

At the start of this year there was a dangerous conspiracy of silence on the subject of land grabbing. Not anymore. A breakthrough was the hugely energising 3-day global conference at IDS Sussex in May. Amazingly, over 400 people wanted to write papers. Ben White concluded that, having carefully studied the 400 papers, he could not find a single case of any large-scale corporate land acquisition which had fulfilled its claimed developmental role of increasing food security, or providing jobs or other benefits for rural people. So the burden of proof was surely now on those who favour corporate land acquisition and industrial farming over small-scale agriculture.

Since then coverage has grown apace. The Oakland Institute is emerging as a key player, undertaking serious research and finding imaginative ways of publicising issues such as American universities investing their pension funds in ways that contribute to land grabbing. It halted a land deal in South Sudan through use of radio. It has published country reports on Ethiopia, Mali and Sierra Leone and two powerful critiques of the dominant consensus, *"Mis/Investment in agriculture"* and *"The great land grab"*. On December 6 it published its reports on Mozambique, Zambia, Sudan and Tanzania plus several briefs.

The International Land Coalition has also produced excellent country research reports on Ethiopia, Zambia, Rwanda, Kenya and Madagascar plus policy briefs. In May it publicly denounced "all forms of land grabbing, whether international or national", and on December 14 it launched its global synthesis report, *"Land rights and the rush for land"*. In September, Oxfam published two reports, *"Land and power"*, which stated that an area the size of Western Europe has been sold or leased since 2001, mostly to international investors, and *"The New Forests Company and its Ugandan plantations"*, plus a video, *"Oxfam sounds Uganda land-grab warning"*.

In October, ActionAid produced a powerful video, *"How a bio-fuels landgrab has destroyed the life of an African village"* (in Tanzania) and is currently running a petition, (*"Stop the biofuel land grab in poor countries"*), aimed at the targets and subsidies that are driving the biofuel boom. The small pressure group GRAIN wrote the hugely influential briefing *"Seized! The 2008 land grab for food and financial security"* in October 2008. Its daily updated site (<http://farmlandgrab.org>) is absolutely essential reading and quite incomparable.

So, and not a moment too soon, the cavalry is coming.

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