

Commentary, March 23, 2018

GREEN GRABBING- INDUCED DISPLACEMENT

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The complex impacts of climate change on human mobility have gained increased attention, but an invisible and growing number of people are also being displaced – paradoxically – by the very measures taken in the name of addressing it. Although mitigation and adaptation interventions are crucial in order to decrease the likelihood of forced displacement, climate response measures such as agro-fuel production and carbon forest projects have been amongst the main drivers of the global land rush which is unprecedented in scale since the colonial era¹. These green grabs, or 'appropriations of natural resources for environmental ends'², are serving to cleanse the image of polluters, with devastating social and environmental consequences. The logic behind market-driven initiatives is that we should 'sell nature in order to save it'³ and that

unsustainable practices in one place can be repaired by sustainable ones in another⁴. With regard to displacement, they assume that their negative effects can be balanced by the gains in environmental protection⁵. However, and although the presence of certain entities (mostly corporations and extractive industries) is indeed negative for the environment, it is local populations and indigenous peoples – who are the best positioned to protect natural resources – that are being evicted. Although not generally recognized as a part of climate or environmental-induced displacement debates, the links with this category are twofold: 1/ when climate change policies drive land grabs and the eviction of local populations; 2/ when climate mitigation or adaptation projects destroy local resources,

¹ For the most reliable figures, see the [Land Matrix](#).

² J. Fairhead, M. Leach and I. Scoones, "Green Grabbing: A New Appropriation of Nature?", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2012, pp. 237-61.

³ A. McAfee, "Selling Nature to Save It? Biodiversity and Green Developmentalism. Environment and Planning D", *Society & Space*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1999, p. 133.

⁴ M. Leach, J. Fairhead and J. Fraser, "Green Grabs and Biochar: Revaluing African Soils and Farming in the New Carbon Economy", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2012, pp. 285-307.

⁵ A. Agrawal and K. Redford. 2009. "Conservation and Displacement: An Overview", *Conservation and Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2009, p. 1.

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forcing people off their land in what could be seen as a form of tertiary displacement⁶.

Examples from Africa

How diverse 'green' interventions impact the human mobility of local populations depends on a variety of factors ranging from the social and tenure arrangements already in place, to the purpose of the project, the negotiation power of populations, the level of rule of law in the host country, and how the costs and benefits are distributed⁷. Although land and green grabs are occurring worldwide, it is in countries where the protection of human rights is low, or inexistent, that they have reached the most alarming peaks. Due to a combination of international and domestic drivers, Africa has been by far the most targeted continent⁸. Tropical forests are typically under the formal control of the government and it is relatively simple to expropriate them from inhabitants in the name of climate mitigation. When tenure is not formalised, populations have little negotiation power and can be labelled as illegal settlers and evicted without compensation. For example, in the Rufiji Delta in Tanzania, the state portrayed inhabitants who had been occupying the land for millenia as recent migrants and poor stewards of the mangrove forest. This false portrayal has justified their expulsion in the name of REDD+, deprived them of their livelihoods, and created considerable conflicts⁹.

⁶ S. Vigil, "Climate Change and Migration. Insights from the Sahel", in *Out of Africa. Why People Migrate*, Milano, Ledi Publishing-ISPI, 2017, pp. 51-71 ; S. Vigil, "Green Grabbing-Induced Displacement", *Handbook on Environmental Displacement and Migration*, Routledge, 2017.

⁷ B. White, M. Saturnino, Jr. Borrás, R. Hall, I. Scoones, and W. Wolford, "The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vo. 39, no. 3-4, 2012, pp. 619-47

⁸ Land Matrix (2017).

⁹ B.A. Beymer-Farris and T.J. Bassett, "The REDD Menace: Resurgent Protectionism in Tanzania's Mangrove Forests",

Afforestation and reforestation schemes in Uganda, conducted under the Clean Development Mechanism, have also evicted approximately 20,000 residents who had been living on their land since 1975¹⁰. Given the lack of recognised rights for populations and the corruption of elites, the distribution of benefits from these projects is often captured by local and international elites rather than distributed equally amongst local populations¹¹. On the other hand, whilst employment creation is often presented as the main benefit of large-scale biofuel plantations by governments, investors, and local populations themselves, de facto employment creation tends to be scarce, seasonal, or unreliable. For example, around the Lac de Guiers in Senegal, the livelihoods of 9,000 semi-nomadic herder populations have been infringed upon by a land acquisition which claimed to produce sweet potatoes for ethanol export to Europe and that failed to deliver production and employment promises. As land that was previously used for agriculture and grazing has been converted, communities have been either displaced or left with little more options than to move¹². In fact, plantations are often highly mechanized and have a much lower labor input than the small-scale family farms that they often replace. In Mozambique, a biofuels company that had estimated employment creation for 2,650 people had only created 35 to 40 full

Adding Insult to Injury: Climate Change, Social Stratification, and the Inequities of Intervention, vol. 22, no. 2, 2012, pp. 332-41.

¹⁰ R. Carrere, "Carbon Sink Plantation in Uganda: Evicting People for Making Space for Trees". *Upsetting the Offset: The Political Economy of Carbon Markets*, 2009, pp. 98-101.

¹¹ E.O. Sills, S. Atmadja, C. de Sassi, A.E. Duchelle, D. Kweka, I.a.P. Resosudarmo, and W.D. Sunderlin (Eds.), *REDD+ on the Ground: A Case Book of Subnational Initiatives across the Globe*, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Bogor, Indonesia, 2014.

¹² S. Vigil, "Without Rain or Land, Where Will Our People Go? Climate Change, Land Grabbing and Human Mobility. Insights from Senegal and Cambodia", 2016.

time jobs two years after its approval¹³. Moreover, the growing demand for land for climate interventions increases the value of the land that millions of people depend upon for their livelihoods. Although this could bring opportunities to certain farmers, it can also translate into the inability for the poorest to access needed farmland and to further increase the numbers of involuntary migrants. Concerning destinations, and as occurs with any other type of movement, migration tends to remain internal, inter-regional, and south-south. The main explanatory factor is that people need a higher amount of human, financial, social, and natural capital to be able to move longer distances. Since green grabs take place in countries that are often incapable of absorbing the labour they expelled, they are contributing to higher inequality, exclusion, and increasing the *planet of slums*¹⁴. Moreover, displacement also describes situations in which some people are deprived of their productive lands or income-generating assets without being physically evicted¹⁵. Mobility is just one of the possible outcomes emanating from a multifaceted 'package of losses' including the loss of social networks and capital, economic and material goods and power, political and legal rights, and even of cultural moorings¹⁶. Lacking the necessary assets to make a move, many of those who lose land become 'involuntarily immobile'¹⁷ and in conditions of increased social vulnerability.

¹³ E. Aabø and T. Kring, 'The Political Economy of Large-Scale Agricultural Land Acquisitions: Implications for Food Security and Livelihoods/Employment Creation in Rural Mozambique', 2012. pp.32-35.

¹⁴ M. Davis, *Planet of Slums*, London, New York, Verso, 2006.

¹⁵ M. Cernea, 2005. 'Restriction of Access' Is Displacement: A Broader Concept and Policy.' *Forced Migration Review*, vol. 31, 2005, pp. 48-49.

¹⁶ S.C. Lubkemann, 2008. 'Involuntary Immobility: On a Theoretical Invisibility in Forced Migration Studies', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2008, pp. 454-75.

¹⁷ J. Carling, 2002. 'Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immo-

The perverse impact of bad "solutions"

Amongst those interested in forced displacement, there remains a tendency to analyse the drivers of displacement as a result of visible disruptions such as natural disasters, development projects, or civil wars, and to understand movements following lack of tenure, market calamity, or debt as out-migration rather than as evictions. This means that the forces underlying and coercing people to move – such as land and green grabs – often remain invisible and analyzed through the lenses of 'labour migration'¹⁸. However, when climate projects are implemented in countries where human rights protection is low or inexistent, they are *de facto* serving as a mechanism to legitimize the expulsion of the most vulnerable and to further reinforce and centralise the control of natural resources in the hands of the political and corporate elites which are responsible for climate change to begin with. Solving the very real problem of anthropogenic climate change through exactly the same mechanisms that created it (e.g. the market in the absence of social protection), will not only take us further from the 2°C commitment, but will also contribute to delegitimizing the vitally important cause of climate change altogether. These indirect impacts of climate policy should thus be urgently addressed in order to avoid further 'green grabbing-induced displacement'¹⁹, and to prevent the impoverishment of the most socio-environmentally vulnerable populations.

bility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2002, pp. 5-42.

¹⁸ S. Sassen, 'Expelled: Humans in Capitalism's Deepening Crisis'. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2013, pp. 198-201.

¹⁹ S. Vigil, 2015a. 'Displacement as a Consequence of Climate Change Mitigation Policies'. *Forced Migration Review*, no. 49, 2015, pp. 43-45. S. Vigil, 'Green Grabbing-Induced Displacement', in *Handbook on Environmental Displacement and Migration*, Routledge.