

Land grabbing, a destructive model - The role of scholars and researchers

Tuesday 8 December 2015, by [BERRY Paul](#), [GUTTAL Shalmali](#) (Date first published: 19 October 2012).

Land grabbing Q&A with Shalmali Guttal, from Focus on the Global South. Opinion and comment from Future Agricultures researchers on agricultural politics, science and society in Africa.

Q: You said during the opening session: ‘How much more information is necessary for us to know that this land grabbing needs to stop’. Could you elaborate on what you meant?

Shalmali Guttal: A few years ago when the term land grabbing exploded on the world scene, many of us who’ve been working on various rights to do with land and resource, had been using the word land grabbing for a very very long time. Then 4 or 5 years ago it becomes this big thing: oh, land grabbing is happening. And we thought: that’s fine, at least the term is now going all over the world, and the impacts of these large scale land expropriations are going to finally be discussed.

One of the things we were always asked about is: where is the evidence? And when the land grabbing craze hit the media, people started doing research frantically—and now, if you just Google “land grabbing” and see how much comes up, there have been so many studies in every country where there have been large scale land deals, and all of them show that this model is not working, and that this is a destructive model.

Nobody, even the World Bank, one of the biggest supporters of large scale land expropriations, is able to say that this kind of system works: that’s why they’re coming out with their own version of principles for agricultural investment—because they know that they cannot justify this.

So I guess my question now is that if we know all this, then how much more evidence is needed? Why are we still being asked to produce more evidence? How many details on the ground and how many details of the mechanics do we need to interrogate to put an end to this?

Q: What kind of role do you think academics and research can play in positively advancing people’s livelihoods, in the land grabbing struggle? What are some strengths, or things that could be changed? Do you think this conference is a move in the right direction?

Shalmali Guttal: Well I think the conference and the whole LDPI initiative is definitely a move in the right direction. Basically what it’s doing is building up a larger community of scholars and researchers who are interested and committed to exploring the issue of land grabbing and resource grabbing and all those various grabs from different viewpoints, and from actually a people and communities point of view you know.

The community of people I’ve met here from academia are really the most empathetic and

sympathetic I've met. I got to a lot of policy meetings, and I cannot tell you the hostility, or the tensions that come up because if you're not there speaking a so-called neutral line, then you're not welcome – immediately you are seen as too advocacy-oriented or they'll say you know, you have a bias, etc, etc so somehow you'll have to be neutral, as though policy making ever was neutral.

One of the things that would be great is if people here, and other academics who are engaged in this kind of study, can actually fan out, make a larger community, enlarge the community of researchers and scholars who are thinking this way, and make very hard proposals: find ways in which the knowledge that they're generating can be translated into hard power, into policy, into regulation, into things that we can use at national and local levels to stop land grabbing. If the findings just stay as papers I fear that's not going to happen.

Maybe academics need to write more in popular journals and find ways to get involved in national legislative processes, or become advisors to social movements - you know, come offer your advice, offer your services to social movements and say 'I'm here, use me'. It would be a huge help when we're arguing for developing certain policies or legal strategies or laws/regulations, that we can have academics and researchers who are qualified in the mainstream parlance to do this, to actually help us put those things together, because we don't have that now.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say to researchers?

It would be good if you all found ways in which you could integrate what other types of researchers or other, you know communities, other social movements are saying, and integrate them into the work that you do. So that it does find space in official discourse, rather than getting marginalized into a box.

Interview by Paul Berry, Cornell University

P.S.

* Future Agricultures. Friday, 19 October 2012:

<http://www.future-agricultures.org/blog/entry/land-grabbing-qaa-shalmali-guttal-focus-on-the-global-south>