

IS Academy on Land Governance for Equitable and Sustainable Development

Vacancy for PhD Researcher (1.0 fte)

‘Implications of land deals in Africa for equitable and sustainable development’

IS Academy on Land Governance for Equitable and Sustainable Development

LANDac, the IS Academy on Land Governance for Equitable and Sustainable Development, is one of the IS Academies for International Cooperation sponsored by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It aims at bringing together researchers, policy makers and practitioners in the field of land governance and development. LANDac is a partnership between several Dutch organisations and their Southern partners involved in development-related research, policy and practice. The partners share a concern for increasing land inequality and new land-related conflicts, and how land governance – rules and practices on access to land – can be used to promote equitable and sustainable development in the Global South. Partners include International Development Studies, Utrecht University (leading partner), African Studies Centre (Leiden), Agriterria (Arnhem), Disaster Studies (Wageningen University), Hivos (The Hague), Royal Tropical Institute (Amsterdam), Sustainable Economic Development Department (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague), and Triodos Facet (Zeist).

The focus of LANDac is on how local people and policy makers deal with new pressures and competing claims on land and natural resources, while maximizing opportunities for inclusive and equitable development. We pay special attention to changing institutional dimensions (new land policies and legislation, decentralization of land governance) and current trends of large-scale land acquisition by investors, foreign and national. These latter claims occur in a context of other pressures on land, such as demographic shifts, climate change and environmental degradation. Together, these changes compel us to reconsider the issue of land governance.

In analyzing the trends, research within the IS Academy focuses on the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of land acquisition and to what extent are they substantiated by facts?
2. What are the implications for equitable and sustainable development?
3. What can be done to improve land governance, in view of the goals of sustainable and equitable development?

Phd Researcher ‘Implications of land deals in Africa for equitable and sustainable development’

Call for proposals

PhD candidates are invited to submit a brief research proposal within the framework of Research Question 2 and 3. Up to now most studies on land acquisition in Africa focus on a study of the governance (processes), institutional structures and negotiating processes behind the land acquisitions to arrive at conclusions about the extent to which rights are respected and the outcomes of these land acquisitions contribute to equitable and sustainable development.

Many of the conclusions from these studies are based on an assessment of the degree of ‘people centeredness’ and/or ‘sustainability’ of statutory provisions included in land deals and an assessment of the degree to which land deals have been reached in a participatory way. However, studies on ecotourism projects in different parts of the world that involve “local” partnerships have shown that whatever statutory provisions on equity and sustainability (environmental, labour conditions, employment, income, etc.) have been included, and however inclusive and participative the

negotiating process may have been, reality shows that these projects had adverse outcomes on the ground both in terms of equity and sustainability.

An important question within LANDac is therefore whether and to what extent this discrepancy in theory and practice can also be observed with current land acquisitions in Africa?¹ To answer this question, it is necessary to study both the degree of participation and inclusiveness of the negotiating process and the statutory or otherwise defined provisions in land deals which should ensure equity and sustainability, and collect facts on the ground on the real outcomes of these land deals in terms of equity and sustainability. Central questions that should guide the PhD study are: how have negotiations about equity and sustainability taken place, and what has been the role of the government and civil society in negotiating conditions and power? How effective have processes of collective action within potentially impacted communities been in protecting their rights to land/resources, and what are the determinants that underlie this? What were the expectations of relevant stakeholders (e.g. different levels of government, civil society, and the impacted population) vis-a-vis the proposed project and how have these expectations shaped negotiation processes and, ultimately, outcomes? What is the position of the private sector, what impact mitigation strategies have been adopted, and what alternative business models were considered? How effective are institutions, statutory or otherwise defined provisions in ensuring and monitoring the dimensions of equity and sustainability of these land acquisitions? In relation to this, what factors explain the disconnection between theory and practice? How do ulterior motives and perverse incentives influence governments' stance on and involvement in land acquisitions (e.g. as a means to extract rents, bring customary land into the public dominion)? Which effects at grassroots level can be observed in terms of equity and sustainability? What is the relationship between these effects and the specifics of the governance / institutional structures underlying land deals? What could this mean for the process of renegotiating existing or negotiating future land deals and what can be done to improve land governance, in view of the goals of sustainable and equitable development?

Qualifications research proposal

Applicants need to submit a brief description of the research they would like to conduct within the framework outlined in the previous section. The research proposal should reflect a strong focus on the collection of 'facts' on the ground, combining rigorous data collection at micro level among farmers and other stakeholders (for example, wage workers, local administrators, land owners, environmental and human rights advocates, and so on) with research at the meso level of institutions (in its broadest meaning), governance structures and actors involved. The study or studies should be located in an African country where large-scale land acquisitions have been present for some years now. Ideally, the case study allows for a comparative analysis of land deals with different governance regimes and/or investors within the same country. Given the focus of the research on the investigation of discrepancies between theory (such as what has been written in contracts and code of conducts with regard to issues of sustainability and equity) and practices (to what extent do practices on the ground reflect what has been put on paper) land deals in which issues of equity and sustainability are formalized are of special interest.

The research proposal should contain a working title of the project, a brief outline of the intended research (maximum of 1500 words), including a brief section on methodology, one A4 maximum with references, an explanation of the institutional set-up (local affiliation and supervision of the candidate while working in the host country). Please include a description of sites/ cases to focus on during the research project.

Qualifications applicant

The Phd candidate should have a recent MSc diploma in the social sciences, human geography, development economics or law, and with a proven interest for issues of land governance, rural

¹ The importance of this question is for instance made clear in a recent presentation by Robin Palmer in Oxford (16-19 September 2010) entitled: 'Would Cecil Rhodes have signed a Code of Conduct?'

livelihoods, and/or environmental sustainability. Proven knowledge on and/ or research experience in Africa on one of these subjects and knowledge of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods among rural or urban communities in Africa or elsewhere in the developing world are a pre. Candidates with a nationality of one of the African countries are encouraged to submit a proposal.

Terms of employment

The selected candidate will be offered a full-time PhD position, initially for one year. Contingent on a satisfactory performance this may be extended to a maximum period of four years, with the specific intent that it results in a doctorate within this period. The PhD position is a so-called 'sandwich PhD', which means that the candidate works and lives in the country where the research will be conducted, with occasional visits to the Netherlands.

Employment conditions are similar to the arrangements offered by Nuffic for the Netherlands Fellowship Programmes (NFP). The maximum NFP budget available for a PhD study is € 85,000 (4 years, including fieldwork costs, traveling costs, cost of living, visas, travel, insurance and so on), as specified in the NFP booklet 'Rules and Regulations for Fellowship holders'. PhD students are allowed to seek alternative sources of funding. The maximum duration of a PhD fellowship is four years.

The PhD candidate will be supervised by professor Annelies Zoomers (IDS, Utrecht University) and one or two senior researchers from the other academic partners of the LandAc. Local supervision will be arranged in consultation with the candidate. After successful completion, graduation will take place at Utrecht University.

Application and contact

Applications, including an application letter, curriculum vitae, a research proposal, and the names and addresses of 2 references, must be submitted by e-mail to landac@geo.uu.nl before 7 March 2011. For further information on this vacancy you can contact: t.hilhorst@kit.nl or Leliveld@ascleiden.nl. For more information on LANDac, please visit our website: <http://www.landgovernance.org>