



Brussels Rural Development Briefings
A series of meetings on ACP-EU development issues

**Briefing session n° 9: Land access and rural development:
new challenges, new opportunities**

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**Large-scale land acquisitions for agricultural investment:
risks, opportunities and responsibilities for Governments, investors and smallholders**
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Executive Summary

A number of new trends and changes combine their effects to put new pressures and demands on land worldwide. They include: climate change and carbon trading; plantations for biofuels; sovereign funds investment to produce food to be exported (to the country supplying the capital for the new investments). These changes and their combined effects on the economy, on the value and the scarcity of land create serious economic opportunities -that can be positive for all- as well as real risks, mostly for the rural poor and the customary users of lands affected by new large scale investments in land. A major responsibility of the State, including through land policies, will be to maximise the positive opportunities for the global benefit of the whole nation and to avoid the risks of uncompensated loss of land rights for current land users and holders of land rights.

FAO and IFAD with the technical collaboration of IIED have begun to work on this issue in late 2008, in order to better understand the land tenure implications and impacts on land access for rural people in recipient countries, focussing on Africa. The aim is to provide informations that can eventually be used by countries and other actors to better inform negotiations and contracts, and identify key factors that can make the investments more pro-poor and contributing to sustainable rural development.

Preliminary analysis and previous work by FAO and partners indicate that:

- Risks and opportunities are high for all and interlinked, with the need to address risks of uncompensated land loss for small and family farms who do not have legally documented land rights;
- Well informed, well negotiated and balanced contracts between Governments and investors, and between investors and communities are key to the outcome;
- A range of options are available for the type of contracts, the type of agricultural development to be promoted, and even how to make land available for export oriented agricultural growth;
- Win-win situations between investors and communities can be designed, under certain conditions;
- Rural small-holders and family farms must be integrated in the plans and negotiations, and should be fairly compensated when involuntary displacement may occur;
- Massive and affordable programmes for legalization of customary land rights, and good governance in land tenure and land administration are key actions to minimize risks and optimize benefits of such investments.