

End of project popular science description

Introduction

The main aim of the 'Hierarchies of rights' research program was to analyse how large-scale investments in natural resources affect smallholders' rights to land in Africa. The project was formulated at the end of the last major resource boom in Sub-Saharan African countries, which by then had experienced an unprecedented number of investments. A basic assumption in the project was that, in developing countries undergoing democratization, rights would gradually be established as large-scale investments materialized. However, the strength of different actors' rights was expected to differ. Thus, the value of the investment projects and the organization of political and economic power in a country would influence the strength of smallholders' rights.

A number of studies of rice, coal and gas investments were carried out in Mozambique and Tanzania, latterly with funding for a postdoc by Malin Nystrand from the Swedish research council on Uganda. The two (later three) countries had been selected for comparison because they had received a large number of investments. They were similar in many ways but differed in the way political and economic power was organized. This indeed turned out to affect the hierarchies of rights in the two countries, albeit not always as anticipated. Thus, the fact that the ruling party in Tanzania was less united and under more pressure from the opposition appears to have contributed to more benefits and stronger rights for smallholders, as the ruling elite had to win over local populations. By comparison, Mozambique was able to push through more investment projects at a faster pace, which, however, also tended to generate resistance and more violent conflicts locally. In Uganda, due to the comparatively strong clientelism and patronage-based politics, local communities could sometimes protect their rights when needed by the ruling party.

Results

The project had two aims. The main aim was to analyse how struggles related to large-scale investments in natural resources affect the rights, particularly of smallholders, to land in Sub-Saharan Africa. The main overall findings are outlined above. These findings are based on a number of publications, primarily working papers and articles in scientific journals on agricultural, coal, and gas investments in Tanzania and Mozambique, as well as Uganda (due to the additional postdoc project from Sweden). They have also been published as analytical and theoretical frameworks towards the end of the project, and a forthcoming edited book (see <https://ruc.dk/en/forskningsprojekt/hierarchies-rights/> ; see also Elgar publishers forthcoming 2023: <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/land-rights-and-the-politics-of-investments-in-africa-9781800377257.html>).

The second aim was to strengthen research capacity and inform policy interventions related to large-scale investments in natural resources in the two Danida-supported countries, Tanzania and Mozambique. The main component was the training of three PhDs, two in Mozambique and one in Tanzania, who have all written and successfully defended PhD theses, besides publishing numerous articles and monographs. Exchanges of knowledge on investments in natural resources across the four countries (Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda, and Denmark) have been facilitated through annual workshops. The building of international contacts and networks has happened through participation in a number of international conferences jointly as a team as well as individually.

The dissemination of policy-relevant knowledge happened through, for instance, briefings of embassies, NGOs and private-sector actors, and through interviews and articles in newspapers, radio and television. Initially a blog had been planned, but this was replaced by activities of more project participants on Twitter, with Thabit Jacob, for example, having 63,000 followers. More modestly Rasmus H. Pedersen has 1000 or more followers, which for good or bad more generally has become the main media for exchanges of academic and policy-relevant knowledge.

Conclusions

The project has contributed to a better understanding of large-scale natural resource investment processes in Sub-Saharan African countries, which at the time of the formulation of the project was dominated by a focus on insecure rights for investors on the one hand and the literature on land- and resource-grabbing on the other. The latter initially produced fairly simple analyses of foreign investors taking land and resources from hapless smallholders. The project's findings point to more complex processes in which national and sub-national elites especially, through their control of the state, play a key role in investment processes. Furthermore, elites and states often acquire significant land for investment-related projects, for instance, for infrastructure or industrial zones related to extractive investments.

The project's findings also confirm the hypothesis that rights are established gradually as investment projects are implemented. This suggests that the strengthening of rights, not least those of smallholders, requires working with all actors in an investment cycle. Towards the end of the project, we came to focus more on the importance of procedural rights (to information, participation and compensation) during land-acquisition processes. Given that large-scale investments have the potential to accelerate economic growth and create jobs, and the fact that investments are likely to be promoted whether we like it or not, the strengthening of procedural rights is of the utmost importance. Often, policy frameworks have strengthened procedural rights *de jure* but are not being implemented or only partially.

Recommendations

Policy interventions should therefore to a greater extent:

- Put pressure on and strengthen the capacity of the state institutions involved in land acquisition processes.
- Ensure access to adequate dispute resolution mechanisms during investment projects.
- Increase the knowledge of project-affected populations about their procedural rights.
- More research on investments by domestic actors, whose importance we point to but who are little researched.

The recommendation to strengthen the capacity of state institutions is also informed by the work of more team members on capacity in the oil and gas sectors in a related research project under the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID). Among the main findings of our programme participants, and in line with ESID, was how political dynamics in a country shape the development of institutional capacity. This in turn suggests that being realistic in a given context and working with political stakeholders are required elements in strengthening the rights of smallholders.