

What is so Novel about the ‘New Land Grab in Africa’? The Case of Tanzania

Chambi S Chachage¹

¹Freelance, Independent Researcher, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

chambi78@yahoo.com

In the wake of the three ‘F’ – Food, Fuel and Financial – crises in 2007 a discourse of ‘New Land Grab in Africa’ has emerged. This has precipitated a theoretical debate on what has been happening in the last three years or so in relation to increasing large-scale land investments in a number of African countries. On the one hand, there is an assertion that what is being observed is a continuation of colonial and neo-colonial land plunder. On the other hand, it is asserted that this is a new phenomenon that is only focused on land investments aimed at resolving the ongoing global crisis as encapsulated in the three ‘F’ crises.

This paper revisits this theoretical debate and its implications on land rights and the right to food among small-scale producers. On the basis of fieldwork from three regions in Tanzania, it analyses the three main rationales used to justify such large-scale investments namely food (in)security, energy (in)security and environmental in(security). The paper also touches on the contentious issue of estimates and scales of these acquisitions, the dynamics of key players involved and the responses of farmers and pastoralists.

A preview of the theoretical debate among the proponents and critics of the discourse of new land grab constitutes the first part of the paper. The second part of the paper provides an overview of the land policy and legal framework in Tanzania and the way(s) it facilitates these large-scale acquisitions. In the third part the paper presents a review of specific cases of agribusiness, agroforestry and agrofuel investments in food/cash crops, carbon credits and energy units respectively among other profit-making undertakings.