasingly variegated. More specifically, if one wants to solve the problem of exclusion by including one set of actors, this could lead to the exclusion of others. Processes of inclusion and exclusion are therefore intimately connected.

In addition to, or rather because of this basic contradiction revealed in the concept of inclusion used in investment projects, the case studies in this themed issue empirically show that different attempts to make investments more inclusive face dilemmas. Here, we identify two major contradictions that the focus on inclusion reveals on the ground and look for ways forward.

First of all, local populations are hardly the ones who initiate the investment projects. Therefore, from the beginning, they are excluded from the first decisions about whether and where certain investments will be made. This means that, from the perspective of local people, investments come from outside, and local people continue to have limited capacity to assess and determine what impacts those investments from outside will exactly have in their local places. People are invited to participate in multi-stakeholder or FPIC meetings to build a consensus, and they have the right to withdraw their consent when they are consulted about the project. However, in many cases, their inclusion is expected nominally. Even when the local community at large welcomes the investment, they have little control over the core elements of the investment such as types of crops, infrastructures or exact locations of the projects, which are thereby likely to cause grievances as time progresses. Moreover, due to a lack of attention to diversity that actually exists within a community, the inclusion of one group could lead to an exclusion of another group in the same community, as observed in the gendered space configurations.

Secondly, in today's globalized world, no one can be in full control of ensuring inclusion. The investors and international donors are often influenced by global market forces or the policies of funding agencies and consultancy enterprises in combination with the positionality of the place (road access, distance to port, etc.). This leads to unexpected bypassing of local people who are nonetheless affected when investment projects generate unplanned effects. The unexpected outcomes can be observed in spontaneous mobilities, changing patterns of settlements, and new frictions created between those who benefit directly from the investment projects and those excluded. In short, a levelled playing field does not exist to

amplify scopes of inclusions for the decision-making since no one knows the actual consequences of investments and speculations (see also Zoomers et al., 2016).

Even if we focus on the already included groups such as those directly participating in the formal infrastructural and plantation grids or in outgrower schemes, there is a need to clarify the real benefits they acquire. As an outcome of inclusion, the participants receive formal service provision and employment, which come with new types of dependencies and cost and benefit flows. The new rules and regulations that induce formalization in the new investment projects tend to create new contestations. This is because the formal benefits are not always in line with people's priorities. In short, pursuing inclusive development reveals that inclusion is not always beneficial to the poor.

4. Ways forward: from inclusive development to inside-up development

Nevertheless, the quest for inclusive development will likely persist in years to come, presumably because it is subject to different interpretations by variously involved actors in practice and for the convenience of addressing the adverse investment and developmental effects. When different interpretations proliferate, at least there should be a recognition that land investments are only inclusive when they are in line with local people's needs and existing plans and help resolve vulnerabilities. Indeed, more engaged approaches have been proposed such as territorial and jurisdictional approaches, which fully acknowledge the need for participatory policy making and implementation. These newer approaches re-emphasize the importance of bottom-up development. Following Mintzberg (2006), we must take the recognition of endogenous development more seriously to envision "inside-up" development in relation to the "top-down" planned investments and interventions and inevitable "outside-in" influences of global market development.

In other words, investment projects should become less supply-driven and more fruitfully combined with local demands. Based on detailed studies on local and national governance and livelihoods, researchers can collaborate with investors to identify what local people or national officials really need and what types of investments are required in which locations and at what scale. Naturally, this collaboration entails the creation of a new deliberative space in which local people can exercise their agency and co-produce investment models or alternative plans that may counter the one-size-fits-all formalization and planning. This deliberative space should also work for local people themselves to overcome intra-community fragmentation and power differences, and claim their rights to fully participate in place-making affected by investments.

Theoretically speaking, we need to move away from focusing on land grabbing as a phenomenon that only coercively affects local places. The emphasis on the negativity works to justify the proliferation of inclusive development as being what could potentially repair the investments' bad impacts through compensations without sufficiently addressing the needs for inside-up development. Instead, recognizing the contradictions inherent to inclusion, we should focus on transformation of the grabbed land based on local people's everyday coping with the impacts of investments. As our evidences show in this themed issue, even in what appear to be the most coercive situations, the short-term impacts of large-scale investments indicate possibilities of long-term transformation based on the agentive coping and creation of alternative plans by local individuals and communities. The politics of participatory land governance, place-making and the new contentious process of inclusion are all relevant concepts that help us study such transformation in depth.

Methodologically, looking into the inside-up development possibilities leading to the co-creation of investment plans and projects requires longitudinal approaches, starting from pre-engagement with investment opportunities and following up and close monitoring of the project evolution. Currently, many of the assessment tools measure the project impacts and its feasibility at the moment of planning and a limited period after the implementation. More attention should be paid to analysing the impact pathways to find out what the implications of investment projects are for directly affected and indirectly affected groups. In addition, the assessments are often conducted by consultants and experts sent in by the donors and investors. However, as the authors in this themed issue argue, we need much more engaging approaches that enable us to fully grasp structural constraints for certain groups of people to benefit from the investment projects and to understand the ongoing mechanisms of non-formal uses and gendered space demarcations of land and related resources. Therefore, local people's self-assessment and exchange of experiences with others going through similar investment projects will become crucial to ensure such engaging assessment approaches.

In conclusion, this themed issue highlights the need for analysts to reframe the use of inclusive development in evaluating the experiences of land grabbing. We need to closely monitor proliferating investment projects in order to trace who is promoting inclusion for whom and clarify whether they are enabling inside-up development. In this sense, inclusivity should not be an outcome of investment projects assessed merely through financial capital achieved in the forms of compensation and menial employment, but it needs to be evaluated in how this focus on inclusions enlarges opportunities for all and strengthens people's ability to capitalize on new situations created by the projects. In other words, rather than striving to identify who to include or how to include people as beneficiaries, we should ask what types of contestations the process of inclusion creates and identify opportunities for change that emerge from such contestations.

After all, development is not a matter of vulnerable groups being incorporated or becoming owners of projects brought in from the outside: people should become the designers of their own plans, inviting investors and policy makers to come in. Therefore, our emphasis must be placed on co-designing alternative, genuinely pro-poor investment models actively shaped by the poor themselves. Ultimately, investors, donors, governments and local individuals and groups should all be able to learn from the contentious processes of land grabbing and the pursuit of inclusion to negotiate and re-negotiate alternative development possibilities. By outlining new avenues for research on investments and inclusion, we hope to facilitate such learning possibilities.

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