

## Minutes from the third meeting of the SIANI Expert Group on Chinese land investments in Africa Siani

**Title of the Seminar:** *Africa's response to large-scale land acquisitions*

**Date and time:** 2012-05-09, 10:00 – 14:30

**Place:** Stockholm Environment Institute, Stockholm

**Seminar organizer:** Atakilte Beyene, SEI

**Chair of the Seminar:** Atakilte Beyene, SEI

### List of participants

Peter Roberntz	WWF
Marie Widengård	PhD candidate
Lennart Båge	Ambassador, formerly IFAD
Madeleine Fogde	SIANI
Blanca Iris Sandoval	MSc student, SLU
Josefine Ekros	DNB Asset Management AB
Pär Löfving	Responsible Investments, DNB Asset Management AB
Karl Hallding	SEI
Atakilte Beyene	SEI
Åsa Nevestveit	SEI

After a brief welcome by Atakilte Beyene, participants started to introduce themselves. This was followed by brief introduction to the theme of the seminar by Atakilte, Karl and Madeleine (all from SEI). In the introduction it was indicated that China's engagement with Africa has rapidly expanded over the last decade. Current China-Africa relations are multi-sector and the nature and scale of China's investments in Africa hugely varies across countries and type of resources. While there are sufficient data sets that indicate China's extensive 'investments' in such sectors as minerals, timber and oils, the nature and extent of Chinese investments in the agricultural sector is not well understood. So, the first focus of this seminar was to exchange information on the character and extent of Chinese interests in agriculture in Africa.

Another major omission in the current debate on the Chinese land investment in Africa is that there is little discussion regarding how African countries are responding to Chinese investments in Agriculture. So, the second focus of the seminar was to highlight on this topic. The major questions in this regard were the following. What agency and roles has Africa? Is Africa simply passive in the current land acquisitions? Or are there emerging processes and adjustments in land acquisitions? What differences can we observe among African countries?

In this seminar, two presenters, who had extensive works in Africa, were invited to present and share their experiences.

Peter Roberntz, From the WWF Sweden, presented a topic titled “**An attempt to summarize four years of listening to different voices in East Africa**”. Peter’s evidence was base on the information received over the last 4 years working with his colleagues across the region and having attended numerous meetings on the topic with different stakeholders including companies and government officials.

Peter highlighted his personal observations and reflections on the different voices regarding land acquisition in East Africa in general and biofuels in particular. His presentation addressed the challenges related to forest logging and why investors become corrupt. Loopholes in African policies and institutional failures are some of the major reason why corruption and illegal logging of forests are taking place in some countries of Africa.

One major hypothesis drawn by Peter was that although the legal system is in place, the illegal system is generating enormous income which is difficult to be stopped or checked by the formal or legal systems. Other challenges that undermine the development of a robust African response to such failures were poor connections between departments and line ministries, lack of transparency in procedure in land acquisitions and poor attention given to village voices.

Uneven playing fields between investors and local people were also a common encounter across many land investments in Africa. This, according to Peter, has generated conflicts and this may undermine investments in Africa. To mitigate this, local people need to be supported and strengthened so that they can seal a better deal with investors.

Marie Widengård, Ph.D. Candidate Göteborg University was the second presenter. Her presentation was titled: “**Acquisition processes and area transfers: Zambia and Mozambique**”. Marie had conducted extensive field works in Zambia and Mozambique during the past few years. She has recent and updated first hand observations from the fields. Marie’s presentation highlighted responses to large-scale land acquisitions ranging from a generous official position, new regulatory frameworks, out-grower schemes to few critical reports from the ‘radical’ civil society.

As a case, Marie presented a case where the processes of land acquisition negotiations between government officials and Chinese investment appear to be highly secretive and confusing. China requested 1,8 – 2 million ha of land from the Zambian government. To get access this land China has been scouting, screening and negotiating. Despite these, the reported area given to the Chinese was only 80,000 ha. So, at the basic information level there are high uncertainties, e.g., regarding the actual land given.

On a general note, it seems that Chinese interests in agricultural land in Africa need to be carefully assessed. So far, China has been indicated as the major actor. However, the evidence so far does not support this.

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