

## 34.3m ha of agricultural African land 'grabbed' since 2000

According to research done by Worldwatch International, an independent research institute devoted to global environmental concerns, an estimated 70.2 million hectares of agricultural land worldwide have been sold or leased to private and public investors since 2000.

Most of land acquisitions done in the past 10 years took place in Africa, with most deals occurring in East African regions.

Worldwatch author Cameron Scherer says that the term "land grabs" refers to the "large-scale purchase of agricultural land by public or private investors." Africa, he adds, has seen the greatest share of land involved in these acquisitions, with 34.3 million hectares sold or leased since 2000. East Africa accounts for the greatest investment, with 310 deals covering 16.8 million hectares. Increased investment in Africa's agricultural land, he says, reflects a decade-long trend, with foreign direct investment to the continent growing 259 percent between 2000 and 2010.

The food crisis of 2007-08 helped spark the dramatic increase in land acquisitions, as investors rushed to capitalise on the rising prices of staple crops. In addition, as fuel consumption and oil prices continue to rise, the demand for land on which to grow feedstocks for biofuels will likely rise too, increasing the pressure on limited cropland, Scherer says.

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