

Topical Lunch, CCSF, November 11, 2010

12:30-2:00 pm

300 Rice Hall

Title: Access to Land and Global Development

Host: Wendy Wolford, www43@cornell.edu

Attendees:

David Kay, dlk2@cornell.edu

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Summary:

The lunch began with a presentation by Wendy Wolford on the concomitant explosion of land reforms and land grabs as two opposing responses to contemporary concerns about access to land, food insecurity, and development. In particular, special emphasis was put on:

- The incredible rise, over the past ten years, of small farmer or landless worker movements that have put land reform – or equitable land distribution – back on the political agenda at a time when most reputable scholars had said the age of land reform was over;
- The rapid growth of large-scale land deals since the food and fuel price spikes of 2008, with private entities and national governments seeking out land for the purposes of financial speculation and/or future industrial food, fuel, livestock, and forest production;
- The macro-scale factors and mechanisms (legal instruments; financial tools; market issues; relevant actors; land use; labor; and political process) involved in land reforms, on the one hand, and land grabs, on the other;

Wendy put forward the goal of developing interdisciplinary/inter-departmental research initiatives to address one overarching question: How do the mechanisms and processes involved in land grabs and land reforms influence the ability of various actors to confront contemporary

challenges (i.e. global climate change, environmental degradation, poverty, and hunger) at multiple scales?

This was followed by a roundtable discussion of individual research interests and/or current work on land grabs, land reforms, and related issues of land governance, control, access, and use. Specifically, the participants' interests could be grouped into five main thematic areas. First, the role of governments in sponsoring/managing land grabs (analyzing what kind of incentives governments have to allow land acquisitions and what forms of backlash are thereby produced; the mechanisms involved in land grabs that affect social/ethnic groups historically marginalized from the political process; and the relationship between land grabs and the police power of states). Second, people were interested in the relationship between land grabs, land reforms, and different forms or conceptions of property (private vs. common; Western-based vs. indigenous; formal vs. customary), eminent domain power, and rights (to land, property, and housing/shelter). Third, there was interest in the relationship between land grabs and development opportunities (analyzing whether and to what extent land deals are complemented by investments in sustainable technology, increased productivity, ecosystem services etc.). Fourth, people expressed an interest in the relationship between land grabs and changing patterns of land use/control (within the context of both local and global energy transitions). Finally, people felt it was important to understand the ways in which land grabs affect local communities' access to resources (land, water, food), and give rise to potential conflicts between different groups of resource users.

The lunch discussion ended with the participants expressing their willingness to attend one-to-one follow-up meetings and develop further initiatives of inter-departmental research.