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What is the role of China as land grabber in Sub-Saharan Africa? Between reality and myth: a literature overview

Supervisor:

Prof. Matteo Bortolini

Candidate: Mariasole Pepa

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Summary

Introduction

China’s presence in Africa has gained growing attention at an international level in the last two decades, although China’s relationship with Africa started to develop in the early 1950s. The growing debate around China’s rising influence in Africa has been strongly related to the alarmism resulting from the 2007-08 food crisis. Concerns mainly regarded the rise of Chinese aid commitment and economic engagement since 2006, when the first Forum on China-Africa cooperation (FOCAC) was held in Beijing. China has been blamed to be one of the main countries for land grabbing in Africa, and the main objective of this study is to challenge through an accurate literature review shared beliefs and robust myths around the role of China in Africa. For this purpose, land grabbing has been used as a conceptual instrument to construct an understanding of China’s land acquisition in Africa. Scale and geography are analyzed to understand the dynamics of this phenomenon globally and which has been the role of China with respect to Africa.

Moreover, for a better understanding of the development of the relations between China and the African continent, in the first chapter the historical, political, and economic relations are analyzed in order to understand the strong presence of China in most African countries. The background of Sino-African relation represents the cornerstone of the understanding of the actual volume of economic exchange. While during the colonialist period China mainly supported socialist regimes, with the end of Cold War it was already clear that China's interests in Africa far exceeded the support of socialist governments; indeed, from a more ideological and political intervention the activities shifted onto a more focused economic and utilitarian approach (Van Dijk, M, 2009). With the end of the Cold war, pragmatism piloted China's involvement in those African countries which had been overlooked by the United States and the Soviet Union. The withdrawal of cold war powers from Africa during the 1980s, and the sharp decrease in development aid provided by Western countries, gave rise to the opportunity for China to foster its political agenda by strengthening contacts with African elites (Servant, 2005). China's aid involvement in foreign countries today is still based on Enlai eight principles expressed in 1964, which were mainly based on mutual benefit, equity, non-interference in the political sphere and free interests in economic loans. The West is concerned about China taking over Africa, and about the impact that China's engagement could have on the base of their principles of intervention.

Based on this analysis, the thesis moves to a second chapter which addresses China’s involvement specifically in African agriculture. Since 2012 China has been declared as “food dependent” and surely his demands for supply will increase in the coming years on the base of its population growth and fast economic development. China's food problem is also strictly related to the actual status of its natural resources, for instance the conversion of agricultural land into industrial areas or the contamination of water have sharply reduced its production capacity. In 2016, China's arable land per capita was 0.086, which is a rate comparable to the one of Bangladesh. At the same time, Africa has 60% of the total of arable land, nevertheless does not have the technologies to strongly develop the agricultural sector. Thus, is not surprising that China's interest in Africa agricultural land have sharply increased, and that African government are willing to cooperate with China, to obtain advanced technologies. However, China launched its Going Global policy in agriculture already in 2001, long before the food crisis and it was no secret that the going global would include overseas farming. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore if land deals represents an already existing feature of the going global policies in agriculture in which China endorsed since 2001, or as it has been debated by several editorials, articles, statements if China is assuming the role of new colonialist power in Africa. The adoption of the going global policy in 2001 which encouraged Chinese companies to establish business abroad, represented the turning point of China's engagement in Africa. Beijing encouraged Chinese companies to invest in the farming sector in Africa, however the production of food to be exported back to China does not represent the main objective. China is trying to enlarge its area of influence and enter new market, and African markets represent a good business. Chinese government never officially declared that agricultural investments in Africa represent a way to ensure food security in China, or at least not yet. Although, common perception is that China is supporting Chinese enterprises to acquire land abroad as part of a national food security strategy.

In chapter three, main definitions and ideas around land grabbing are explored. Therefore, it is possible to define “land grabbing” following two different paths. On the one hand, land grabs are strictly connected to food security as a part of public agenda. On the other hand, the private sector moved towards the acquisition of land abroad, as resulting of its financial returns. The role of China as a land grabber in Africa and different academic perspectives are presented in the last chapter. Indeed, according to the top 20-reported "Chinese" farmland acquisitions in Africa between 2000-2014 published on Landmatrix, the total amount of land leased was around 5,566,960 hectares. However, field research has documented that the total amount lease in 2014 was 88,837 ha, due to the fact that the majority of investment were abandoned, not implemented by Chinese or still under discussion (Brautigam, 2016). This is an example of how official data based on unchecked grounded research have created a robust myth around China's agricultural engagement in Africa, myths that this work aimed to challenge through an accurate review of the existing literature based on field research. Obviously, the paucity of data and the difficulties to get access to information on the ground increased the poor understanding of the Sino-African relations.

This dissertation finally presents and compares two different case studies respectively of the Hubei-Gaza friendship farm in Mozambique, and Wuhan Kaidi in Zambia. Those projects have been featured as case of "land grabbing" in different list, and the analysis allow to explore how myths differ from reality. These cases demonstrated how agricultural investment in Africa are not easy to finalize as it is often believed. Investments can face local opposition and up rise of the farmers as it happened in the case of the Hubei-Gaza friendship farm, or government opposition as in the case of Zambia. Land deals are dynamic processes involving a wide range of actors (States, private investors, local communities) with distinct interests, and this is an important issue that this analysis have considered.

The analysis of the several issues that have been shortly presented above served to achieve a better understanding of the role of China as a land grabber in Africa, due to the fact that Sino-Africa relations are a relatively new and under-researched topic. This dissertation aims to conduct a review of the existing literature to point out a new set of questions around under-explored topic regarding China's involvement in African agriculture. Field research is extremely necessary, and this work aims to be a starting point for devising such empirical research.

Chapter 1

Overview of the presence of China in Africa

1. Historical brief

The background of the Sino-African relation represents the cornerstone in the understanding of the growing economic exchange between China and the African countries since the 2000's. Although Western media seem to have become aware of the massive presence of China in Africa only after the world food crisis in 2007-08, China's presence in Africa can be dated back to the 1950s\1960s. However, objectives, scale of investment, and geographic involvement have changed and evolved over time (Van Dijk, 2009:9).

The Chinese government likes to date its first encounter with Africa as far back as the fifteenth century, when the admiral Zheng He of the Chinese Hui ethnic group visited the continent seven times to exchange gifts. The relationship – mainly with the Horn of Africa – was based on the trading of herbs, local products and animals. China is using this historical past to assert that its current involvement in Africa cannot be described as a colonial effort. Indeed, as in the past, the current involvement of China in Africa is just a commercial venture. The fact that the Chinese government date its first encounter during this period is to highlight how China differently from the West never aimed to colonize Africa, nowadays this reinforce Beijing discourse about the need of a South-south cooperation and to contrast Western's assumptions of Chinese new presence in Africa.

Despite these firsts encounters, it was during the time of the Afro-Asian Conference held in 1955, that China reestablished its contacts with Africa (Van Dijk, 2009:44). During the Afro-Asian conference, generally known as the Bandung Conference, the representatives of 29 non-aligned African, Asian, and Middle East nations condemned colonialism, racism and stated their disagreement towards the growing Cold War between Soviet Union and United States. In the colonialist era the support offered by China to the African Countries was mainly related to fostering independence movements and anti-colonial activities. With the end of colonialism, Mao Zedong sustained mostly socialist regimes. An example of the link between Africa and China is represented by the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia railway (Tazara). The project was started in 1967 and completed in 1975. still today it is the main infrastructure realized in Africa by China (Brautigam, 2011:40). The Tazara railway allowed the connection between

Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, and Kapiri Mposhi in Zambia via Mbeya. The railway construction was undertaken by the Chinese because no other country was willing to cooperate with the Tanzanian socialist regime due to its political positioning. Nowadays, China still cooperates with several African countries which are not sustained by Western countries because of their political instability, (Van Dijk, 2009:47). Between 1960s and 1970s, China reinforced its political agenda by strengthening its relations with Africa by providing medical aid, technical assistance and political support. Besides the help provided to independence movements such as the one supported by Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe (ZANU), China elected Guinea as a first aid recipient country, where it was decided to build a match and cigarette factory. The election of Guinea was strictly related to ideological interests and support to the socialist regime of Sèkou Tourè (Brautigam, 2011:31-32). At first, immediately after the African independence movements, China encouraged support for socialist regimes, as it did in the case of Ghana and Mali. However, as more countries began gaining independence in the 1960s, it was clear that China’s interests were not merely connected to the support of socialist regimes and their diffusion. Moreover, the several diplomatic visits conducted by the premier Zhou Enlai during 1964 and 1965 to independent African Countries started to alarm the West about Beijing’s interests. The speech held by Enlai in 1963 during his stay in Accra, in which he expressed the eight principles of China’s aid to foreigners, resulted particularly relevant. These principles, which were mainly based on mutual benefit, equity, non-interference in the political sphere and free interests in economic loans, still represent the pillar of China’s aid involvement in foreign countries today (Brautigam, 2011:32; see: Appendix 1). During their visits to Africa throughout the 1960s, Chinese delegations noticed the similarities they shared with the African continent. As China a decade earlier, Africa emerged from a long colonialist period and firstly needed to become self-sufficient in the production of primary products. China offered short and long-term projects related to the agricultural, industrial, and transport sectors which could be quickly settled by Chinese experts and immediately started by the recipient countries (Brautigam, 2011:33). Aid has mainly been used during these years as a diplomatic tool to improve the Chinese involvement in newly independent African countries.

However, China's shift around 1978 towards an “Open door” policy affected its aid policy relations with Africa. China’s open-door policy refers to the economic policies implemented by Deng Xiaoping, which opened China's economy to foreign investors. This policy also encouraged Chinese to invest abroad fostering China's presence all around the world. As a matter of fact, the Chinese government prioritized its own development by reducing the number of projects in Africa. These changes were summarized by Chinese premier Zhau Zygang during his visit in Africa in 1982. The premier slightly modified the principles expressed by Enlai in the 1960s, introducing “four principles” (equality and mutual benefit, pursuit of common development, focus on practical results). Among these principles, mutual benefit was the central point. Indeed, from a more ideological and political point of view the activities shifted onto a more focused economic and utilitarian path (Van Dijk, 2009:59). With the end of the Cold war, pragmatism moved China's efforts in those African countries which were overlooked by the United States and the Soviet Union, due to the opportunities offered by the opening up of the markets followed the open-door policy.

The withdrawal of the United States and Soviet Union from Africa during the 1980s, and the sharp decrease in development aid provided by Western countries, gave rise to the opportunity for China to foster its political agenda by strengthening contacts with African elites (Servant, 2005). Pragmatism replaced ideological involvement, and diplomatic efforts to enrich relations with African elites played a crucial role, in addition to commercial and economic activities.

Nowadays, China-Africa relations are working differently compared to the previous infant stage and diplomatic activities are the leading instrument in the new millennium. Moreover, the adoption of the “Go global” policy in 2001 under the president Jiang Zemin, encouraged Chinese companies to establish business abroad and coincided with China admission to the World trade organization(WTO), which represented the turning point of China's engagement in Africa. The frequent visits and travel of Chinese ministers to Africa demonstrated how China-Africa relations also have political importance. In 2013, the new President Xi Jinping chose Tanzania, South Africa, Republic of the Congo as his first overseas countries to visit, symbolizing a new era of China- Africa relations.

2. Policy and diplomatic activities

Public diplomacy is an important tool in strengthening China's political agenda abroad, and the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, has represented the strategic instruments in cultivating and enlarging contacts with African elites (Idun-Arkhurst, Laing, 2014). The FOCAC is the formal State-level instrument that regulates China's cooperation with the 49 African States that subscribe to the “One China” policy, then rejecting any kind of contact with Taiwan. The Republic of China(ROC), commonly referred to as Taiwan, perceived the One China under the ROC with Taipei as capital, while the People's republic of China consider itself as the only China with Beijing capital. However, during the third FOCAC held in 2006 in Beijing, China also offered an invitation to African countries which recognized Taiwan, clearly showing Beijing's interests in enlarging its area of influence, as it did a decade earlier when it expanded its relations with independent African countries that did not have a socialist regime (Alden, Large,De Oliveira, 2008:5). The conference allowed the creation of stronger economic ties and worked as a place for debate and meetings between ministers, diplomats, and businessmen. The action plan elaborated at each forum allowed several areas of interest to be covered such as the participation of Chinese companies in African infrastructural works and the export of African agricultural products to China.

Since the 2000, the FOCAC have been held every three years; during each conference, an action plan has been released in order to steer Sino-African relations. The first conference, held in Beijing in 2000, charted the path towards a new, long-term cooperation between China and Africa based on equality and mutual benefit, and oriented towards the possibility of new forms of engagement considering the new circumstances of the 21th century. FOCAC II was convened in December 2003 in Addis Ababa, and the conference was based on a action-oriented cooperation plan for the period of 2004-2006 ("Forum on China-Africa Cooperation-Addis Ababa Action Plan", 2009). The concerns that the West had towards the Sino-African relationship arose during the FOCAC III held in Beijing in 2006, during the "Year of Africa" as denominated by the Chinese government. The conference brought on consistent step forwards China's involvement in Africa, and the necessity to understand this new dynamic in the West (Brautigam, 2011:2). Up until 2006, China contributed around US$5.5bn worth of aid to African countries; during the 2006 Beijing summit China pledged its commitment to double the contribution by 2009. Moreover, China pledged to give around US$2 billion through preferential buyer's credit, during a three-year period (2006-2009) (Idun-Arkhurst. Laing, 2014:6). China's Export Import Bank (EXIMBANK), founded in 1994, was committed to financing Chinese business and exports to Africa in the following three years for a total of $20 billion. It is interesting to note how the World Bank's commitment towards Africa in the same period did not reach the $17 billion tag (Brautigam, 2011:2). Furthermore, during the Summit, China declared that it would take charge of training over 15,000 African professionals, while also increasing levels of education by providing around 4,000 scholarships every year for

African students by 2009 (during 2006 some 1,100 students from Africa were given the opportunity to study in China). Furthermore, China pledged to install 10 agricultural technology demonstration centers which are both sites of training and research, build 100 schools in rural areas, and send over 100 Chinese agricultural professionals (Alden, Large, De Oliveira, 2008:11). FOCAC III represented a massive step forward in China's commitment to Africa, while Western countries have refocused their attention on Sino-African relations and begun to express concern about Beijing taking over in Africa.

The publication of China's first white paper on African policy in 2006 represented the nation's ambition to further strengthen its position in the continent. The paper, which resumed China's objectives in Africa and the strategies activated to reach them in the following years, moved cooperation towards a new stage (Wu, 2012). The white paper on African policy reiterated the five principles of peaceful coexistence (mutual respect and support, non-aggression, non-interference, equality, mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence), and the “One China” policy as based on the Sino-African relations (Wu, 2012). Throughout the years, the FOCAC has represented the opportunity for China to publicize its commitment to Africa, and thus the conference represents the public instrument to announce preferential investments and foreign aid. An example is provided by the Chinese president Hu Jintao's speech at the opening ceremony of the 2006 Summit, when the commitment to double China's assistance to Africa by 2009 was announced (Jintao H,2006). Moreover, China's official development aid is not published in other occasions, because of China's lack of an international development cooperation agency, and here lies the problem in defining what can be labeled as aid or investment. However, the National people congress in March 2018 vote the proposal to finally set up a new international development cooperation agency (Brautigam, 2018).

During FOCAC III, the “Program for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development” was also launched, which mentioned the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Africa. SEZs are specific areas, that can either be directly owned by the Chinese or by Chinese-African ventures, where favorable economic policies, tax incentives, and flexible governmental measures are granted. The Chinese special economic zones in Africa are instrument to transfer China's own experience in a wide range of sector, create jobs and promote industrialization. If implemented in the right way, SEZs should attract foreign investment and favor convenient commercial policies, however they represent another transfer of China's own experience to Africa, which does not seem appropriate in every geographic context (Hanauer, Morris, 2014:39).

In some Ministerial conferences (2009: Sharm El Sheikh; 2012: Beijing; 2015: Johannesburg; September 2018: Beijing), China reinforced its commitment in terms of its investments in Africa, clearly showing an ambition to overlay a predominant role in the African continent. During FOCAC VI held in Johannesburg, China predicted that it would commit at least US$ 60 billion in the period of 2015-2018 (Finazzi, 2015). The partnership has emphasized investment in infrastructure, industrialization, agricultural development, and security. In fact, security has assumed a prominent role in recent times and has also become one of the five pillars of the China-Africa relations. However, China is still primarily interested in protecting its economic activities in African internal markets.

Besides the slowdown in the growth of China's annual GDP to 7.5 percent in the two years prior to the Johannesburg conference, President XI announced ten major cooperation plans that would involve China and Africa in the period between 2015 and 2018, and reaffirmed that "China-Africa relations have today reached a stage of growth unmatched in history" (Jinping, 2015). While China's lower growth rate and shift in demand directly affected commodity prices and African internal markets (Pigato & Tang, 2015: 2), the composition in the 2015 financial pledges, if compared to previous years' commitment, shows that China remains confident in Africa's future economic growth, and that China's assets in Africa are presumably going to grow. In fact, the US$60 billion commitment announced during the sixth conference was generally defined as “investment”, while in 2012 the US$20 billion was entirely “loans” and in 2009 the US$10 billion was delivered entirely in the form of “concessional loans”, which are based on terms more generous compare to market loans ensured through grace periods or below markets interest rates (Sun, 2015).

The last FOCAC has demonstrated how the presence of China in Africa has continuously consolidated since the first forum held in 2000. Sino-African relations are deeply connected to the growth of Chinese economy in the last decade and this also affects the instruments used. China-Africa relations are not without obstacles and they are at the center of growing debates.

China's presence in Africa has been seen with suspicions by Western countries, especially on the behalf that China's relations with Africa are guided by the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of other States which favored the neglect of environmental standards and threats to human rights. One of the topics that repeatedly comes up in academic discussions, concerns the implications of China's engagement in Africa vis à vis the possibility of political reforms in the continent, and for other EU strategies to support democracy and human rights. Nevertheless, China's aid strategy is based on its own experience as a developing country and its model contrasted with the dominant “Washington consensus”. Furthermore, the so-called Washington Consensus model is a term coined by John Williamson in 1989, which resumed a set of neoliberal economic reforms primarily based on deregulation, liberalization of trade, privatization of State enterprises, which should promote economic development in developing countries. However, the Washington Consensus does not conceive the singularity of each developing country's political and economic direction, wrongly assuming that “one fits all”. Since the consolidation of China-Africa relations, Western countries shall not perceive China as a competitor but rather will rethink cooperation delivery and triangulate the strategy. China and the West engage in cooperation in different ways, thus it is probable that African countries are interested in receiving both types of engagement.

3. China development aid and its origins

The presence of China in Africa has influenced the relationship that the African continent has with the West. China presented itself as the propeller of a model of development alternative to the Western approach. The origins of China's aid and its own experience as a developing country, especially with Japan, and the West have broadly shaped its foreign aid strategy and its aid program has been elaborated from its experience as recipient country. In fact, China's lack of proper technologies brought the country to accept “compensatory trade”, thus the sale of services and good in exchange for other goods or services instead of cash. Even if nowadays China is considered a superpower, during the 1970s it was an economy based on agriculture. As it is happening in Africa today, when China emerged from the Cultural revolution, foreign companies started to take an interest in China's natural resources which were various and diversified. Japan entered the Chinese market first, and in 1978 the Japanese and Chinese governments signed a trade agreement which allowed China to import US$10 billion worth of modern Japanese technologies, in exchange for the same amount in coal and crude oil to be exported to Japan. In the 1980s, China had already signed about seventy contracts with Japan to foster ten major projects which would represent the cornerstone of China's first steps towards modernization (Brautigam, 2011:47). This financial model used as a means for developmental purposes was something new to the West that China had inherited from Japan's experience. The fact that they were able to repay loans with natural resources was perceived by China as a win-win situation, as otherwise they would not have been able to repay Japan for the transfer of technologies that Beijing needed to foster the economic development in the initial phase. The Japanese heritage has shaped China's relationship with African's resource-rich countries, especially regarding “compensatory trade”, and investments repaid with natural resources. Moreover, compensatory trade allowed infant industries to import the capital they needed, and they repaid it with the goods they produced. China has embraced it as a win-win cooperation, and it is not surprising that a similar attitude is expressed in African countries. For example, investment in resource exchange has been established between China and Angola, the Congo, Senegal and almost everywhere else in Africa (Brautigam, 2011:56).

3.1 China aid practice

After half a century the five principles of mutual respect and support, non-aggression, non-interference, equality, mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence put forward by Zhou Enlai and incorporated into the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India in 1954 (Eslava, Fakhiri & Nesiah, 2017:187-192) remain the cornerstone of China's external diplomacy.

Moreover, China does not accept the label of “donor” and presents itself as the biggest developing country while considering Africa as the continent composed of the highest number of developing countries, shifting the argument around the south-south cooperation, equality and mutual benefit (Van Dijk, 2009:60). Firstly, south-south cooperation is based on China's own experiences in addressing pro-development challenges in similar socioeconomic and environmental conditions. Secondly, it is based on equal relations and thus on mutual benefit, solidarity, horizontal cooperation and the absence of strings and conditions. However, comparing China's aid flow to those provided by other countries is difficult due to a lack of a central aid agency in China, and because of the Chinese definition of aid strongly differs from the one customarily used by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Sun, Jayaram & Kassiri, 2017:18). The OECD defines official development assistance (ODA) as concessional funding with a grant element of at least 25%, which are provided by official agencies to promote economic development and welfare in developing countries ("Official Development Assistance (ODA)", 2018). China is not a member of the

OECD and it does not embrace in this definition. Officially, China provides aid through eight principal forms: complete projects, goods and materials, technical cooperation, human resource development cooperation, medical assistance, emergency humanitarian aid, volunteer programs, and debt relief (Carter, 2017:2). For instance, China's foreign aid includes military assistance, cooperative projects, construction of sport facilities which are not included in the Development assistance committee (DAC) definition of ODA. Concurrently, China excludes administrative donor costs, scholarships offered to study in China, which fall under the category of ODA (Carter, 2017:4). Moreover, China is reluctant to use the term "aid", thus Chinese financing to Africa are including under the category of development finance. Furthermore, China's aid to Africa is not attached to any condition aside from the engagement in the "One China" policy. However, aid delivery is tied to the procurement of goods and services of which at least 50% needs to be produced in China, but African governments can freely choose how to allocate the aid funding (Hanauer & Morris, 2014:38).

However, the fact that China went from being listed as one of the twentieth least developed countries in the 1980s to having an annual GDP growth of 10 percent in the last three decades, is what most attracted African elites. However, the impressive economic growth of China and its position as major emerging economy is not the only factor that fascinates African countries. The fact that China's development has been carried out independently from the development aid of the major international agencies such as the World Bank (WB) and the International monetary fund (IMF) and without the political constraints that this implies, has showed African elites an alternative model of development to the one imposed by the West and its global institutions. On the one hand, the "Chinese model" contrasted the neoliberal recipe that international agencies such as the WB and IMF have created for developing countries. On the other hand, it is true that the "Chinese model" does not consider political and moral aspects such as human rights policies and democracy. However, the model presented above in addition to China's development aid has contributed to the questioning of the prominent "Washington consensus" and to the welcoming in Africa of what is known as the Beijing consensus.

The so called "Beijing Consensus" has gained notoriety since Joshua Cooper Ramo's publication with the same title, issued in 2004. The "Beijing consensus" represents the model of development that China proposed as an alternative to the principles of free market and democracy embraced by the Washington Consensus. As Ramo highlighted in its extended essay, the Beijing consensus is constructed around three pillars: innovation-based development, economic success measured by other indexes rather than pre-capita GDP, and self-determination (Ramo, 2004). Nevertheless, the Beijing consensus cannot be understood as an agreed consensus since the Chinese government never officially embraced it. It is more of a paradigm of China's past experience, resembled lessons, philosophy, and the manifestation of the growing soft power Beijing is acquiring around the world. However, the term has been widely used by policy makers to express an alternative to the dominant WC, especially since more developing countries in Africa are strengthening their relations with China because of their failed experience with the West (Qasem, de Ridder & van Dongen, 2011).

4. China's involvement in Africa: actual trends

The paucity of China's data publication has challenged the estimation of the actual presence of China in Africa, creating a poor understanding of China's involvement which has sometimes been publicly perceived as a new-colonialism, and as a voracity for Africa's rich natural resources. As it is often erroneously perceived, China's involvement in Africa is not simply related to the extraction of natural resources, but also to infrastructure development and manufacturing. Moreover, China is engaging in diplomacy, trade and is increasingly using new instruments of soft-power as cultural exchanges to foster its influence. Clearly, China is interested in Africa's natural resources, especially its oil and gas, to foster its economy. However, this does not represent China's unique objective. The new presence of China in Africa since the start of the millennium has been driven by strategic interests in local markets for Chinese exports, to seek legitimacy in international arena, and to build peace, stability and prosperity in Africa both for its well-being and for the stability of China's investment and economic activities. African governments are important allies that China seeks in the global political arena. In 1971, China's admission into the United Nations was strongly supported by African countries, which presently account for nearly one quarter of the total number of UN member States. This unfolded into a win-win situation. On the one hand China seeks allies in the international arena and the African countries represent a crucial voting bloc, on the other hand African countries want to be threatened with equality in international fora (Hanauer & Morris, 2014:5-7).

Nevertheless, China is Africa's major trading partner and on behalf of the lack of official data, several field reports have been published in the last few years, to shine light on the magnitude of China's real involvement and to contrast the poor understanding of China-Africa relations (see: Sun, Jayaram & Kassiri, 2017; Chen & Nord, 2017; Atkins, Brautigam, Chen & Hwang, 2017).

4.1 Economic engagement

Economic goals are the base of existing Sino-African relations, and the main channels of economic engagement have mainly been trade, investment, and loans. Over the last twenty years, trade between China and Africa has risen more than 40 times. Chinese direct investment in Africa has expanded due to the growth of Chinese enterprises, and Chinese manufacturers have provided African consumers with low-price goods that were previously out of their reach; this, however, is harming local African manufacturers which are unable to compete with the lower prices of China's exported goods (Chen & Nord, 2017:49). Since 2009, China has represented Africa's largest trading partner. However, the break in commodity prices in 2014 and China's domestic slow down, has directly affected China-Africa relations (Atkins, Brautigam, Chen & Hwang, 2017). This slump has exacerbated the trade imbalance over the last several years, posing new challenges and increasing concerns about the inability of African countries to diversify their economy and their continuous dependence on the natural resource market. The flourishing of Sino-African trade relations in the last decade has been balanced with China's need for Africa's natural resources, and with African countries necessity to attract investment and develop infrastructure. In 2011, China invested around $14 billion into financing Africa's infrastructure through the Exim bank, mainly related to the power and transportation sector (Hanauer & Morris, 2014:34). The understanding of China-Africa economic relations is however challenged by the opacity of the data. In order to investigate the change in trade and the volume of China's foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa, the economic bulletin published in 2017 by the China and Africa research initiative (SAIS-CARI), directed by Prof. Deborah Brautigam, will be used as a reference point in the next paragraphs. The economic bulletin resumes China-Africa economic relations over the last decade, especially focusing on the changes occurred in the last five years related to the 2014 slump of global commodity prices (Atkins, Brautigam, Chen & Hwang, 2017).

4.2 Changes in trade

Since 2000, the presence of China in Africa has sharply increased, and in 2009 China became Africa's largest trading partner overtaking the United States. The bilateral trade volume has shifted from US$ 10.6 billion in 2000 to US$ 210 billion in 2014, and the Chinese government estimated that in 2015 it would have reach US$ 310 billion, but realistically it did not reach above US$ 200 billion. However, since 2014 the volume of Africa's exports to China has consistently decreased (Fig. 1), mainly due to the weakness in global commodity prices, lower demand from emerging economies and new sources of energy supplies from Canada and the U.S. However, the volume of China's exports to Africa remained constant during the same period and this has reinforced the West's concerns about whether China-Africa relations are actually based on mutual benefit, as China constantly stated ("Data: China-Africa Trade", 2017).

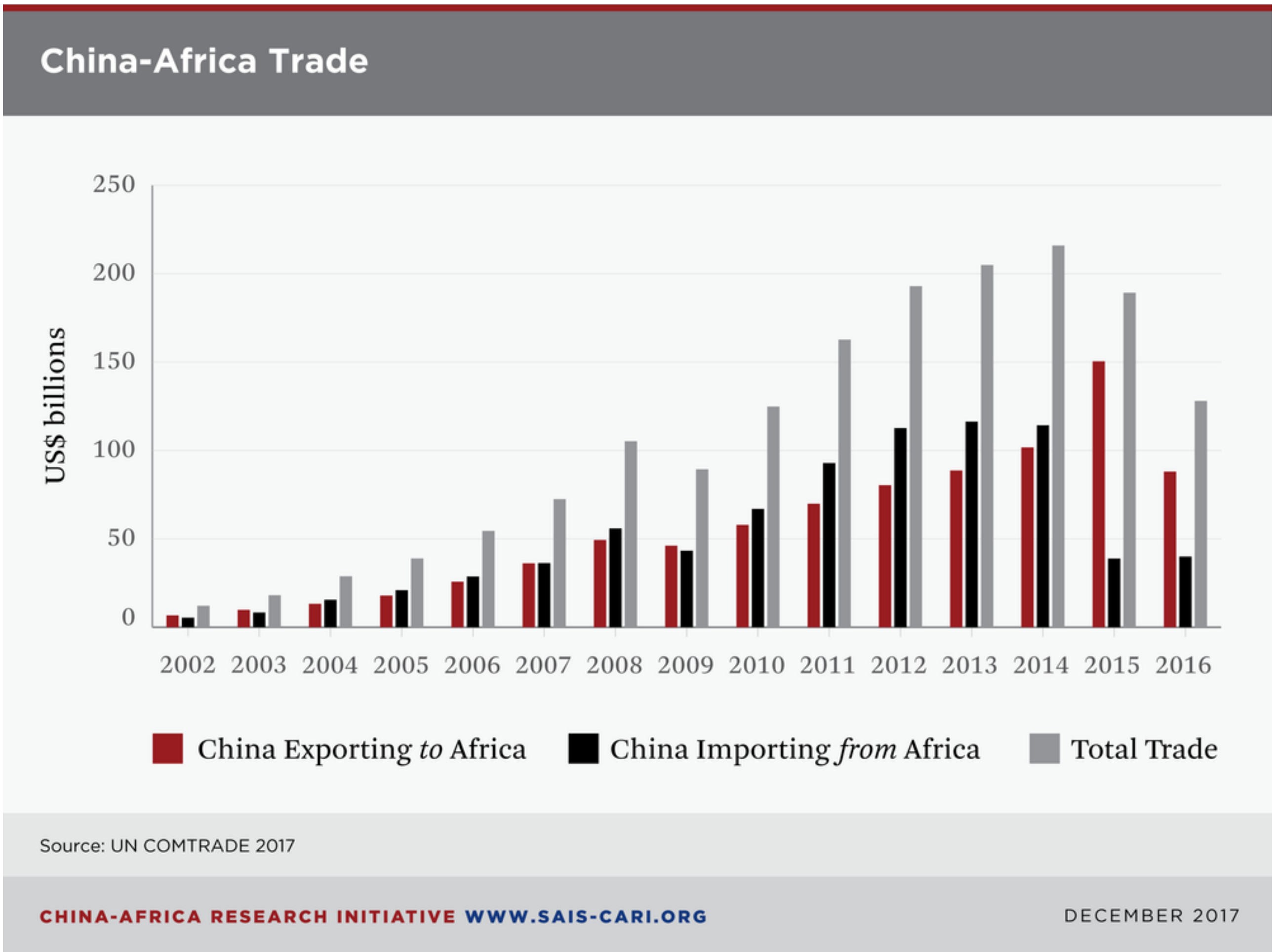


Figure 1 China-Africa trade (2002-2016). Source: "Data: China-Africa Trade" (2017)

The concentration of China-Africa trade strictly differs by country and by sector. In 2015, the five leading African exporters to China were Angola, South Africa, Sudan, the

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Republic of Congo. Within the same period, oil, ores, copper, wood, timber and oil seeds represented the five most exported products to China from African countries. Between 2014 and 2015, the value of exports, especially to Angola, South Africa and the Congo decreased by at least 30% (Fig. 2). This is a consequence of the 2014 commodity price slump, since Africa's largest exporters to China are clearly commodity-rich countries. Nevertheless, Angola and the Congo are the main exporters of oil to China; between 2010 and 2015, the 99% of Angola's registered exports to China consisted of petroleum products.

Rank	2014 origins (US$ bn)		2015 origins (US$ bn)	
1	Angola	31,11	Angola	16
2	South Africa	8,68	South Africa	5,8
3	Congo	5,48	Sudan	3,06
4	South Sudan	4,33	DRC	2,66
5	Equatorial Guinea	3,22	Congo	2.62

Figure 2 African's leading exporters to China, 2014-2015 Source: Atkins, Brautigam, Chen & Hwang (2017)

On the other hand, China's exports to Africa remained stable over the same period; South Africa is the leading exports market in Africa, followed by Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria and Angola. The products exported by China to Africa did not differ from the previous years, and are mostly represented by electrical machinery, machinery, vehicles, iron and steel products, and non-knitted clothing.

4.3 Foreign direct investments to Africa

Analyzing China's foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa gives rise to several challenges, due to different understandings about what is considered as FDI in China's statistical data report and due to the lack of data about FDI per sector in Africa. The Chinese investments mandates in Africa are released by the Export-Import (Exim) bank of China, and China's development bank to broaden investment in Africa.

In 2015, Chinese FDI stock to Africa reached US$ 34bn, and thus an increased US$ 2bn compared to the previous year. Even if it still represents a steady growth it cannot be compared to the US$ 7bn increase reached between 2013 and 2014. In 2015, Ghana was the first recipient country for the delivery of Chinese FDI in Africa, followed by Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and D.R.C. The destination of Chinese foreign direct investment to Africa has changed over the years, and some countries have fallen down in the rankings (Fig. 3). Overall, in 2015 Chinese FDI to Africa represented 3.7% compared to the total of Chinese FDI abroad, indeed the main destination is still Hong Kong.

Rank	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015	
1	Sudan	12	Angola	92	Zimbabwe	18	Algeria	66	Ghana	83
2	Zimbabwe	40	DRC	44	Zambia	93	Zambia	25	Kenya	82
3	Mauritius	19	Nigeria	33	Kenya	31	Kenya	78	S. Africa	33
4	Zambia	92	Zambia	92	Angola	24	Congo	39	Tanzania	26
5	Nigeria	97	Zimbabwe	87	Nigeria	09	Nigeria	00	DRC	14

Figure 3 African recipients of Chinese FDI, 2011-2015 Source: Atkins, Brautigam, Chen & Hwang (2017)

4.4 Chinese loans to Africa

According to the data elaborated by the China-Africa research initiative (CARI), in 2015 the total amount of Chinese loans to African governments was US$13.1bn, just a slight decrease compared to the previous year, after a peak of over US$15bn that was reached in 2013 (Figure

4). However, it is important to notice that during 2015 only 21 African countries had been receiving loans from China while in 2014 24 countries were targeted.

In 2015, the main recipient of Chinese loans was Ghana, used for the extension of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), and the Lamu Coal Power Plant. The other main recipient countries were Uganda, Senegal, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. Disaggregate data by sector reveal that the transport sector covered 39% of the total of Chinese loans to Africa in 2015, for an amount of US$4.59bn, followed by power stations (38%), industry (6%), water (6%), education (2%), and other (9%).

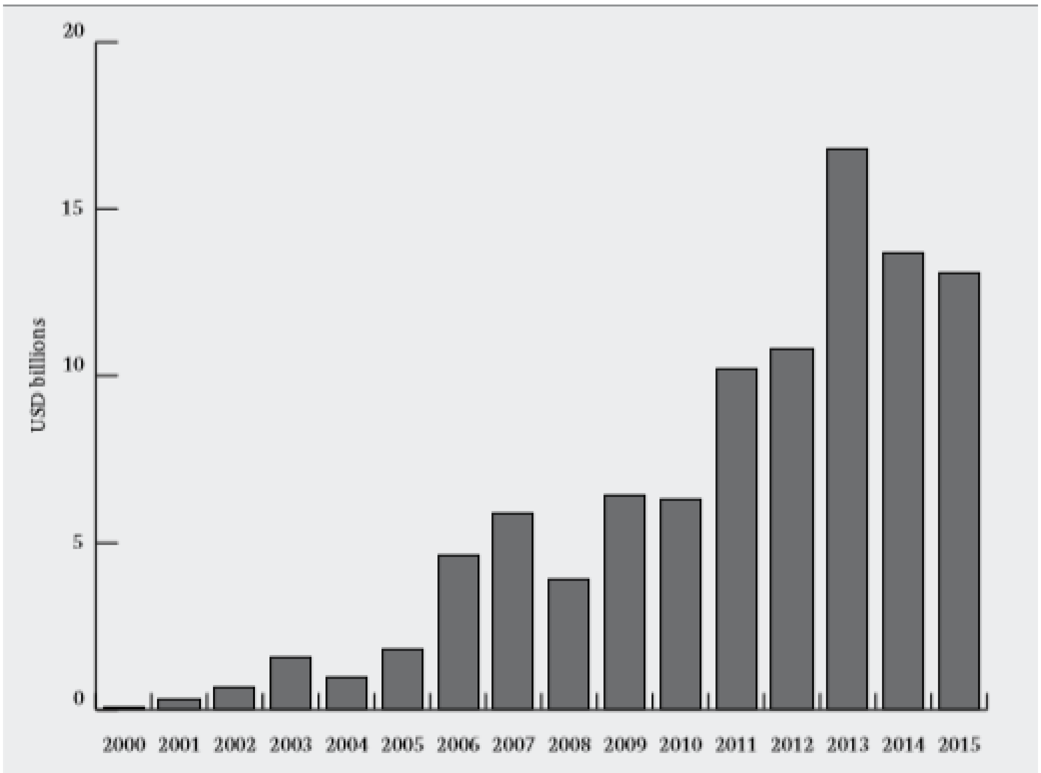


Figure 4 Chinese loans to Africa 2000-2015. Source: Atkins, Brautigam, Chen & Hwang (2017)

5. Criticism

The increased engagement of China in Africa has raised criticism and debate. The Western countries are concerned about China taking over Africa, and about the impact that China's engagement could have on political reforms. One of the issues debated concerning the presence of China in Africa, is the impact that the presence of China could have on EU strategies to support democracy and human rights. China arguments that the principle of non-intervention is related to China's objective in promoting economic development and human rights, and that the West is attempting to demonize China's role in Africa (see: Zheng, 2016;Xie & Copeland, 2018). The impact of Chinese involvement in African countries has both positive and negative aspects. China has contributed to Africa’s economic development, created jobs, built infrastructure, and offered educational training. However, as the 2014 slump in commodities price has highlighted that China has reinforced African countries' dependence on natural resources and has strongly weakened local manufacturing industries that are unable to compete with the cheaply exported goods from China. This has produced a growing anti-Chinese feeling towards China's political and economic engagement in Africa. The impact of cheap Chinese goods (e.g.textiles), the taking over of jobs and business from local populations, and the disagreement about local policies represent the main sources of anti-Chinese populism. Obviously, opinions towards China's engagement vary across regions of Africa (Hess & Aidoo, 2013).

Chapter 2
China's involvement in African agriculture

2. China's food security and Africa's abundant resources

In 2005, China became a major importer of food, and to safeguard food supply, the Chinese government introduced parameters of food security. In 2008, the Ministry of Agricultural released a memorandum which set up a “red line” of 125 million hectares of arable land that pledged to protect domestic food security and set a target of 95% of self-sufficiency in grains (Alden, 2013: 17). In 2013, China imported 4% of the world's grain, and in the same year the Chinese government announced that nearly the 40% of China's arable land is suffering from degradation (Horta, 2014). In order to face these challenges, Beijing adopted strict farmland protection policy and tried to control population growth.

Despite the achievement in raising domestic production in agriculture, food security remains a major focus in China. The growing concerns around food security, have led China to endorse a “Green revolution” which relies on the utilisation of hybrid seeds and fertilizers derived from petroleum (Alden, 2012: 18). However, the government will not be able to face internal demand of agricultural products to its 1.4 billion population solely with domestic production (Jiang, 2015).

Food security combined with the millions of Chinese farmers pushed off from their lands may thus logically explain the attraction for rural African land. As a result, China's rising presence in African agriculture has been met with suspicion even though China is not the only country that seeks to buy or lease land abroad.

Africa is a main target for land deals. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Africa is estimated to have 60% of the world's uncultivated and arable land. However, although Africa is a net importer of food, agriculture still remains highly underdeveloped due to poor management, lack of resources, and technology. Food security in Africa remains a central issue as the number of people that suffer chronic hunger is rising and the region strongly depends on the global market and foreign assistance to address food supply (Brautigam, 2015:252).

China's objective to obtain land abroad combined with Africa's urgent need of technological transfer, to contrast the chronically food insecurity ("African Agriculture, Transformation and Outlook", 2013:27). However, until jump to conclusion about China's intention in Africa agriculture, how has been mediatically reported following the 2007-08 food crisis (i.e. “China eyes overseas land in food push,” an article published in the *Financial Times*, see Anderlini 2008), it is necessary to analyze China's engagement in Africa agriculture from its very beginning and to determine to what extent the existing global policy, in which China endorsed in 2001, has shaped its actual dynamics. Little has been researched on the Chinese investment and aid projects in rural Africa, and this has undobtedly contributed to the poor and ideological understanding of the topic. The following paragraphs aim to better understand China's involvement in African agriculture.

2.1 The changing role of China's engagement in African agriculture

China's involvement in African agriculture can be traced back to 1959, when the Chinese government first sent food aids to independent Guinea (Alden, 2013: 18). This longstanding engagement reflected China's diplomatic strategies and has changed over time, as in general China's aptitudes towards Africa. In the infant stage between 1960 and 1970, China's funding aid aimed at the construction of large State-owned farms which embraced the model of modern socialism like Tanzania Mbarali State farms (Brautigam, 2011: 237). However, the shifts of China's engagement in African agriculture followed Taiwan's “Operation Vanguard,” launched in 1961 with the aim of financing small- medium scale rice and agriculture cultivation. The majority of Taiwan's target countries were in Africa, thus China needed to contrast Taiwan's objectives. Until the mid-1980's, China's financed large State-owned farms including the Kapatawee rice farm in Liberia and Megbass in Sierra Leone. The diplomatic struggle with Taiwan and the scant economic sustainability of large farms influenced China's new approach in rural Africa. Moreover, China's shifts into African agriculture have been related to the former's admission to the United Nations in 1971, which was strongly sustained by the vote of African countries (Brautigam & Xiaoyang, 2009:688).

The Chinese government started overtaking Taiwan's demonstration farms, as a result of rising African diplomatic recognition of Beijing over Taipei.

Diplomatic struggle shaped China's new engagement in African agriculture; from large scale State-owned farms that China turned to small-scale projects in the 1980's. However, even if China successfully outpaced Taiwan in the majority of projects, economic sustainability remained low. Once the Chinese left the projects, they rapidly declined due to several causes. One cause was that African farmers were reluctant to work through Chinese practices as they were not used to their system. Another cause was that Chinese entrepreneurs complained about the limited cooperation provided by local governments to make projects last (Brautigam, 2011:249). China strongly assisted African agriculture, although in the mid-1990s it was already clear that China's aid projects would not achieve economic sustainability in the long term or in the absence of China's constant assistance. Chinese found that was hard to achieve sustainability of agricultural projects in the long term. Failure in African rural projects was also experienced by other foreign donors. For instance, the World Bank reported that during 1965-1986, 50% of projects failed in rural areas. Similar difficulties were experienced by China. Although the projects resulted failed to deliver benefits, the diplomatic struggle with Taiwan has encouraged China to continue agricultural aid in Africa (Brautigam & Xiaoyang, 2009: 689).

However, it was clear that the aid program should provide profits to China as well as support for African's own development, based on the principle of mutual benefit. China needed a way to make aid program profitable and the phase of experiments launched in the 1980s under the leadership of Zhao Ziyang represented the opportunity to connect aid to economic engagement. Several initiatives were launched under this experimental program. For instance, as a means for obtaining diplomatic legitimacy, China rehabilitated public works constructed during the 1960s and 1970s. Another initiative that launched in 1985 involved the setup of joint ventures between Chinese and African companies (Brautigam & Xiaoyang, 2009:690). Moreover, structural adjustment and the expansion of privatizations in the 1990s, allowed China to further enter into Africa's agricultural sector and to reinvest in their previously failed projects through joint ventures and long-term leasing. After China endorsed the "Open door" policy in 1978, and with the start of the new millennium, Chinese investments in Africa have grown rapidly.

3. Going global in agriculture

On December 2001, China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and endorsed what is widely known as the "Going Global/ Going Out" Policy. The Going Global Policy represented the new tools China needed to link aid with other forms of economic engagement. The Going Global Policy encouraged Chinese companies to invest abroad, provide high level technologies and services, and facilitate the entrance of Chinese firms into the global market (Brautigam & Xiaoyang, 2009:694).

Agriculture has represented a cornerstone in the Going Global framework since the beginning and overseas farming was one of the pillar which sustained the policy. Moreover, following China's admission to the WTO, agriculture became one of the greatest concerns. China engaged in African agriculture through different modalities including State-sponsored enterprises (SOEs). However, since the mid-1990's also small-scale enterprises have played a rising role and constantly increased, promoted by the Chinese government (Sun, 2011). At State level, the main actors involved in the promotion of China's Going Global in agriculture are namely the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), China development bank (CDB), China export import bank (EXIM BANK), and the Ministry of foreign affairs. The role of these actors is central in the promotion of China's aid and investment abroad.

3.1 China's main State actors

The Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Agriculture have specific units which support Going Global, mainly supporting Chinese enterprises to implement agriculture cooperation projects overseas. Moreover, Chinese banking system is composed by two policy banks. The China Development Bank (CDB) was launched in 1994 as a State-owned policy bank. The CDB provides commercial loans for China's businesses to become global brands. Furthermore, the China-Africa Development Fund (CAD-fund), an investment vehicle to encourage Chinese enterprises to invest in Africa, was established by the CDB in 2007 (Brautigam, 215:58-60). During the last FOCAC held in Johannesburg in 2015, President Xi Jinping pledged an increase of an additional $5 billion to the CAD-fund, which in total reached $10 billion ("The Company Overview," n.d.). The China Export-Import Bank, also established in 1994, is the other policy bank subordinated to the State council. The main role of the China Eximbank is to facilitate, export, and assist Chinese enterprises in offshore contract projects and outbound investments. Finally, the Ministry of foreign affairs has a specific department of international economic affairs in charge of support the going global strategy. The department provides help and advice during agreement negotiations (Brautigam, 2015:60).

3.2 Going global in the new millennium

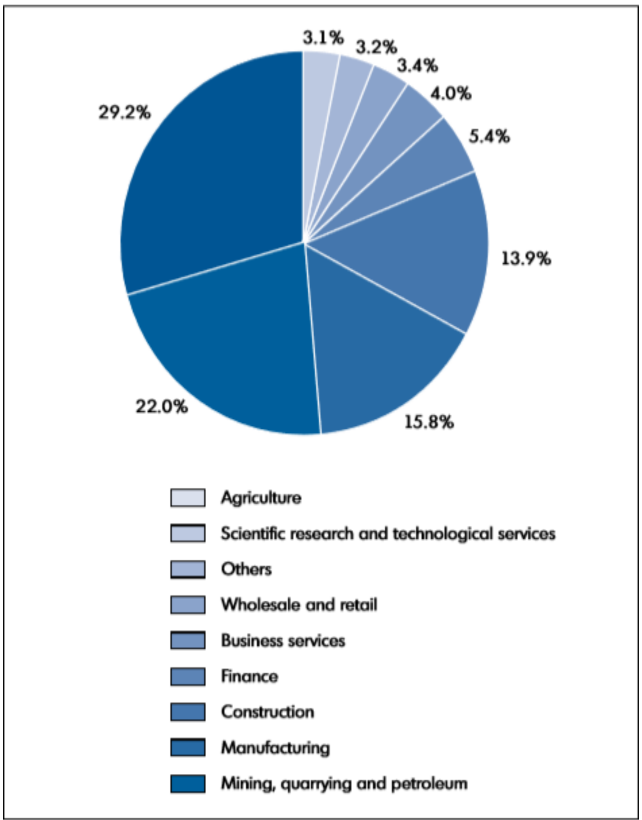
Overseas farming has been a central strategy of the Going Global policy since its very beginning, and Africa, with its high percentage of unused arable land, an early focus. In 2001 MOA and MOFCOM launched a seminar on African agricultural cooperation. The seminar was attended by 21 representative ministries and over 60 Chinese companies. During a seminar speech, the vice-minister of MOFTEC Wei Jianguo commented that "China-Africa agricultural cooperation in the new century must be conducted by enterprises and should be market-oriented" (Brautigam, 2015:61). China's intentions regarding investment in the farming sector in Africa was already clear. On the basis of mutual benefit, China encouraged its companies to invest in African agriculture and help achieve food self-sufficiency there. However, China-Africa agriculture cooperation also had to be profitable for China, therefore aid would need to play a role. China-Africa agricultural cooperation, as commented by Wei Jianguo, needed to be driven by enterprises and be market oriented (Brautigam, 2015:61). As a result of the seminar, China's investment in agriculture was presented as a tool to ensure food security in Africa. However, some Chinese officials claimed that the government's strategy was to produce food in Africa that would then be exported to China (see: Xinhua, 2004). These claims were contrasted by Niu Dun, Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture's Department of International Cooperation. Niu Dun commented to the China Daily that food self-sufficiency was one of China's main objectives and that the country would be able to feed its' own people without relying on overseas farming ("China can feed its own people: Official," 2004).

In 2004, the first forum on the Going Global strategy was held by MOFCOM. During the forum, it was announced that China would build overseas farms by using multiple approaches, which comprises two main categories of enterprise management: State-owned enterprises (SOEs), and private enterprises. In 2006, an inter-ministerial working group formed by the Ministries of Finance, Commerce, and Agriculture was set up in order to develop new strategies that would accelerate China's Going Global policy and modernize its agribusiness. As a consequence, before the 2007-08 food crisis, the Chinese government was already finalizing a new set of incentives and tools to foster China's Going Global in agriculture (Brautigam, 2015:62). The incentives can be seen below.

3.3 New incentives structure

In 2004, the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Finance jointly published the first catalog on outward investment. The catalog served as a guide to Chinese investors and suggested the sectors and countries favorable to receive incentives because of their particular interest for China. The catalog included five target sectors and agriculture was one of them. For each country, specific sectors of interest were listed. Nevertheless, even if China's interest in African agriculture have been longstanding has commented above, in 2004 its presence in was still limited.

For instance, only thirteen out of the sixty-seven countries listed were African. However, during the following years the interest grew: ten African countries were added to the catalog in 2005 and an additional ten in 2007. Nevertheless, the catalog recommended investments in crop cultivation and farming only in twelve of the thirty-three African countries listed. Furthermore, in 2005 to support the Going Global initiative the Ministry of Commerce and Finance established the special fund for foreign economic and technical cooperation (FETC), which aimed at finance the agriculture sector within others sector listed. Moreover, it allowed Chinese companies investing in agriculture abroad to benefit from interest rates subsidies, and to obtain rebates of previous investment expenses, up to US$ 30 million (Brautigam, 2015:63). Moreover, a strategic cooperation agreement was signed by the China Development Bank and the Ministry of Agriculture in 2006 to foster China's agriculture also financed land acquisition abroad. In total, the CDB pledged over $2.5 billion for the agreement. Even if the majority of funds have been used for China's internal agricultural sector, $420 million were allocated for going out projects (Brautigam, 2015:63). Thus, African agriculture was already an objective for China before the 2007-08 food crisis, although its presence was limited compared to other foreign investors. In fact, in 2009 Chinese FDI stock to African agricultural accounted only for the 3,1% of the total of FDI to Africa (FIGURE 1). However,



in 2009 China's Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) to African agriculture accounted for over $30 million, nearly four times more compared to the involvement in 2000; rising trends are a sign that a greater role will be played by China in rural Africa (Alden, 2013:17).

Figure 1: Chinese FDI stock to Africa in 2009. Source: ***(Sun, 2011)***

3.4 Economic diplomacy

China's engagement in African agriculture is both related to diplomatic and economic strategies. Diplomatically, China's investments in rural Africa are a tool for maintaining and enriching relations with African leaders providing the host countries with the incentives and technologies they strongly need both to foster economic development and to ensure their population's welfare. Economically, Africa is the main target for China's resource-oriented agricultural investment (Jiang, 2015). The 2006 Beijing Summit of the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) represented a turning point in China's engagement in Africa agriculture. For instance, in 2006 the FOCAC commissioned to forty international experts a strategic Africa investment road map. The two areas in which China proved to be the most competitive were seed cultivation and agricultural technology. It was then suggested the establishment of Chinese agricultural demonstration centers around Africa aiming at attracting Chinese investors (more on demonstration centers below). President Hu Jintao pledged to install ten agricultural demonstrations and send over 100 agricultural experts to Africa. Moreover, during the Beijing summit, the Chinese government declared it would support private and State-owned enterprises to invest in Africa. The increased Chinese aid commitment to African agriculture combined with China's ambitions to overlay a leading economic role in Africa (Brautigam, 2011:237-241). Chinese agribusiness investors perceived African farms as a potential new market and African farmers as new potential customers. The results of the action plans were released at the FOCAC while the Africa Policy white paper also presented in 2006 resumed clearly China's policy in Africa and comprised proposals and measures regarding agriculture cooperation in Africa (Brautigam & Xiaoyang, 2012:2). The 2006 Africa policy white paper contained specific objectives regarding agriculture cooperation:

> Focus will be laid on the cooperation in land development, agricultural plantation, breeding technologies, food security, agricultural machinery and the processing of agricultural and side line products. China will intensify cooperation in agricultural technology, organize training courses of practical agricultural technologies, carry out experimental and demonstrative agricultural technology projects in Africa and speed up the formulation of China-Africa Agricultural Cooperation Program ("China's African Policy", 2006).

Agriculture and food security have also continued to be a central point during the last FOCAC held in Johannesburg in 2015. The jointly adopted action plan (2016-2018) strengthened China-Africa agriculture cooperation projects. The Chinese government pledged to carry out agriculture demonstration centers in Africa and even send 30 teams of Chinese agricultural experts to provide vocational training to the area. Moreover, China committed to further support by encouraging Chinese enterprises to invest in African agriculture ("The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Johannesburg Action Plan (2016-2018)", 2015).

3.4.1 Agro-technology demonstrations centers (ATDCs)

The agricultural demonstration centers represented the opportunity for China to build a bridge between aid and business, and as a part of the Going out policy in agriculture represented a new model for China-Africa agricultural cooperation since 2006. For instance, the centers would be financed with Beijing's aid funding and administrated by Chinese enterprises for the first three years, and then for five to eight years in case the recipient countries accepted. Chinese companies were encouraged to invest in these design centers both to increase China's agricultural opportunities and find a solution to the economic in-sustainability of previous Chinese aid projects. For instance, ATDC were presented as the new model to achieve economic sustainability of China's agricultural aid projects in Africa; mixing aid with business. Nowadays, ATDCs are present in 23 African countries. Scholars have argued that Chinese ATDC represents an opportunity for Africa, in terms of transferring advanced technologies and resembled lessons from China's past experiences (Xu, Li, Qi, Tang & Mukwereza, 2016).

The Chinese government provides a maximum of $6 million in funding for the construction of centers that combine both living and working spaces for technical cooperation. However, the centers are not directly controlled by Beijing, but by companies selected by the government. The full implementation of ATDCs can be divided into three different phases. The first and second years are dedicated to infrastructure construction, then the following three years focus on technical cooperation (demonstration, trainees, field trials, extension, etc.) Finally, the third phase aims at reaching the economic sustainability of the center, while the businesses involved cover the costs. The center supplies local agricultural development through transfer of technologies and demonstration, while the ownership of the land remains under local cooperation partners. Following the three years of State-sponsored technical cooperation, the companies responsible to hold the centers should develop a business-based sustainable model for the center to carry on without Beijing's funding. Chinese policy makers strongly believed that the business-based management model that is at the base of the ATDC is an effective tool to pursue aid sustainability and stimulate local development.

The ATDC does not represent just a strategic model to link aid to business. Instead, demonstration centers are usually located near capital cities, and this allowed China's presence in African agriculture to be strongly visible at national and international level (Xu, Li, Qi, Tang & Mukwereza, 2016:85). However, field research results included in the article "Science, Technology, and the Politics of Knowledge: The Case of China's Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centers in Africa", discuss how Chinese and Africans partners have different ideas about the functions of demonstration centers in regard to extension and demonstration. On the one hand, Chinese experts perceived ATDCs as a mean to transfer Chinese technologies into an African context. On the other hand, African partners complained that the Chinese used the centers mainly as research instruments, therefore demonstration played an insignificant role and remained only inside the center. African researchers argued that the conditions that were created inside ATDCs (e.g. irrigation systems), were not congruent with the actual access to facilities that local farmers had outside the center (Xu, Li, Qi, Tang & Mukwereza, 2016:85).

3.4.2 Production models

China's agricultural investment in Africa is mainly structured on three production models: farm/plantation production, contract farming, or a combination of both. In the case of farm/plantation production, Chinese agro-investors need to either have land or buy the land from local land owners or the national government, although this is strictly related to the legal framework of each African country. The leasing term can vary from 15-99 years. Furthermore, in the case of farm/plantation production, Chinese managers are in charge to run the companies while local farmers are employed to grow the crops. The number of local workers hired is proportional to the size of the cultivation. For example, in 1999 the Tanzanian government leased 69.00 hectares for 99 years to the CAAIC sisal farm. The Chinese sisal farm employed 100 local workers for production, security, and accounting while the higher-level management positions were held by a team of six Chinese people (Jiang, 2015:17).

The other model of production for Chinese agro-investors in Africa is represented by contract farming. Chinese companies sign agreements with local farmers: the deals supply the quantitative and qualitative amounts of agricultural commodities that the contracted farmers need to produce and the agreed price that the companies have to pay. Chinese companies finance agro-inputs (seeds, fertilizers, etc.) and usually assign Chinese experts in agriculture in order to design the planting project. However, investors are not supposed to supply land for farming.

Unlike the farm/ plantation model, the land is owned by the contracted local farmers. The contract farming model is not widely adopted by Chinese agro-investors in Africa. This producing model has been mainly used in the case of cotton projects. A good example is represented by the private China Africa Cotton Company (CACC), which is actually presented in seven African countries and has contracted over 200,000 cotton farmers (Jiang, 2015:18).

Finally, a combination of farm/plantation production with contracting farming represents a third model of production. A combination of the above describes models that imply that Chinese companies rely both on their own farms and contracted farmers for the production of agriculture commodities. Usually, this combination model is driven by two main reasons. First, Chinese companies need to enlarge their agricultural production. Secondly, Chinese agro-investors work with neighboring farmers as a way to acquire recognition through benefit the local community, for instance creating jobs and employment (Ibid).

3.4.3. Market-driven factors

Most agricultural investments in Africa are small-scale projects, unless the farming projects are financed by Chinese State companies. Chinese farming projects usually rely on the production of grains and vegetables. This said, it has been strongly debated that China's aim is to produce food in Africa and send it back to China, current evidence shows that Chinese farming projects serve local markets. There is not strong evidence to support the thesis that Chinese agro-investors produce food to ship it back to China. In fact, trade data supported the evidence that Africa is not feeding China, or at least not yet. Recent data collected by the United Nations commodity trade on the agriculture trade between 2004-2013 showed that the main products that China imported from Africa remained: natural rubber, raw cotton, tobacco, sesame seed, and cocoa beans. Moreover, between the same period data suggested that rice or wheat were not imported in China from Africa, although small amount of maize, soybeans, and cassava represented China’s imports (Brautigam, 2015).

However, the fact that this is not happening at moment does not exclude the possibility that it could occur in the future. Actually, shipping food produced in Africa back to China does not seems feasible due to limited production, the host country’s control over exports, and the high costs of transport. These constraints are not going to be a challenge in the short term, however China's future objectives in African agriculture are still difficult to predict.

3.4.4 Challenges and risks

China's agricultural aid and investment in Africa, are not free of challenges and many obstacles at the local level prevent the final implementations of projects. Even if Africa has an abundant share of arable land, agriculture remains the main source of livelihoods for millions of people and local land ownership on several occasions reclaimed their rights to land and opposed to Chinese investments. For instance, African governments not always have obtained permissions from the affected population once they allowed transfer of land to Chinese agricultural investors (Brautigam, 2011:251). Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure and political instability in the African context has encouraged Chinese companies to abandon the realization of the projects following a first assessment of risks. Although the Chinese government has fostered the Going Global policy in agriculture through several incentives, Chinese investors are still reluctant about the advantages of investing in farming in Africa.

The Magbass Sugar Project in Sierra Leone is a good example case of the challenges that Chinese agricultural investors face in terms of gaining profits from investment in rural Africa. Magbass was an aid project devised by the Chinese government between 1977 and 1982 as a diplomatic tool to increase its influence in the area. From 1982, the sugar complex of 1,280 hectares was managed by the Chinese State-owned company, China National Complete Plant Import Export Corporation (Complant). However, with the beginning of the war in Sierra Leone in 1996, the project was abandoned and only at the end of the war in 2003 Complant decided to renew and manage the sugar complex. However, China's aid involvement could not be the same of one provided during the 1977 and 1982, indeed the former aid for the sugar project in the new millennium needed to be businesses-based and profitable. Deborah Brautigam investigated the challenges which the Chinese company faced when personally visiting Magbass in 2007 and documented them in her book *The Dragon's Gifts: The Real Story of China in Africa*. For instance, local land owners complained that they did not receive compensations for the leased land. Compensations were captured at a national level and the government of Sierra Leone did not provide a share of rental fees at a local level, even if Complant paid off the compensations directly to national government. Politics play an important role in the success of Chinese investment and in the case of Magbass, it represented a barrier. Chinese investors leave all responsibility related to compensations and resettlement to the African governments so that they do not have to deal directly with landowners. Moreover, the lease contract established the extension of the complex to another 800 to 1,000 hectares. As a result, this led to further opposition against landowners, due to the fear that they lost their land forever. Local owners also argued to the government that the Chinese should have provided medical facilitates, scholarships, and schooling. Finally, in 2009 Complant sold its' interest to private Chinese leather companies held by Hua Lien (Brautigam, 2011: 260). The scarce profitability and political and local challenges have led Complant to forge a deal with Hua Lien.

This example summarizes some of the challenges and risks that Chinese agricultural investors are likely to face in rural Africa. Nevertheless, the Chinese government continues to support both State-owned and private enterprises investments in rural Africa. Despite the obstacles, agricultural investment remains a major focus for Beijing.

Chapter 3
Land grabbing: definitions and ideas

1. Origin of land grabbing: a broader perspective

In 2007-08, the financial and food crisis has affected a new global land rush. The article "SEIZED" published by the NGO Grain in 2008, is considered the first international case that explicitly talk about land grabbing. Land has become extremely interesting not merely for food insecure government, but for private investors too. As a result, the article distinguished between two different kind of land grabbers. On one side, national governments which strongly rely on imports to ensure internal food supply engaged in vast land acquisition abroad as a part of the national food security strategy. On the other, investment in foreign farmland represents an important new source of revenue: Food and fuel became a new source of profit for the private sector (GRAIN, 2008). However, the acquisition of land abroad is surely not a new trend. In fact, land grabbing is a phenomenon that needs to be read through an historical analytical framework, to distinguish the recent wave of land grabbing from previous large-scale acquisitions.

Land grabbing cannot be perceived merely as related to the 2007-08 commodity price slump or to the increased interest in food and bio-fuels. Seen from a broader perspective, large-scale expansion abroad is not a new phenomenon: it's a long-standing phenomenon that can be traced already in the context of conquests and colonial expansion. However, during the colonial era the share of land used was limited due to the lack cheap labor force. Extension in land utilization was consequent to the development of advanced technologies such as refrigerators, and new way of transports which allowed to reduce costs. These factors contributed to create the conditions that made the acquisition of land abroad an economically viable option (Arezki et al., 2011:5). Past land acquisitions have had long term-effects, that have been documented both in developed and developing countries (Libecap and Lueck 2011; Banerjee and Iyer 2005, Iyer 2010), and continued to shape the recent global land rush. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many agricultural investments based on large scale plantations were led by the United States, Europe, and Japan in developing countries. Moreover, from the 1960s onwards due to process of decolonization, increased nationalizations in Africa, and land redistribution programs in Latin America, a new set of opportunities emerged for investors. In fact, agro-investors moved from the dominant plantation model towards the development of long-term contracts with local farmers. Long-term contracts rather than plantation, which constituted large-scale farming specializing in one cash crops, allowed a greater flexibility and variability in the production of products, and to adjust production according to the fluctuating agriculture commodity prices (Cotula, 2012: 661-662. However, there is a general consensus that the recent wave of land grabbing is shaped by different drives compared to previous land acquisitions.

1.1 What is new about recent land grabbing?

The recent wave of land grabbing has been driven by both political and market forces. Expectations of the private sector about rising agriculture commodity prices combined with the concerns of national governments about long-term energy and food security played an important role. Indeed, several factors have distinguished the current wave of land grabbing from previous large-scale acquisitions. Population growth, changing consumption patterns caused by growing incomes, and highest degree of urbanization are all factors that pushed up global demand and consumption of agriculture crop for food, feed, and fuel. Global interests in the acquisition of land is also driven by other sectors rather than agriculture, such as tourism, mining, and petroleum. Investors perceived the appreciation of the land values as an important asset for their business in the long term, particularly in lower-income countries where land is cheaper and land rights weak. Crop productivity has increased to meet global needs, however, the fact that the so called "energy crops" includes wheat, corn, soybean, and sugarcane could cause more hunger, because agriculture land is nowadays a scarce resource. Between the 1980s and the beginning of the new millennium, food prices have been stable because of technologies transfer, openness of agriculture markets, and trade. However, during the 2008 food crisis the prices of wheat and grain doubled compared with 2003 (Cotula, 2012: 662). Between March 2007 and April 2008, the prices of wheat and rice increased respectively of the 77% and 18% in the global market. Meanwhile, global cereal stocks dropped to the lowest point in the last twenty years. Rising cereals prices prompted to higher prices of all food products; affecting directly products such as bread and pasta, and indirectly products of animal origin. Countries around the globe experienced dramatic food and fuel prices shock, that affected the poorest of the South the most. Therefore, during the spring of 2008 violent protests against rising food and fuel prices break out in Egypt, Cameron, Filipins, Haiti, and Ivory Coast (Sodano, 2008). Food prices started to drop after the summer of 2008, although, in the spring of 2011 prices slump again. The variety of causes which have shaped the global food crisis that made headlines in the 2008, have been subjected to a strong debate.

1.2 Formal and informal causes of 2007-08 food crisis

Formally, the food price spike of 2007-08 has been related to a high number of interacting factors:

- Expectations of increasing global demand due to the development of emerging economies such as China and India, and changing patterns of food consumption
- Stock market crash
- Decline of the supply in the previous year related to the decreased in agricultural investments
- Contingent factors, i.e. bad harvests due to climatic conditions
- Reduction of available arable land suitable for food production because of the impact of biofuels on agriculture
- Higher transport and production costs caused by rising oil prices. Rising transport and production costs directly contributed rising prices of food.

The *High-level conference on world food security: the challenges of climate change and bioenergy* held in Rome in 2008 by the FAO, discussed the interpretations which have been shared at international level as the causes underlying the recent food crisis. According to the conference, the rise of the cereals price was related to a combination of two factors. First, the increasing demand of the major emerging economies: China and India; second, global food prices and land prices increased for higher demand of biofuels (FAO, 2008).

In her article "The 2008 food crisis," Valeria Sodano challenged dominant interpretations, arguing that other factors affected the global food crisis. The reports elaborated by the ETC group, and PANAP (Pan Asia Pacific) have been used by the author to highlight three further factors that have been outpaced by "official" assumptions. First of all, the global food crisis did not start suddenly. At the end of the 1980s, the majority of developing countries were already net food importers, and this has been caused by the political adjustment in which developed countries endorsed. For example, agro-investors have been pushed to invest abroad damaging small farmers, and impacting agricultural commodities price. Moreover, agricultural investments have been sharply reduced. In fact, during the 1980s nearly 30% of World Bank loans were financing agriculture projects, while in the 2007 the rate was comparable to the 12% (Sodano, 2008:2). Second, Sodano argued that there is a direct correlation between the food crisis and the financial crisis that has not been considered. Indeed, official statement around the 2007-08 food crisis never referred to the financial crisis as a possible cause. Finally, the population growth and related increased in consumption demand has been successfully satisfied by the existing supply. Sodano argued that the rise in food prices cannot be related to the scarce food supply at the global level market, although she claimed that increased cereal prices are probably related to the economic and political power of the monopoly and monopsony (Sodano, 2008:3).

1.3 The role of biofuel

Increased interest in biofuel has been a central point in the recent wave of global land rush, because wheat, corn, soya bean, and sugarcane are the main “energy crops”. Biofuel production can either represents an opportunity for rural development, a source of income for farmers or a threat for agriculture production. Public policies, and especially renewable energy policies combined with higher oil prices, played an important role in rising interest in biofuel. Thus, interest in biofuel is not merely driven by market forces and appreciation of land values. For instance, the 2003 EU biofuels directive (BDF) directly affected the demand for biofuel crop production that increased both at European and global level (Asia, Africa, South America). In fact, the European Union is not able to meet the targets set by the BDF solely with domestic production (Banse et al., 2010). A similar role is played by the United States Renewable fuel standard which encouraged sourcing feedstock predominately in Brazil and US (Cotula, 2012:669).

Biofuels promotion policies have been presented by governments as the key to contrast climate change and ensure mitigation. The role of States in promoting investment overseas has been crucial in fostering outsourcing of farmland, and the “Going out” policy in which China endorsed since the start of the millennium is a case point. However, similar policies have been implemented in the Gulf States.

Moreover, policies in the area of carbon trading are also a driver in the global land rush. In fact, carbon markets policies have been supporting the acquisition of land abroad for biofuel projects. Host-country have also enacted legislation to increase attractiveness in land investments. For instance, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Tanzania all have located "idle" land in their countries to attract foreign agribusiness investors (Cotula, 2012: 670).

Biofuel production also became extremely attracting due to its profitability. Energy and biotech companies started to invest in land, particularly to develop biofuel projects in the South. According to Land Matrix data, in the period between 2001 and 2010 land acquired worldwide for biofuel projects accounted for 37,2%, while the land appropriated for food production was only for 11,3% (Cotula,2012:663). Assuming that some projects listed in Land Matrix have not been implemented and in others the final allocation of land areas was smaller, the rate remained an important landmark. Furthermore, the borderline between food and biofuel crop production could be difficult to distinguish. In fact, the so-called energy crops include wheat, corn, soybean, and sugarcane; as a result, the same plantation can be used either for food or biofuel production.

2. "Making sense" period

These interacting factors have brought to a rising interest in land acquisition abroad. Interest in land investments soared not only among agribusiness or energy companies, but attractiveness for land arose also among financial operators. The land grab debate started immediately after the 2007-08 global food price spike. The period between the 2007 and 2012 represent the so-called "making sense" period, when activists, NGOs, scholars, tried to grasp a broader perspective around the trajectories of the global land grab. Main questions have been related to identify what to include in the definition, how to measure the scale of the phenomenon, how to analyze the main actors involved, how to understand underpinning drivers and impacts of land grabs (Edelman et al., 2013:1518). However, there is no consensus on these methodological and epistemological questions.

During the initial period, NGOs and media reports played an important role in exposing the global land rush to international attention and raising public awareness. Indeed, the first understanding of the phenomenon has been strongly affected by media and NGO reports (e.j. GRAIN, 2011) that selected specific issues according to their interests, creating false myths, which then became difficult to challenge. Academics quickly entered the debate and their entrance was significant to challenge the parameters established by media and NGOs. Already in 2011, an international conference on global land grabbing was held at the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex, organized by the Land deal political initiative (LDPI) in collaboration with the *Journal of peasant studies*. A large body of literature emerged at the beginning of the period, that to some extent have been affected by rapid appraisal research and an overestimation of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the initial set of research also strongly contributed to significant and abundant cases studies which served as starting point for the formulation of new set of questions. Towards the end of the "making sense" period, scholars agreed consensus on two main issues. First, researchers agreed that interest in land is climbed sharply and that is a renewed phenomenon that is happening worldwide, although with greater impact on selected countries. Second, academics assumed that the initial set of basic questions served as a primary focus, while new questions need to be posed, through new approaches. The challenge posed by the first set of questions brought to further research which questioned issues that have not been considered in the first wave of research (Edelman et al., 2013). Indeed, new themes drove the new wave of research such as gender questions, relevance of historical framework, and implications at the local level. Researchers argued that for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon a more in-depth historical approach of land grabbing is needed. Moreover, several drivers have shaped current land grabbing, for instance the role of global capital accumulation, and agrarian changes which are shaped by legal frameworks should be included in the investigation.

The "making sense" period highlighted the controversary nature of land grabbing, and the difficulties to identify common themes to analyze the phenomenon. The entrance of scholars in the debate have suddenly complicated the initial set of questions which is both positive to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon but also challenges when comes to policies. Each case of land grabbing had its own features, and aspects which are difficult to deeply explore. In conclusion, analysis of land grabbing stories required specific historical and empirical investigations to account how economic, social, and political key drivers impact different outcomes (Edelman et al., 2013:1525).

3. Scale, geography, and nature of investments

Question of scale and geography represent a limit in the understanding of land grabbing. In the three years following media reports on new wave of land grabbing, an impressive amount of data that analyzed the international distribution of land acquisition has been published. Land grabbing has been massively reported by the media, which played a leading role in the awareness of large scale investments. However, the lack a of a shared methodologies brought to a body of evidence which is difficult to compare and to discrepancies within different datasets. Datasets on land acquisitions have being drawn on systematic inventory of media reports such as GRAIN, Land matrix or on in-country research of approved land deals through systematic national inventories. While it allowed to quantify the phenomenon, the fact that data rely on different sources creates a divergence in the results.

3.1 Systematic inventories of land deals based on media reports

Since 2008, the scale and the geography of land grabbing have been presented initially in media reports which remained the largest source of information due to the recent nature of the phenomenon. Several authors have estimated the magnitude, and location of land deals through systematic review of media publication. For instance, three pieces of research will be listed below which rely on different sources.

Friss and Reenberg released an estimation of 117 land deals in 27 African countries, through a systematic review of the articles collected by the International land coalition (ILC) blog. The authors have considered the period between the 2008 and 2010 as reference and have then triangulated the information collected from the ILC blog with other three inventories from the existing literature. Overall results of the estimation reveal that between 51 and 63 million hectares during the period considered (2008-2010) have been assigned for land deals or were under negotiation (Friss & Reenberg, 2010). The purposes of the deals were mainly related with food production and biofuel investments, and only partly with industrial production. However, quantitative estimations are limited to the ILC blog, thus is important to consider that data reliability depends on the blog publications.

A team led by Deininger reviewed for the World Bank land deals acquisitions relying on media reports included in the GRAIN blog, considering the period from the first of October 2008 to the 31th of August 2009. Results are published in the book "*Rising Global Interest in farmland: can it yield sustainable and equitable benefits?"*. The quantitative analysis of the magnitude of land deals targeted 81 countries worldwide, with an estimation of 56.6 million hectares of land allocated. Most of investments, nearly the 48%, involved Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by East and South Asia, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and

Caribbean. Of the 465 projects listed in media reports, for 405 projects were also available commodity price. Reports showed that of these 405 projects, 31% focused on food crops, 17% on biofuel, 14% on industrial and cash crops, and the remainder was distributed among game farm, forestry, and livestock. However, nearly the 30% of the projects were still under exploratory stage (Deininger et al., 2011).

In 2011, Oxfam have published a short report on the new wave of investments in land. The figures of the report where the results of an on-going research conducted by the Land Matrix partnership. The Land Matrix partnership include: Centre de coopération international en recherche agronomique pour le développement (Cirad), Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at University of Bern, GIGA at University of Hamburg, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and Oxfam. The land research project has documented, through the analysis of media and research reports, large scale acquisition happened worldwide during the period 2001-2010. The figure includes 2,000 deals which accounted for over 67 million hectares of land that have been sold, lease, or were under-negotiation. Moreover, 1,100 land deals have been cross-checked through triangulation and affected over 67 million hectares of land. Research indicates that half of land deals were concluded in Africa, while over the 70% of cross-checked deals were involved the agricultural sector (Oxfam, 2011). The higher estimation of the Oxfam report, compared to the previous estimation commented, is related to the longer period of time considered and to the fact that the report includes in addition to agriculture investment, mining, forestry, and tourism (Cotula, 2012: 651).

Finally, the above-mentioned funding on large scale acquisition drawn on different media reports presented a similar estimation of the total amount of land area that has been sell, lease, or was under-negotiation. The figures highlighted that land investments have sharply increased followed the 2007-08 food crisis and have mostly targeted African countries and its agricultural sector (Table 1). However, media reports are not fully reliable and are likely to have overemphasized the role of Africa as recipient country.

Table 1. *Aggregate land areas acquired, based on media reports*

Land area (ha)	*Coverage*	*Time period*	*Source*	*Method*

51-63 million	27 African countries	2008-2010	Friis & Reenberg (2010)	Systematic inventory of media reports included in ILC blog
56.6 million	Global (81 countries covered)	1 October 2008-31 August 2009	Deininger et al. (2011)	Systematic inventory of media reports included in GRAIN blog
About 67 million	Global	2001-2010	Oxfam (2011)	Systematic inventory of media and research reports triangulated trough cross-checking; includes mining, forestry, and tourism

Source: Cotula, 2012

3.2 Systematic inventories of land deals based on in-country research

Systematic national inventories of approved land deals based on specific in-country research have been also carried out and represent an alternative quantitative estimate on the magnitude of land deals. As opposed to the inventories based on media reports, these in-country research relies on data collected from national governmental agencies which are responsible for agriculture, land, and investment. Moreover, reports draw on interviews held with third-party, and on cross-checked data. For instance, in-country resources have been conducted by the World Bank (Deininger *et al.* 2011), IIED together with FAO and IFAD (Cotula *et al.* 2009), and GIZ (Gorgen *et al.* 2009). The figures that appeared in these inventories resulted smaller compared to these drawn on media reports. However, these data must be treated with caution because not all information can be collected at national level, and the paucity of data can lead to an incorrect estimation. Furthermore, national inventories do not include land under negotiation or the possibility to increase land areas in the future, this can influence the discrepancies of dataset (Cotula, 2012: 652).

In table 2 are compared in-country based national inventories of approved land deals, compiled by different authors (Deininger *et al.*, 2011; Gorgen *et al.*, 2009; Cotula *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, in-country inventories based on media reports (Friis and Reenberg, 2010) have been inserted in the table, to obtain a greater comparison.

Table 2. *Aggregate land areas acquired in selected countries (ha)*

Source	*Deininger et al. (2011), 2004-2009*	*Gorgen et al. (2009)*	*Cotula et al. (2009), 2004-2009)*	*Media sources as compiled by Friis and Reenberg (2010), 2008-2010*
Country				
Cambodia	958,000	943,000		
Ethiopia	1,190,000		602,760	2,892,000-3,524,000
Ghana			452,000	89,000
Lao PDR (two provinces)		417,075		
Liberia	1,602,000			421,000
Madagascar		1,720,300	803,414	2,745,000
Mali		159,505	162,850	2,417,000
Mozambique	2,670,000			10,305,000
Nigeria	793,000			
Sudan	3,965,000			3,171,000-4,899,000

Source: Cotula, 2012

Different figures resulted from distinct methods used. For instance, Gorgen et al. (2009) refereed to land ‘demanded’ but not necessarily to approved land deals thus figures resulted higher, while Cotula et al. (2009) examined projects above 1,000 ha. Moreover, Deininger et al. (2011) dataset for Ethiopia included figures collected through regional government agencies, whilst Cotula et al. (2009) reported data collected from federal government agencies and one regional government agency (Cotula, 2012).

Excepted for Liberia, Ghana, and Sudan which aggregate land allocated resulted higher compared to country-specific figures based on media reports; all other countries' figure included in table 2 resulted lower compared from what suggested by media reports. For instance, according to Deininger et al. (2011) 1,190,000 million hectares have been allocated in Ethiopia, while media-based reported a range between 2,892,000- 3,524,000; in Mozambique land allocated accounted for 1,670,000 ha compared to media reports of 10,305,000 ha; in Mali a range between 159-162 ha compared to media- based figures of 2,417,000 ha.

3.3. Challenges for correct estimations

Data on large-scale acquisitions are difficult to acquire. Both media-reports and in-country inventories presented discrepancies, although, allowed to understand the magnitude of the phenomenon that is happening on a very large scale. Several challenges are posed for a correct estimation, and distinct factors influenced researchers. For example, in-field research has been influenced by previous media reports, thus there could be places where land grabbing is happening massively which received low media attention and consequently have not been considered for field research. In fact, in many cases the selection of countries for grounded research has been informed by media reports. Moreover, the paucity of dataset is related to the fact that several assets are not included in the analysis. For instance, companies preferred to take over existing farms or companies that control farms, however these are not considered as land acquisition and are not included in national registers. Furthermore, the area under negotiation can change from the one leased finally, while dataset can have included unrealized projects or deals that have just been signed but not implemented followed feasibility studies. All these factors challenge a correct understanding of the phenomenon.

3.2 Nature of investments

Media reports raised awareness particularly over investments led by government entities from Asia and the Gulf States, investment funds from the West, and investors from the private sector. However, little attention has been paid to the role played by national investors or national citizens living overseas. The World Bank estimated that nationals accounted for 97% of the land area acquired in Nigeria, and for about half or more in Sudan (78%), Cambodia (70%), Mozambique (53%) and Ethiopia (49%) – though only 7% in Liberia (Deininger et al. 2011). However, the role played by these actors in land acquisition was only partially covered in field research. Data on the nature of investors remains limited. The driving actors of land grabbing are considered to be the European Union, and United States, although, the most exposed countries at media level have been East Asia, China, South Korea, and Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE). However, State and private actors both from the South and North are participating in land acquisitions.

On the one hand, Western companies played and still play a crucial role in biofuel investments. For instance, in all cases documented by Nhantumbo and Salomao (2010), and Sulle and Nelson (2009) respectively in Mozambique and Tanzania, biofuel projects were all owned by European companies (Cotula, 2012:657). Moreover, farmland deals in Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan were concluded by European companies, particularly from Denmark, Sweden, UK, and Germany as documented by Visser and Spoor (2011) which focused on land grabbing in post-soviet Eurasia. On the other hand, the role of Middle East and East Asian investors seemed to be overreported. In the case of China, Deborah Brautigam in her book *Will Africa feed China?* has challenged shared beliefs about China's presence in Africa.

Furthermore, the origins of land acquirer are difficult to identify because large-scale acquisitions routinely involve huge numbers of actors and investors. The nationality of investors does not usually correspond with geographic interests, and investors are not usually living in the place of the investments. The blurred line between government and private investments also impact the paucity of data. Information about equity structure is not revealed by many companies, thus is difficult to identify the ownership. For instance, in many cases projects are financed by governmental agencies but are run by private companies, as is common in the case of China's investments in Africa. Moreover, African countries like Mauritius act as strategic transit countries, which allowed to channel foreign investment into other African countries (Cotula, 2012: 659). Private companies rather than governments entities are responsible for greater land acquisitions, although, supported by government policy that enhance agribusiness-led acquisition. Nevertheless, data on the nature of investments remained limited and the role of the government should not be underestimated. In fact, national governments can play a crucial role in supporting financial or diplomatic activities. The role of the State is crucial in land deals even when appears absent on the ground.

3.3. Land deals and the State

The role of the State in the global land rush and public policies implemented at national level are central key drivers, both in origin and recipient countries, to foster and facilitate land-acquisition. This said, 'the State' need to be understand as a dynamic structure, and government and governance as an on-going process. Transnational and domestic interests are central to the new wave of land grabbing. In countries where land rights are weak, and governments are unable to ensure the deserved protection that the affected communities deserved, land grabbing is strongly happening. Certainly, interest is higher in countries where land rights are not formally recognized, however other factors are considered by the investors such as proximity to market and good infrastructure. Good governance represents the driver to address problematic land transfers, forced displacement, and corruption (Wolford et al., 2013:191). Wolford et al. (2013), debated in their article "Governing global land deals: The role of the State in the rush of land" that research on the relation within land grabbing and the role of modern nation State is still dim. The contributors of this special issue underlined four key arguments regarding this controversial relation. Arguments have been elaborated on broader analytical themes, such as: sovereignty, territory, institutions, authority and subjects.

First, the authors debated that the role of the State is not passive as it is perceived. States are not merely the target of foreign investors, they are central players in supporting land deals or opposing resistance against them. For instance, the Brazilian government has evaluated possible uses of land before deciding final allocation. The government undertook regularization processes to protect land-user's rights in the Amazon region but allowed fraudulent large-scale investment in the Cerrado region that is located between the Amazon, Atlantic forest and Pantanol. This has resulted in the growing consolidation of transport and production sector in the Amazon-Cerrado transit zone (Oliveira, 2013).

A second argument supported by research is that States cannot be divided into two strict categories: those acquiring land and those being acquired, between buyers and sellers. The borderline is fuzzy, and a wide range of actors within States compete for land allocation. Moreover, land competition increased by two factors:

1) Investors are looking for areas with specific characteristics, such as proximity to local markets, availability of water, fertile soil, good infrastructure, strategic communications and transport axes. For example, in Mali most of land deals have been concluded in the Ségou Region because of its irrigable areas.

2) Interest in land increased not only for reasons related on agriculture for food and fuel production, a broader range of “pressure” factors that influenced the perspective of investors need to be considered. For instance, tourism, mining, forestry, tree-plantation for rubber.

These factors led to a higher competition for land, which include within States several actors, and set of interests (Cotula, 2012:655).

Third, contributors to the article argued that States react in different ways to land deals, and each government enacts its own strategy that is hard to forecast. In particular, following the recent wave of land grabbing States have endorsed more strict regularizations. For instance, Brazil endorsed in severe regulations regarding foreign land ownership. Finally, researchers highlighted that different kind of powers within the State flow through various disaggregated levels for the implementation and regulation of land deals (Wolford et al., 2013). The State did not merely shape land deals, indeed States contributed to reformulate a new understanding of the meaning of territory, sovereignty, and the role of the authority and subjects. Wherever large-scale investments are controlled directly by the State or by different government agencies, is important to underline how the role of the State remain central, although contradictory, in facilitating the process or either foster land grabbing abroad; for example, carrying out legal-administrative steps to facilitate land deals.

4. Risks v. benefits

Scant attention is given to the risks and benefits related to large-scale investments. There is a particularly lack of consideration for the indirect effects of land, and negative outcomes associated with agriculture projects. Moreover, cases studies of 19 projects in seven countries confirmed shared concerns around the risks associated with large-scale investments. Mainly, these includes weak land governance that do not allow to properly guarantee recognition to land or protection to the affected community; incapacity of the recipient countries to administer large scale-investments, and enforce proper instruments of consultation and consent; investors proposals could be not enough technically elaborated or do not fit local visions, indeed, in some cases investors are leading to encroach local land to meet their interests; land deals can lead to conflicts, terrain contestations that can impact negatively gender issues (Deininger, 2011: 225-226).

Furthermore, fieldwork proved that large-scale investments can provide benefits mainly through four channels:

1. Investments can generate local jobs and employment.
2. Social infrastructure can be implemented using land compensation of the community development funds.
3. Investments can improve the level of national or local tax revenue.
4. Higher access to markets and advanced technologies can be offered to local producers.

Large-scale investments can benefit the same community differently, as is not possible to reduce people in a single class. For instance, skilled people or enterprises could enjoy job created by an investment, while the same investment can affect access to land to vulnerable groups which rely on it for their livelihoods.

5. Reactions at the local level

Local communities are affected in different ways from the global land rush. The struggles to which are usually exposed can be resumed in:

- Struggles against expulsion: when labor is not needed, people are expulsed from their land, especially when monocrop large farms highly mechanized are established. As a result, people have no job and no place to live.
- Struggles for/ and around terms of incorporation: incorporations usually occur when cheap labor is needed, moreover people that engage in political struggles for incorporation can be those who failed to obtain formal claims to land.
- Struggle against land concentration, and/or redistribution and recognition: a greater degree of land concentration is especially affecting poor people living in rural areas. In the case of indigenous people, based on the UN principle of free, prior, informed consent (FPIC), struggles against land concentration take the form of demanding recognition over the land.
- Struggles interlinked geographic and institutional spaces: the variety of interests and actors involved in the recent wave of land grabbing, led to an overlap and intersections of struggles linked to labor, agrarian, and environmental issues.

The first two types of struggles listed are the more common in the recent wave of land grabbing. The struggles which local communities experienced is related to distinct causes. This depends, first, from the fact that they perceive the value of the land in different ways. As argued by Borras & Franco in their paper "Global land grabbing and political reactions from below", land is the key starting point in the discussion on political reactions from below. Land can be perceived in monetary terms, as a mean to guarantee subsistence; at the same time, as it is happening for instance in the case of indigenous peoples, territory can represent the land where ancestors lived *and still live*. The contested meaning of land can lead to political conflicts because different parties have distinct perspectives. Different group are related to land in different ways. Moreover, the meaning of land can be often in contrast with the actual formal recognition that local communities have on the land they live. For instance, in many African countries people that depend on land for their livelihoods do not have formal ownership, thus do not appear in the census and this allowed governments to consider their territory "unused" lands.

Territory is not just a physical plot of land but is the object of cultural and ideological aspects that need to be re-considered. Thus, is not possible to generalize the reactions at the local level, because a central role is also played by the dynamic of social relations and by inter and intra-class relations. However, is possible to explore how communities usually respond at different types of land grabs (Borras & Franco, 2013).

Furthermore, the concept of 'local community' can appeared limited for a fully understating of the phenomenon. In fact, land investments can impact the same group differently, for example based on gender relationship implications are not uniform (Borras & Franco, 2013: 1727). Moreover, State policies impacted land deals in different manner, thus is also hard to find common reactions at the local level. For instance, people expelled from their land can either resist, seek for a higher compensation, or simply demand for incorporation. Affected social groups can resist through political mobilisations, although, protest can reach international attention or remained invisible to media reports. Moreover, agrarian studies literature has proved that not in all cases of unjust treatment the affected social group automatically engaged in political conflicts. However, local communities can react differently to the same struggles also depending on how they have been treated. Borras & Franco argued that political contestations around land grabbing are not simply between local community and foreign investors. Moreover, the authors analyzed three different trajectories of political contestations, namely poor people versus corporate actors, poor people versus the State, poor people versus poor people (Borras & Franco, 2013).

In conclusion, research on the dimension of political reactions "from below" is still limited, often because places of resistance are difficult to reach for those who want to report cases. Generally, observers are divided into two categories: those who argued that land deals represent an opportunity of development for the poor people involved, and those who claimed that if people would be fully informed about the consequences of land investments they would reject it. However, systematic field research are necessary to address these issues.

6. Understanding Water Grabbing

Interest around *water resources* has grown thanks to recent debates on the global land rush. While water and land are strictly interconnected, the implications of water resources (both groundwater and surface water) remained highly ignored. Despite the attention given to land grabbing, the appropriation of water resources is an issue that deserve a stronger focus. Indeed, evidences suggested that land grabbing can be motivated by a growing interest in water resources (Smaller and Mann, 2009; Woodhouse and Ganho 2011; Skinner and Cotula, 2011). Thus, the global rush to control water can be considered both as a cause and effect of land grabbing, and growing attention to water can contribute to our understanding of the latter in two different ways. On the one hand, water perspective can foster attention on the global land rush providing new drivers to evaluate the phenomenon. On the other hand, could contribute to questioning old arguments related to social justice, political control, and environmental responsibility related to water resources management (Franco et al., 2013: 1651).

Debates around land grabbing have not considered the interests of investors to capture water resources. Large-scale acquisitions have been mainly associated with agriculture driven forces, while in many cases water has resulted to be the main objective in the grabbing. In their special issue, Mehta et al. (2012) defined water grabbing "as a situation where powerful actors are able to take control of, or reallocate to their own benefits, water resources already used by local communities or feeding aquatic ecosystems on which their livelihoods are based" (Mehta et al., 2012: 19). As land grabbing, water grabbing directly affected livelihood of local community and alter the environment. Moreover, as the global climate changes, water is likely be an increasing challenge in many parts of Africa, and competition for water may prove a source of conflict. As a result, large-scale agricultural projects may impose further stress on the capacity of local ecosystems and people to be resilient to climate change, losses to wild and domesticated biodiversity, and access to seasonal resources. While land is fixed, water is a fluctuating resource whose distribution could change over time and space. In fact, water grabbing does not always involve the consumption of big quantities of water. For instance, investors in land acquisition do not merely take into account water volume, but also its fluctuating nature. Usually investors' control of land coincides with control of water resources, and for example as it is happening in Mali and Sudan investors have unrestricted access to water which as a result encouraged water grabbing (Franco, Feodoroff, Kay, Kishimoto & Pracucci, 2014:13). Water grabbing is happening globally, and due to the water supply scarcity interests are rising quickly. Moreover, Franco et al. (2014), individuated five key drivers of water grabbing:

1. The 2007-08 food crisis led to a new interest in acquiring land and water for agricultural production. Large-scale plantation based on monocultures required ten times the water needed for biodiverse systems.

2. The sharp rise in oil prices contributed to an increase of agrofuels. However, the production cycle of agrofuels requires a high amount of water.

3. Rising international interests in raw materials lead to the continued expansion of extractive industries and large-scale mining projects. Extractive and mining industry activities required high volumes of water. For instance, to extract and wash one ton of coal are necessary nearly 24 bathtubs full of water. Moreover, new technologies such as "fracking" can pose a threat to local water resources.

4. Privatization of water systems and services reduced water rights of marginalized communities in developing countries, and enforce the market forces of the private sector

5. Water has been designed as a commodity like any other. The financialization of water have emerged so that water consumption generated wealth for private investors.

However, quantifying and measuring scale and scope of water grabbing is complex due to several factors, although available evidence suggests that the phenomenon is happening globally. For instance, complexity in measuring scale and the scope of the phenomenon are related for example to hydrological complexity, or to the distinction between “green” and “blue” water.

Interest around water resources is not a new phenomenon, indeed what is new is the range of actors involved. For instance, water resources management involved not only traditional State but new capitalist players as well (Mehta et al., 2012:198). Water grabbing has not only been drove by increased interest in biofuel production and hydropower development. Indeed, host national government have been main drivers in promoting both foreign and domestic investments because water has become a precious natural resource that will suffer scarcity in the near future. Furthermore, water and energy reforms encouraging privatization and deregulation have enhanced interest in water grabbing. For example, in India sectoral reforms have enhanced mechanism to legitimate land grabbing. The Malian government increased more than tenfold the water fee for hectare to discourage small- scale farmers and increased the amount of water available for large- scale investments (Franco et al., 2014:13). International investors pledged to build water infrastructure to obtain lease or acquisition of land. In Mali, the Libyan government has built an irrigation canal in exchange of 100,000 hectares of land.

Furthermore, despite the growing visibility of water grabbing, mechanism of global water governance received less attention at the international level if compared with land governance. For instance, governance regulatory initiatives around agricultural land deals such as the “Voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure land, fisheries and forest in the context of food security” (FAO-TG) implemented by the FAO, or the “Principles of responsible agricultural investment” (PRAI) carried out by the World Bank, do not deal with water issues. Even the FAO-TG, which represented the strongest guidance, excluded water from the coverage, because in the final negotiations some participants argued that water and water governance were issues “too complicated” to be included. A little step forwards was taken with the recognition by the UN council in 2010 of the access to clean water and sanitation as a human right (Mehta et al., 2012).

However, certain conditions can prevent water grabbing. For instance, prior informed consultation, protest, resistance, political reaction. A stronger water governance is necessary to reduce the diverse implications for local land users. For instance, implications of water grabbing can include the alteration of grounded and downstream available for local land users (exclusion from the volume); change base flows and peak (exclusion in timing); change local ecosystems (exclusion form benefits); and impacts water quality (exclusion from clean water) (Franco et al., 2013:1656).

7. Contemporary land grabbing

In recent years, a wide range of actors which goes from governments, private and domestic corporate, business to finance have engaged in large land acquisition of agricultural land especially in the South but also elsewhere. Often these agriculture investments are presented as opportunity for local development, although, evidences suggested that instead of enhancing the living condition of the rural population are proper cases of land and water grabbing. The new wave of land grabbing has resulted in renewed interest in land resources, leading to a rapid expansion in the scope and scale of transnational acquisition of arable land across many developing countries moved by food price volatility, the increased demand for biofuels and feeds, climate change and the financialisation of commodity markets. One of the main problem is that the majority of territories with are objective of land grabbing are inhabited by poor rural people who need land most. Indeed, the global land rush is massively happening in Latin America and Africa, countries where land and water represented the main sources of living. However, in several occasions African governments have welcomed such large-scale land investments, considering them an opportunity to transform their agricultural sector, as in the case of China’s engagement in Africa agriculture, particularly through technology transfer, the expansion of local infrastructure and rural employment generation. Moreover, large-scale investments are also perceived by African governments as a means to achieve national food security, thus many African countries have promoted favorable market policies to investors, such as low land rents, tax waivers, and limited restrictions on production and exports.

However, debates around recent large-scale land acquisitions have tended to follow two main lines of argumentation. The first line of argument focuses on the implications of the global land rush for local communities, arguing that large-scale acquisitions threaten the livelihoods and food security of millions of poor rural people, as well as raising the risks of environmental destruction and social and political disorders. The second line of argument is mainly spearheaded by international financial institutions and development agencies and constitutes the mainstream development discourse. It argues that, if managed well, large-scale land investments have considerable potential to positively contribute to rural development in developing countries. However, the challenges posed to conduct field research such difficulties to reach places of land grabbing and to access to information and official database make it difficult to better understand the impact that large-scale investments have at the local level. Nevertheless, evidences suggested that in developing countries interest for land acquisition is growing nearly everywhere and vast tract of land is being turned over to grow biofuels instead of food crops. Moreover, in many cases land acquisitions have not included appropriate compensations for the loss of land, or have not generated rural employment, in some cases have provoked displacement of local farmers, and exploitation of local resources. Whichever lines of argumentation we agreed on, surely new regulations on land grabbing are needed to fill the existing holes in international law even more in Africa considering that by 2050 world population is projected to growth to reach 9.8 billion of which more than half will occur in Africa countries.

Finally, in the following chapter will be analyzed the role of China as land grabber in Africa as Beijing has been targeted as the leading actor of this new phenomenon. Africa has the main share of existing arable land, and China's involvement will grow in the future. As a result, I assumed that international and media attention around the Sino-African relations should not faltered, and such relationship need to be better explore in order to understand to which extent China's engagement can or cannot represent an opportunity for African agriculture.

Chapter 4

Is China grabbing land in Africa?

1. Is China grabbing land in Africa?

The role of china as biggest land grabber in Africa has been highly debated at the international level followed the shock in food prices in 2007-08, and Western growing concerns about China's activities in Africa. However, in terms of China's involvement, the authors of the Land Matrix found reports of 86 projects covering 9 million hectares of land, but Smaller et al. (2010) have only been able to confirm the existence of 55 projects covering 4.9 million hectares of land. These figures are the results of the lack of consistent and systematic in-depth grounded resource, however, when the database went online a consistent number of experts challenged this data, namely figures relating to Asiatic transactions.

Chinese government's paucity of data combined with difficult access to dataset in Africa led to a growing misunderstanding around the new presence of China in Africa. The analysis of land acquisition is a topic that only recently has been the subject of academic research, thus is also hard to provide a complete picture of the current phenomenon. Moreover, it is necessary to highlight that scarcity of grounded research is strictly interlinked to the challenges posed to get free access to information, actors, and data. As a result, the scope of this dissertation is to operate a consistent review of the existing literature in order to give a better understanding of the Sino-African relations and to formulate a new set of questions for further grounded research.

Different positions have been documented about the role of China as a land grabber in Africa. In the following paragraphs three main positions about this controversial argument will be presented as a starting point for questioning the two cases studies that will be further examined: the Wambao rice farm in Mozambique and the Wuhan Kaidi in Zambia.

1.2 Debate about the role of China as land grabber: different positions

The presence of China is growing nearly everywhere in Africa. How have been reported by Van Dijk (2009), China's involvement in Africa has grown rapidly in terms of trade, investment, aid, and number of Chinese currently living in Africa. Van Dijk argued that Beijing facilitated and supported, more than other countries, Chinese enterprises to get access to new markets abroad. For instance, China's policies with respect to Africa encouraged Chinese investors to engage in agricultural investment. In the case of China, land grabbing has been perceived as a State-sponsored strategic plane to ensure food security. However, different position surged around the role of China as land grabber, providing different perspectives on the analysis of the phenomenon. First, the following debate will be based on distinction between primary and secondary land use. In primary land use land is bought or leased only for agricultural purposes, while, in the case of secondary land use the main objective is not agriculture but the establishment of special economic zones as a mean to foster industrial development.

According to Deborah Brautigam (2015), Chinese influence across the African country is growing, although, there is no evidence that China endorsed in a massive State-sponsored land grabs in Africa. The Chinese, she writes, are not "embarked on a State-sponsored quest to lock vast tracts of African land". Brautigam argued that during her field research conducted to fill her latest publication *Will Africa feed China?*, she found scattered investments, mostly on small-scale and which production mainly served local markets, apart from occasionally exports of traditional crops such as rubber and palm oil. Brautigam argued that China's interest in land remained little compared to other sectors as oil, and mining as suggested by other researchers (Van Dijk, 2009). Moreover, according to Brautigam, there is no evidence that supported the idea that Africa is being used to produce food to be ship back to China, because transportation costs are too high to make this option economically profitable. Finally, she argued that land investments in African agriculture cannot be perceived as a direct attempt of Beijing to acquire land (Brautigam, 2015).

A different view is given by Lila Buckley, an anthropologist specializing in ethnographic research methodologies with a focus on China-Africa relations. In her article "Chinese land-based interventions in Senegal" she examined discourse and practice on agricultural governance in Senegal. However, the findings of her research provided insight into land deals that are occurring in other parts of Africa. Buckley argued that the analysis of China's land grabbing in Africa needs to include multiple perspectives to go beyond the simplistic distinction between "threat" or "development" opportunity. Indeed, she suggested that China "land grab" cannot be seen as a linear process in which the Chinese government is the only actor involved. Buckley showed through her field research in Senegal that land management deals are negotiated by a wide range of subjects, and individual improvisation is a factor that may lead to unpredictable outcomes. Consequently, Buckley argued that land grabbing shall not be perceived as a linear process of States taking over land, but as a dynamic process which systematically changes comprised State actors, private investors, and citizens (Buckley, 2013).

Another perspective is given by Michael Davies (2008), that explored the development of China's special economic zones in Africa, and pointed to a different way in which China is obtaining land in Africa. Indeed, David argued that Chinese development model comes to Africa in the form of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). These geographic areas of economic interest are growing nearly everywhere in Africa. However, SEZs required large amount of land and investments for infrastructure. Although, in these dedicated zones the Chinese government can negotiate with recipient countries the land prices, obtaining discounts on the land and other several advantages such as tax exemptions for the import of raw material and equipment. Davis argued that the role of Chinese SEZs in Africa as a means to claim land have been not considered in the current debate about land grabbing.

The main questions that emerged in the recent debate around China's role as land grabber in Africa pointed to the role played by the Chinese government in obtaining land abroad, and to which extent China's rising presence in Africa is part of a strategic plane to ensure food security. Research debunked myths around the nature and scale of China's agricultural investments in Africa posing two main questions:

- Is China "land grab" in Africa a State-sponsored strategy?
- Is China's agricultural investments in Africa serving the local market or food is producing to be exported to China?

These questions will be further explored in the above session through the analytical evidenced that surged from two cases studies.

2. Country overview: Mozambique

Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world. In the 2016 Human development report published by the United nations development programme (UNDP), the country ranked 181 out of 188 countries in the UNDP human development index (HDI) ("Human Development Report", 2016). Mozambique's population is estimated at approximately 28 million people, 68% of whom live and work in rural areas. Despite steady economic growth over the last two decades, more than two-thirds of the population still live on less than US$ 1.90 a day and 55% live below the national poverty line (CIAT, 2017). Its history of poverty is rooted in distinct factors and historical events such as colonialism, civil wars, and the imposition of neo-liberal principles by Western institutions.

Portugal occupied Mozambique in the 16th century, and the country achieved independence only in 1975 after a long-armed struggle. The liberation front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), a liberation movement established in 1962, instituted a one-party State guided by socialist principles. Between 1981 and 1992, Mozambique faced a long civil war that involved Frelimo against the opposition the Mozambique national resistance (Renamo). Renamo was best known both in Mozambique and outside the country as a guerilla movement without a declared political program, which committed several war crimes such as rape, mutilation, and mass killing. However, in 1994 Renamo completed its transformation into a conservative political party, just in time for Mozambique's first multi-party elections. China and the Soviet Union strongly supported the liberation front of Mozambique guided by Eduardo Mondlane, while anti-communist government in Rhodesia and South Africa supported Renamo which aimed to oppose Frelimo's attempts to consolidate a socialist one-party State. Despite 16-year of civil war, tensions remained high between the ruling party Frelimo and the opposition movement Renamo. In 1992, a peace agreement was signed which led to multi-party elections in which Renamo came second, as it has happened in every election; Frelimo is still the leading party in Mozambique, and Renamo its main opposition party even if is losing influence.

With the onset of independence, the failure of Frelimo social planning led Mozambique to have no choice other than to accept the conditionalities established by the neo-liberal economic policies sponsored by the IMF and WB, if the country wanted to receive foreign aid from international institutions and achieve development. Mozambique became a model of cooperation with Western countries and donors, however even if IMF neo-liberal policies (ej. Privatization, financial regulations) entered the country in the late 1980s, Mozambique remained one of the poorest country. Official development assistance has continued to support Mozambique and still covers nearly 50% of government's expenditure. Critics argued that this longstanding economic support have limited the independence of the government.

Mozambique still struggles to achieve significant development especially regarding its export capacity, agricultural production, expansion of small and medium enterprises. For instance, in 2016 Mozambique exported $3.93 billion while imported $7, thus resulting in a negative trade balance. The country top exports are raw aluminum, coal briquettes, raw tobacco, rough wood, and electricity. However, SMEs are facing several obstacles to export, for example Mozambican manufacturing companies are not exporting because the cost for export licenses posed by Mozambique authorities are too high. In the last decades, Mozambique growth has been driven by foreign sponsored large-scale investments which can benefit from favorable economic policies and by relevant aid inflows. Moreover, since 2006 economic growth has been largely supported by foreign investments in mineral extraction, agro-industry, and the construction sector (Jiang, 2015).

2.1 Background to Sino-Mozambican relations

Sino-Mozambican relations can be dated already in the 1960s when China provided military and economic support to social movements of independence, particularly to FRELIMO. However, despite these first encounters that were mainly based on economic and military support to the socialistic party Frelimo, the relationship between China and Mozambique reemerged gradually in 1997-1998, once the civil war was over and the country reached some stability. Indeed, Beijing pledged to invest $20 million fund to support Chinese companies to invest and create business in Mozambique (Roque, 2009). Chinese cooperation has been welcomed by government officials in Mozambique because it provided an alternative model of development compared to the one prompted by traditional Western donors. For instance, China and Mozambique signed in 2001 a Joint Economic and Trade agreement, and since 2004 more agreements have been concluded. For example, agreements on debts cancellation were signed regarding loans worth over $20 million dated back to the 1980s (Jiang, 2015).

After the 2006 Beijing summit, Sino-Mozambican relations intensified. In the same year, Mozambique was included in China's list of touristic destinations. Moreover, in 2007 President Hu Jintao visited Mozambique, where signed a bilateral cooperation agreement and pledged to invest further 170$ million to support areas of agriculture, education, health, technology, mineral extraction, and economy. Furthermore, during the same year China and Mozambique signed an agreement regarding military support. China committed to guarantee Mozambique future security, and a as a part of this agreement Beijing pledged $1.5 million to guarantee the renovation of several department of Mozambique armed forces (Ibid.).

Sino-Mozambican relations are increasing under all sectors. China's rising influence is demonstrated by the fact that became Mozambique's largest bilateral creditor in 2015. Government officials in Mozambique showed their willingness to boost cooperation with China in the future. Indeed, President Nyusi invited by the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, spent 5 days in China during May 2016 to strengthen relations and further cooperation between the two countries ("President Nyusi in China - Official program", 2016).

2.2 China in Mozambique's agricultural sector

According to the Mozambique Ministry of Agriculture, the country has 36 million hectares of potentially arable land. Mozambique has the adequate level of land and water to feed its country, and to benefit from agricultural exports. However, the agricultural sector is strongly underdeveloped and does not successfully contributed to reduce poverty among the majority of population which rely on agriculture for their livelihoods (Hanlon, 2011).

The 90% of the current cultivated land (only 10% of the total arable land) is devoted to agriculture, and over 2.5 million of households are involved in this sector. Although, the agriculture sector in Mozambique has a high potential, it is predominantly controlled by family farms which rely on non-irrigation system, and obsolete technologies that contributed to low performances. Moreover, Mozambique ranks among the most vulnerable countries to natural disasters such as drought, floods, and cyclones. Is estimated that annually climate hazards bring a loss of $790 million (Ibid.). For instance, the majority of Mozambique agriculture is based on a rainfed system, thus agriculture is totally dependent on rain.

Mozambique strongly needs to fully leverage the potential of the agricultural sector because due to its high potential could represent the sector that positively impact poverty reduction. To attract foreign investments, Mozambique has to strongly invest to improve the quality of infrastructure in rural areas (roads, bridge, rails), and create favorable conditions, through an appropriate national strategy that attract investors and make agriculture a valuable resource. China’s cooperation with Mozambique may represent a crucial resource to achieve these objectives.

The Chinese and Mozambican governments agreed that the development of large-scale production of rice would be mutually beneficial. Indeed, in 2006 members of the Chinese institute of Hunan hybrid rice visited Mozambique to explore if this variety of hybrid rice was appropriate for the country conditions. Few fertile areas have been located like the Zambezi valley, and the Gaza region. For instance, the Zambezi valley located in central Mozambique is a highly fertile area that has been targeted by several foreign investors as favorable to develop commercial farming.

China’s involvement in Mozambique agriculture can benefit rural areas rehabilitation, and led to improvements in term of technology assistance. Indeed, in 2007 the Chinese government signed an agreement with the Eduardo Mondlane University, located in Maputo, to conduct research over rural areas and agriculture. Moreover, following the 2006 Beijing

Summit China established the first pilot project in agricultural cooperation, the Umbeluzi institute of agricultural research (Roque, 2009).

Sino-Mozambican agricultural cooperation usually relies on the Chinese partner's transfer of capital, technology, knowledge, construction, while Mozambique partners make fertile land available for investments. Nevertheless, to examine this longstanding relation is necessary to highlight key principles of land policy in Mozambique. Indeed, China's engagement in Mozambique agricultural sector can be favorable if the rights of Mozambican people over land are ensured.

2.3 Land Tenure Issues in Mozambique (law and policies)

Formally, land in Mozambique is owned by the State, and cannot be rented or sold. However, land can be leased, and individuals and communities have the right to occupy their land and request a "right to use and develop land" (DUAT). In both cases, however, it is possible to obtain only a permission to use the land.

The land law approved in 1997, after two years of national debate, still regulates land tenure issues and its designed around three main pillars:

1) Mozambican communities and individuals have the right to occupy the land where they have traditionally lived. The right is permanent, and land cannot be sold but only inherited.
2) Mozambican communities and individuals have the right to the land that have occupied in "good faith" for at least ten years.
3) Land can be leased to Mozambicans and foreign companies and individuals for 50 years, with the possibility to renew the lease for further 50 years.

The land law attempted to provide a regulatory system that balanced protection of the land rights of occupants while allowing foreign investors to obtain land. The innovative aspect of the law is the definition of a "local community" as "a group of families and individuals living in a defined area, smaller than a locality that wants to safeguard its common interests by protecting its living area, farming areas whether cultivated or fallow, forests, sites of socio-cultural importance, pasture, water sources and areas of expansion". The definition remained intentionally vague (Hanlon, 2011).

The document to obtain the right to use and develop the land is the DUAT, which for foreign investors represents effectively the lease. While Mozambican's lands occupants automatically hold a DUAT, they are strongly encouraged by the government to obtain a formal title. Moreover, if an individual or company wants to submit an application to obtain the permission of land occupancy, it needs to first present the project application to the Provincial mapping and land registry service (SPGC). Then, two governmental agencies are responsible for land applications and investments proposal, namely, the investment promotion centre (CPI), and the commercial agricultural promotion centre (CEPARGI).

The application has to include an investment proposal, and a community consultation need to be held to ensure that land is available. Once these first steps are successfully completed, a provisional authorization is provided to Mozambicans for a period of 5 years, while for foreign investors the period is of 2 years. During this period, the investment project needs to be carried out to finally obtain the DUAT title which is first released for 50-years, which can be extended for other 50-years.

Regarding Mozambican communities, to obtain formal title on the land they need to comply to two steps, which provide Mozambicans with a DUAT title for occupants that is permanent:

1) Delimitation: includes register a sketch map at the land registry to obtain a certificate which is issued by the SPGC.
2) Demarcation: includes delimitate the perimeter to individuate the exact area.

However, problems with the 1997 land law have emerged during the years. Evidence suggests that consultation procedures with local communities were poor, and not fully reported (Nhantumbo & Salomão, 2010). Procedures seem to be implemented only partially. Mainly, community consultations are held with village elders, officials and elites, while the majority of the community is not involved in the process. When community-level meetings occur, participation is limited to community leaders. Local communities are provided with poor information about investments, terms of land deals, and consultation is usually a one-off event rather than an ongoing process. In 2010, to improve the quality of consultation the Council of Ministers approved a change in procedures. Two community meetings rather than one have been included: the first to inform around the investment project, and the second for the community to declare their position (Ibid.). However, consultation procedures remained a strategic tool to obtain land from local communities rather than a possibility for active participation. Moreover, contracts between investors and government are secret, thus it is impossible to check what the contract contained and overlay the lack of transparency.

Finally, land in Mozambique appeared to be extremely cheap, and by 2005 the World Bank already shown concerns around this issue. Since land cannot be sold, the Mozambican government supposed that investors invest their money for the development of projects in order to obtain right to land. Investment projects are expected to create jobs, employment, and investors to pay taxes. However, are land investments benefitting the rural development? This still an open question.

2.4 Rumors around China's presence in Mozambique

Interest in China's involvement in Mozambique agricultural sector have raised following several reports written by Horta in 2007 and 2008, which claimed that "in 2006 Beijing and Maputo signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for a huge Zambezi river valley agricultural project that would allow as many as 20,000 Chinese settlers to grow rice for export to China". Moreover, Horta (2007; 2008) claimed that in 2008 China pledged to invest $800 million to expand Mozambique's rice production from 100,000 tons to 500,000 tons a year for the following five years. Finally, Horta wrote that "One thing seems to be certain: China is committed to transforming Mozambique into one of its main food suppliers, particularly for rice" (Horta 2008).

These articles have been cited in many prominent research around the role of China as land grabber in Africa (Cotula et al. 2009; Stevens and Freemantle 2011). Even if Horta's publications lacked fieldwork and references to interviews in Mozambique, they became source material for other studies — for example, they have been published on the website of CSIS which is considered a reliable think thanks. A commissioned fieldwork conducted in Mozambique in 2009 by the IIED, and financed by the FAO and IFAD, took in into account Horta statements. However, IIED researchers claimed in the final report that fieldwork did not provided strong evidences that China acquired land in Mozambique as a part of a food security national strategy (Brautigam, 2015). In particular, citing Horta researchers argued that "the accuracy of these report is hard to verify".

Brautigam and Ekman (2012) have conducted field research to better understand this overreported interest of China large-scale investment in Mozambique. The researchers travelled to Mozambique in 2009, 2010, and 2012 and just like the IIED researchers they could not find evidences which supported Horta's claims. Brautigam and Ekman reviewed articles, media reports published in Portuguese, Chinese, and English languages and conducted interviews in Mozambique. However, researchers did not find any agreement signed between the Mozambican government and Beijing which allowed the transfer of millions of Chinese farmers in Mozambique. Moreover, evidences did not support the claim that China pledged $800 million to develop Mozambique rice sector. Finally, what researchers noticed is a growing presence of China's companies exploring the Mozambican agricultural sector, often encouraged directly by the Mozambican government.

2.5 Case study: the Hubei-Gaza friendship

The Hubei-Gaza friendship farm has been included in the top 20-reported cases of Chinese land grabbing in Africa published in various databases (Table 1.) and represents the most significant Chinese investment in Mozambique agriculture. This case point has raised international attention, and the released of several reports based on fieldwork. Mainly, critics perceived the project as case of Chinese land grabbing, while supporters argued that represents a development opportunity. This case study showed how the borderline line within "land grab" and development opportunity is sometimes fuzzy.

	Country	Farm Name/Location	Reported Investors	Year of Report	Largest (Reported) Land Leased (Ha)	Actual Size of Lease in 2014 (Ha)	Source of Report
1	Angola	Pedras Negras; Sanza Pombo; Cuito Cuanavale	CITIC/CAMC	2010	20,000	0	1, 2
2	Cameroon	Nanga-Eboko	Shaanxi SFAC (Sino-Cam IKO)	2006	14,000	100	1, 2, 3, 4,
3	DRC/Congo	Equateur Province	ZTE Agribusiness (Zonergy)	2007	3,000,000	200	1, 2, 3, 4,
4	Ethiopia	Gambela Region	Hunan Dafengyuan	2010	25,000	0	1, 2
5	Madagascar	Ambilobe, Namakia and Morondava	Complant	2008	22,000	29,470	1, 2, 3, 5
6	Mali	Malibya/Office du Niger	Mali govt./ Libya/China	2008	100,000	0	1, 3
7	Mali	N'Sukala/Office du Niger	CLETC Mali govt.	2009	20,000	20,000	1, 2, 3, 4
8	Mozambique	Gaza-Hubei Friendship/Xai-Xai district	Hubei Lianfeng/Wanbao	2007/2010	20,000	20,000	1, 3, 4
9	Mozambique	Malanga	Luambala Jatropha	2008	8,789	(not Chinese)	1
10	Nigeria	Akotogbo	Wems Agro	2014	25,000	(not Chinese)	1
11	Nigeria	Patigi, Ebba	ZJS International	2011	5,000	(not Chinese)	1
12	Senegal	n/a	Datong	2008	60,000	0	2, 3, 4
13	Sierra Leone	Tonkolili district	Shanghai Construction	2012	30,000	0 (still under discussion)	2, 3, 5
14	Sierra Leone	Magbass/Tonkolili district	Complant	2005	8,100	1,845	1, 2, 3, 4
15	Sudan	Merowe "North"	ZTE Agribusiness (Zonergy)	2010	10,000	60	1, 3
16	Tanzania	Rudewa & Kisangata/Morogoro	CSFAC/CAAIC	2000	6,900	6,900	3, 4,
17	Uganda	Hebei Hanhe/Luweero	Hanhe Int'l Ag. Inv. Co/Qiu Lijun	2009	41,000	162	1, 3
18	Zambia	Northern Province	Wuhan Kaidi	2009	2,000,000	0 (abandoned)	1, 3, 4,
19	Zimbabwe	Nuantesi Ranch	CIWEC	2003	101,171	Construction contract only	1, 3, 4
20	Zimbabwe	Chinhoyi	Zim-China Wanjin Ag. Dev. Co.	2010	50,000	10,000	3, 5
				Total, As Reported	5,566,960		
				Actual Total		88,837	

Table 1: The 20-reported cases of Chinese land grabbing in Africa. Source: Brautigam, 2015

The Hubei-Gaza friendship farm was established in 2007 along the Limpopo lower valley in the Xai-Xai, a district of Gaza province in south-western Mozambique (Image: 1). The farm was the result of an agreement concluded between the Chinese Hubei province and Gaza provincial government.

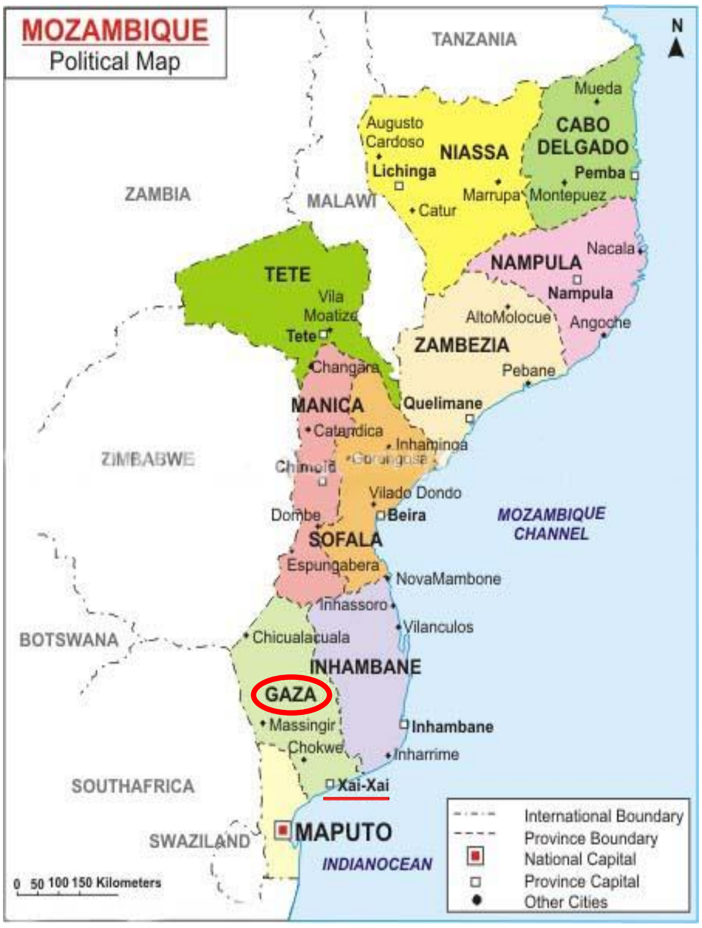


Image 1: Mozambique political map

This agreement allowed the Hubei Lianfeng Mozambique Company, a Chinese State-owned company to produce rice in the Xai-Xai irrigation scheme in an area of 300 hectares. However, after three years of management the company started to face economic difficulties and in 2011 the control of the farm shifted to the Wambao agriculture development limited (WAADL), a private Chinese company. Wambao received from the Mozambican government a concession for 20,000 hectares for a 50-years period. Investors committed US$289 million in three to five years, starting in 2012 (Brautigam, 2015).

Databases reported that Wambao received the concession for 20,000 hectares, that was true, although figures did not report that in 2014 only 7,000 hectares of this 20,000 have been used. In fact, in Chicumbane are being used about 4,000 hectares for rice cultivation, and 1,000 hectares to grow maize, while in Chimbonhanine are being used the remaining 2,000 hectares also to grow rice. Critics argued that China aimed to produce rice in Mozambique as a part of a food national strategy and that Mozambique was not a big consumer of rice. However, figures suggested that between the 2001 and 2015 rice imports to Mozambique have sharply increased, proving that Mozambique is both a rice consumer and importer (Figure 2.). Moreover, despite some domestic production of rice, Mozambique depends on import for two-thirds of total rice consumption. Most of rice is imported from Asia, although, in between the 2011-2015 Thailand became the bigger supplier, accounting for the 54% of total rice imported in Mozambique. These evidences suggested that the Wambao rice farm can contribute for further food security in Mozambique and help the country to reduce dependence of rice imports.

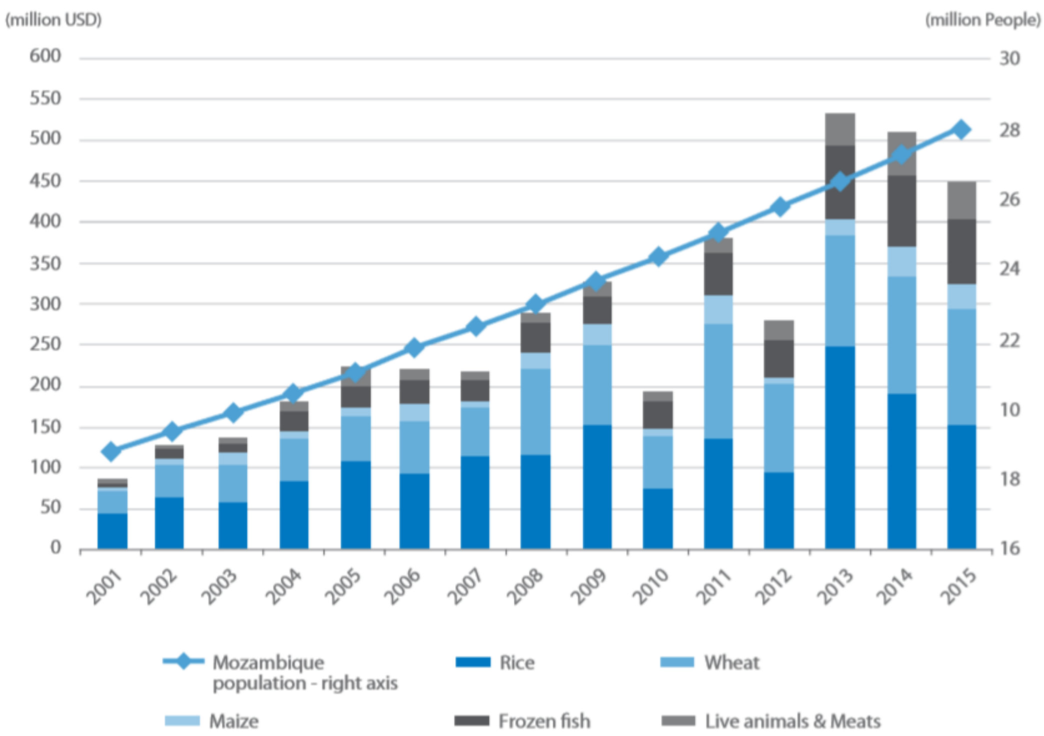


Figure 2: 2001-2015 rice imports to Mozambique**.** Source: Ministério da Indústria e Comércio (MIC), 2016

While evidence suggested that Wambao rice farm could represented an opportunity for Mozambique's food security, other aspects related to China's involvement in Xai-Xai need to be considered. Indeed, Wambao rice farm relies on two agricultural models (Chichava, 2014):

1. The WAADL offered free training to Mozambicans farmers about Chinese rice technical production. Mozambicans are first trained in area of 1 hectare for one year, and then in area of 4\5 hectares while receiving Chinese assistance. At this point, farmers need to start pay the 50% of production costs to the company, and the remaining 50% after the harvest. Farmers can either ask for bank credit (difficult to

obtain), or the company can buy rice from the farmers and deduct the service costs from their income.

2. Wambao has subcontracted its land to four Chinese State-owned agribusiness companies: two companies from the Hubei province and other two from Heilongjiang province.

However, Wambao heavily relies on the second agricultural model, thus reducing the opportunity to create employment at the local level. Wambao's managers argued that Chinese farmers work harder than Mozambicans, thus the company prefer to subcontract its land to Chinese farms. As a result, in 2011 straight after Wambao started its activities local civil society organizations (CSOs) and private media began reporting about land deprivation. In 2012, the local forum of Gaza's NGOs (FONGA) claimed at the Mozambique daily news that more than 80,000 famers were displaced from their land since the start of the Chinese project. Later, FONGA amended its estimate to 38,000 settlers, although the figure is still not confirmed (Ibid.). Moreover, FONGA claimed that the project's water usage could contribute to drought in the Limpopo valley. In 2013, a group of over 400 famers organized a demonstration to stop the Chinese project, and even if the gained a halt of the activities, the policy immediately break out the demonstration. Finally, after the demonstration FONGA sent an open letter to Mozambique's ex-president Armando Guebuza. The letter conceived on the behalf of small-farmers, that how reported by FONGA were angry for the lack of consultation about the project and for the deprivation of land, and lack of resettlement. FONGA divided the settlers into two distinct groups:

1. Cattle herders who lost their grazing land and asked for land compensation, but not for the suspension of the project.
2. Farmers who had been "pulled" out from their land and claimed both the suspension of the project and their land back (Ibid.).

2.6 Land grabbing or friendship farm?

The Wambao rice farm has been a highly debated project, and consequently different narratives have emerged around the role of China. The Mozambique government perceived the project as an opportunity for the development of Xai-Xai production, and considered the Chinese as "serious investor". The Wambao project has been used as a political tool from Mozambican officials to demonstrate that the government was successfully promoting development and fighting poverty. Moreover, Chinese officials obviously did not consider the Wambao project as a case of ‘land grab”, claiming that upon their arrival the potential of the area was not developed. Chinese also claimed that they provided training for local people in Chinese rice agro-technology as proof of their positive involvement, even if how have been commented above sub-contracting Chinese farms has been the predominant model used in Wambao. Furthermore, Chinese officials argued that local’s dissatisfaction was strongly related to the poor transparency of the local government. From the Chinese perspective, local farmers disappointment was caused by the lack of an efficient system of consultation within civil society organizations and local communities, that as a result were poorly informed about the project. In addition, the Chinese argued that the other main problem was the evident nepotism of local government—Wambao managers claimed that these selected to take part to the free training providing by the company were families or friends of prominent officials (Chichava, 2014).

On the other side, Mozambicans perceived Chinese as authoritarian managers attempting to impose their techniques of cultivation, and who think that they work harder than Mozambicans. Probably, these contrasts will continue to emerge if the Mozambicans officials do not take seriously the implementation of consultation processes. Dialogue and information sharing need to be guaranteed by the Mozambique governments as the country strongly need foreign investments to develop its economy. Even if Mozambique’s Land Law should theoretically protect customary rights and ensure that investors’ activities are not detrimental to local livelihoods, official requirements have been ignored in practice, and no dialogue between the investor and local communities has been established.

3. Country overview: Zambia

Zambia with an estimated population in 2018 of 17.61 million, and a density rate of 24 inhabitants per Km2, is one of the most sparsely populated country in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Nearly the 40% of the population is urban, while the majority live in rural areas (Image 2). HIV/AIDS is prevalent in Zambia and contributes to its low life expectancy. Zambia’s HDI value in 2015, ranked the country at 139 out of 188 countries, still from 1990 to 2015 the value increased from 0.398 to 0.579 (UNDP, 2106).

Zambia was a British colony, known as Northern Rhodesia after Cecil Rhodes, a representative of the British South African (BSA) company. The country obtained independence in 1964 under Kenneth Kaunda, who served as the first president of Zambia, and governed for 27 years (1964-1991). However, at the beginning of the 1990s the ongoing economic crisis and international pressure towards a democratization process led to the adoption of a democratic constitution and Frederick Chicuba, member of the Movement for multiparty democracy, was elected as the new president. A multi-party democracy has been in place since 1991 and federal elections took place in September 2011, with the peaceful election of a new president, Michael Sata, which governed until its death in 2014. In the 2015 election a member of the Patriotic Front, Edgar Lungu won the election.

Zambia's economy has historically relied on copper exports and global copper prices. Even if the GDP have growth at a 6/8 percent yearly rate between the 2005 and 2010, there persist strong inequalities in term of GDP distribution. Since most of the population live in rural areas, Zambia needs to diversify its economy. As a result, greater economic diversification has been a cornerstone of Zambia's macroeconomic planning, which currently is focused on fostering agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, and the hydropower sectors. At the same time, Zambia should create favorable conditions to benefit from its mining industry. The WB/IMF Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) of the early 1990s, which required to Zambia to privatize utilities, liberalize trade practices, and cut government spending (including education, sanitation, health services), taxes and royalties from mining activities have contributed little to government coffers, and government revenues from the mining industry are far lower than many other SSA countries. As a result, SAPs have contributed to the fact that very little of the profits of the mining industry stay in the country, and to the insecurity of Zambia's natural resources (Horne, 2011).

Image 2: Map of Zambia

3.1 Background of China-Zambia relationship

China-Zambia relations can be dated back to the pre-independence, when China provided financial and material assistance to the Zambia government to gain autonomy from Western colonialist. Nevertheless, the relation between China and Zambia has been formally consolidated in 1964, at the time that Zambia achieved independence. Indeed, Zambia was the first Sub-Saharan African country who strengthened diplomatic relations with China straight after independence. From its beginning, Sino-Zambian relations have been mutually beneficial: China assisted Zambia's independence movements, and Zambia supported the newly founded People 's Republic of China through supporting China's admission at the United Nations. Showing and reinforcing this relation, is the bilateral agreement signed in 1965 between China and Zambia for the construction of Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA), which still represented the main structure realized by China in Africa (Mwanawina, 2008).

Bilateral cooperation between China and Zambia have particularly increased since the start of the millennium; indeed in 2014, China-Africa trade volume reached US$ 222 billion, 21 times compared to 2000. Through the Forum on China-Africa cooperation, China's bilateral ties with Zambia have consolidated in term of economic cooperation. For instance, during the

FOCAC held in Johannesburg in 2015, China provided Zambia with special trading agreement to promote Zambia exports to China. Indeed, Beijing exempted tariffs on the 98% of commodities imported in China from 31 countries, and Zambia is one of them. Moreover, China offered to Zambia favorable loans and investments without attached conditions, differently from what is commonly offered by international institution such as the WB/IMF (Lubinda & Jian, 2018).

Finally, the longstanding diplomatic relations between China and Zambia have made Zambia an experimental region to test new Chinese-African policies. For instance, Zambia and Mauritius were chosen as the first two regions in Sub-Saharan Africa for the development of special economic zones. In Zambia, the China Nonferrous Mining Group aimed to develop in the Chambishi area a cluster of firms which produced cables, bars, wires, and other products from metals mined in Zambia. The project was welcomed by the Zambia government, that considered it an opportunity for the country to add local value to raw materials, instead of exporting it (Brautigam, 2009).

3.2 China in Zambia agricultural sector

According to the World Bank, in 2014 arable land in Zambia was reported at 3800000 hectares, although due to the lack of infrastructure just a small amount is under cultivation annually. Moreover, the country has a great water potential for irrigation and constituted the 40% of water resources in central Sub-Saharan Africa. The agricultural sector employs nearly 70% of the total labor force, and contributed for about 35 percent of the country's total non-traditional exports. However, historically Zambia have been dependent on copper, and struggled to foster other economic sectors. Agriculture remained highly untapped, although, the Government is promoting agriculture as a way to diversify the economy from copper with the development of farm blocks in each province after 2012 (Mubita, 2010). A farming block is a large agriculture area, large enough to develop economies of scale, where basic agriculture facilities such as water for irrigation, roads, communication facilities are provided. However, as suggested by the OECD, crop diversification in itself does not represent the solution to increase Zambia's agricultural potential. Indeed, the State should support the creation of networks to link Zambia farmers to markets, and to improve market information (Felgenhauer,2008).

China has been present in Zambia's agricultural sector since the beginning of the 1990s. The first Chinese investments have been large-scale projects with size over 500 hectares; the Jonken farm owned by the China National Agricultural Development Group Corporation represented the main one among them. However, since the late 2000s a growing number of private entrepreneurs and firms started to enter Zambia agriculture. Indeed, in 2015 there are only two Chinese State-owned farms while over 30 private farms. Beijing has played a central role in supporting Zambia agriculture through the economic and technical assistance provided for the opening of some Centre for agriculture training. For instance, in 2012 China completed the first technological demonstration centre in Zambia-Lusaka through the Jilin Agricultural University. The center was proposed by former Chinese President Hu Jintao in November 2006 during the Beijing Summit, and is run in collaboration with the University of Zambia. The centre aimed to train 300 students annually, especially around farming techniques, high yield crops, and operating machinery. The centre offered programs in maize, vegetables, mushrooms, soya and wheat. Moreover, in the future the scope of the centre is to develop soil testing and computer programs (Mubita, 2010).

The ministry of agriculture and the ex-president Rupiah Banda expressed their appreciation for China demonstration centre. Moreover, the government claimed that the centre represented the right tool to increase food in rural areas, thus both improving the welfare and food security (Ibid.).

3.3 Land Tenure Issues in Zambia (law and policies)

In 1975, President Kaunda introduced a radical reform which abolished private poverty, imposed the closing of estate agencies and allowed to place all land (expect the Barotse reserve) under the control of the Republican President. Government land policies are not included in just one document but can be traced in several laws, Ministerial circulars, Cabinet circulars, and Presidential decrees, although, the Government is debating a new reform based on private poverty. Generally, Zambia has a dual land system which still retains some of the characteristic of British land law: customary tenure and leasehold tenure. Indeed, customary land, which represent the 90-94% of land base, is a combination of native reserves and native trust lands whose boundaries can be dated back to the British colonial government, and rural chiefs are supposed to hold it in trust for their people. However, customary tenure is unwritten thus it is hard to define it as its meaning changes in each province (Chinene, Banda & Maimbo, n.d.).

Land in Zambia has become particularly interesting for foreign investors, due to its abundance and relatively cheap prices. Since land-use planning does not exist, traditional chiefs can freely negotiate the transfer of customary land to investors. As a result, the availability of customary land varies among chiefdoms and is strictly related to the level of cultural attachment to land. For instance, in the Barotse reserve no land has been leased to foreign investors due to strong sense of ethnic identity and strong traditional hierarchy. However, chiefs can also underestimate the actual value of land and how evidences suggested they can grant land to investors in change of a new car, reform house, or other gifts (Ibid.).

The other way investors can seize land is through the Zambia development agency (ZDA). Due to the increasing demand of land in Zambia, the ZDA have located over 500,000 hectares of the so-called "land bank" that is ready to lease to investors. Most of land bank was not owned by the State but has been converted from customary land before being included in the land bank. The ZDA discouraged investors to obtain land directly from local chiefs because the process might increase lack of transparency, corruption, and limit the role of the government which is not aware of the content of the deals (Horne, 2011). However, while transactions between investors and chiefs are free of charge, in all process involved the ZDA cost and fees are borne by the investors.

In case of large investment, over $10 million, is required to present to the ZDA an Investment promotion and protection agreement (IPPA) that contained a local business development program (LBDP), employment statistics, and reporting requirements. Moreover, in the case of farm block deals a "Sales and purchase agreement" including further clauses such as evaluation is needed. Permits and agreement allowed the ZDA to check that investors observe the content of the deals, and that are not merely speculating over land. Nevertheless, land deals in Zambia are characterized by low levels of transparency. Evidence suggests that when governments departments are not directly included in land agreements they did not seem to be aware of any of the content's deals. Consultation appears to be a merely discussion with the chiefs, rather than an informed on-going process between investors and the local community. Finally, relocation and compensation should be paid out from investors and carried out by the Department of Resettlement under the Office of the Vice President which is responsible for resettlement. However, evidence shows that not a uniform process is implemented, and experiences are different (Ibid.).

3.4 Whuan Kaidi as case study

Kaidi biomass is a joint venture between China's Whuan Kaidi and Zambia's biomass development; it has been listed in the top-20 reported "Chinese" farmland acquisitions in Africa (Table 1.). Rumors around the project started in 2009 when the executive director of the biofuels association of Zambia, Tyson Chisambo, claimed that China was seeking to plant in Zambia 2 million hectares of jatropha, an energy food stock for biodiesel production. These rumors quickly reached media level, and news appeared in the *Economist*, and in a report published by the International food policy research institute (IFPRI). Especially, media reports highlighted that Beijing was putting pressure on Zambia government to obtain the land (Brautigam, 2015). However, the description of the Wuhan Kaidi Zambian biofuel published on various media was not accurate. Deborah Brautigam conducted field research in Zambia, which result are presented in the next paragraphs.

First, the project has been presented as a direct attempt to obtain land in Zambia on the part of Beijing, while it was conceived by two Zambian businessmen. Indeed, during the 2008 interest in biofuel project increased, and the Wuhan Kaidi, a Chinese private renewable energy company was interested to expand globally. Kumbukilani Phiri, a Zambian that was working at the international business division of Wuhan Kaidi, proposed Zambia as a target country for biofuel investments. In 2008, Phiri visited the president of the biofuels association of Zambia, Thomson Sinkala. The meeting went well, and Sinkala was invited at Wuhan headquarters in China to expose Zambia's biofuel potential. The two parties decided to invest together and through the ZDA attempted to obtain the transfer of land from traditional chiefs. In 2009, feasibility studies were undertaken, and Zambia officials declared that were seeking to lease 700,000 hectares and the Chinese Wuhan Kaidi to invest $3 billion (Brautigam, 2015). However, the investment also strictly depended on the total amount of land that they could acquire, and on the final commitment of Chinese banks.

The project aimed to use 70% mixed plantation, and 30% out-grower system with a large factory. Moreover, the project planned to provide seedlings and inputs to benefit the local farmers, that as reported by the investors would have been free to participate in the project at the level they could handle. The ZDA tried to contract with local chiefs the customary land to transfer it into statutory land and make it available for the investments. Chiefs in the Northern Zambia appeared to be favorable to the investment due to the promise of job creation. Indeed, in 2011 the ZDA obtained the concession of land from traditional chiefs for 79,300 hectares, and Wuhan Kaidi committed $450 million (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the main role was finally played by African political elites.

In fact, in 2011 were held in Zambia general elections for the new president. The main candidates were the incumbent president Rupiah Banda of the ruling movement for multiparty democracy, and Levy Mwanawasa who ruled the country since 2002. During the Zambia's 2006 political campaign, Sata already showed its antagonism against Chinese investment and pledged to recognize Taiwan over Beijing if he was elected. However, during the 2006 election the ruling movement for multi-party democracy won the election and Mwanawasa was elected president and governed until his death in 2008. At this point, new elections were held, and Rupiah Banda won the presidential vote with the with 40.09% of the vote against 38.13% for Sata. However, at the general election held in 2011 Michael Sata became Zambia's new president. As a result, the newly-elected president refused to sign the conversion to statutory land for the 79,300 hectares agreed for the development of the project. Sata pledged to transfer only 2,000 hectares for a pilot phase but Wuhan Kaidi argued that was too risky and despite three years of contracting decided to abandon the project (Ibid.).

4. Identifying Similarities and Differences

The case studies that have been presented above present similarities and differences. Indeed, both projects appeared in the top 20 reported case of "Chinese" farmland in Africa during the 2000-2014 period. However, as evidence suggested, the projects unfolded differently from what media reported. While in the case of Mozambique the actual amount of land under cultivation is quite smaller compared to the 20,000 hectares claimed in the reports, in Zambia the project has been abandoned even if it is still reported on web. Moreover, a lack of appropriate and documented information has created a misunderstanding on the role of China as land grabber in Africa, that as showed by the cases reported is smaller than what is commonly believed. Nevertheless, poorly checked information is also related to the difficult access to information and challenges to obtain figures both in China and Africa. Thus, while the cases studies examined represent some of the prominent cases backed with field research, most investments are not adequately documented.

Both cases have been presented by the media as a clear request of China to obtain land abroad mainly to ensure food security. However, in both cases the investment has been carried out by a joint venture between Chinese and Zambian companies. As Buckley (2013) argued, land management deals are negotiated by a wide range of subjects. Land deals are dynamic processes which comprised State actors, private investors, and citizens (Buckley, 2013). For instance, how happened in Zambia, China’s intention to invest in a vast tract of land has been prevented by the President Sata. African governments played a leading role in supporting or preventing foreign investments. In the case of Mozambique, the government has been presented the project as an important pillar for rural development and have been supported the project since its beginning. However, despite government supports and China’s objectives, the local community has playing a crucial role in raise awareness around China’s presence in Mozambique and achieved at some point to halt the activities of the company.

The case studies show that stronger land tenure policies are required to ensure that mechanism of consultation are fully applied, and to prevent forced displacement of local farmers. Agriculture is the backbone of Africa’s development, and better regulations of land deals should be implemented from the local to the national level. The presence of China in Africa agriculture is growing, still few field researches supported by accountable figures have been conducted recently. In conclusion, evidences suggested that media reports have created a misunderstanding around the role of China as land grabber in Africa. Although, China’s presence in Africa agriculture is a relation that need to be further explore through systematically field research.

Conclusion

China has been active in Africa for over half a century. This study suggests that before international attention grew following the 2007-08 food crisis, China has been constantly present in Africa since the 1950s and the 1960s. As of 2018, China is Africa's largest trading partner and is currently maintaining diplomatic relations with all African countries excepted for Swaziland which has ties with Taipei. Nevertheless, China has been designed as one of the biggest land grabber in Africa and its increased involvement have raised concerns both in the West and in Africa, about the motives behind China's foreign aid and whether China is only interested in the continent's rich natural resources and/or whether it is also concerned about development and poverty reduction. This study attempted to verify the role of China as land grabber. Indeed, evidences suggested that China's interests in African agriculture were not merely consequent to the 2007-08 food crisis as has been claimed by media reports. China endorsed in the going global policy in agriculture already in 2001, long before the food crisis, and since then Chinese companies have been encouraged and supported to invest in overseas farming.

This thesis tried to go behind common perceptions about China's presence in Africa and attempted to collect new evidence about this longstanding relationship. The common perception that China is supporting its enterprises to acquire land abroad as part of a national food security strategy is not supported by grounded research. China's intentions in Africa are still not clear, and the paucity of data hinders a correct understanding of Sino-African relation. China's involvement in African agriculture has certainly increased and China is interested in investing in farmland abroad. Nevertheless, while the involvement of China in Africa has been seen with suspicions by the West, African countries are willing to strengthen their relations with the Chinese government, especially for their principles of non-intervention, mutual benefit, and equity. To some extent, China has become an alternative cooperation partner at least as important as the EU for example in the case of Ethiopia and Angola.

However, the case studies of Mozambique and Zambia suggested that Chinese investments could face government and local opposition. The role of recipient governments need to be further explore because is crucial in either provide or deny support to Beijing.

Despite China's interests in African agriculture, is necessary to consider that land deals involved a wide range of actors that goes from States to private companies, and the outcome of a land investment results from the sum of interests of all actors engaged in the deal. Moreover, the case studies suggested that land investment brought to the displacement of people from their land, and to mechanism of consultation and information only partially applied. This is likely to happen not merely in the case of Chinese land investments but of all foreign investors presented in Africa. Indeed, land grabbing lack of a consistent international regulations or at least of a list of "good-practices" which are agreed by the stakeholders. Land grabbing has been massively happening in Africa because it is the continent with the main share of arable land, weak land rights and easily corruptible governments. As a student of local development, I found the Sino-Africa relations an extremely interesting field of study because is still new, and full of myths to debunk and truths to discover. However, at the end of this work I realized how little has been investigated on the implications that Chinese agriculture investments have on local land users and holders. International attention concerned around the total amount of land leased from Chinese or the number of Chinese immigrants presented in Africa, although, the effects that these investments had at the local level (as always) raised little attention.

As the presence of China in Africa agricultural sector is not going to slow at any point in the future, I assume is important to investigate if mechanisms of consultation and consent are fully or partially applied, and to which extent the right to food and land of affected community is respected. The current lack of information about how China operates regarding the rights of local land users, does not allow the international community to actually protect access to natural resources and human rights. Agriculture is supposing to be the sector that could lead Africa out of poverty, and as a result the country need to attract foreign investment to foster rural development. Chinese investments in rural Africa could represent a development opportunity if land deals create local jobs, infrastructure and an efficient transfer of technology that enhance the resilience of local farmers. However, in order to ensure to African countries, the development they deserve systematic fieldworks, that focus more on the effects that Chinese investments have at the local level rather than how much land they have finally leased, are necessary. I am strongly convinced that this existing academic gap need to be fill, and this work can represent a valuable starting point.

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Appendix 1

Eight Principles for China's Aid to Foreign Countries (1964)

1. The Chinese Government always bases itself on the principle of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other countries. It never regards such aid as a kind of unilateral alms but as something mutual.
2. In providing aid to other countries, the Chinese Government strictly respects the sovereignty of the recipient countries, and never attaches any conditions or asks for any privileges.
3. China provides economic aid in the form of interest-free or low-interest loans and extends the time limit for repayment when necessary so as to lighten the burden of the recipient countries as far as possible.
4. In providing aid to other countries, the purpose of the Chinese Government is not to make the recipient countries dependent on China but to help them embark step by step on the road of self-reliance and independent economic development.
5. The Chinese Government tries its best to help the recipient countries build projects which require less investment while yielding quicker results, so that the recipient governments may increase their income and accumulate capital.
6. The Chinese Government provides the best-quality equipment and material of its own manufacture at international market prices. If the equipment and material provided by the Chinese Government are not up to the agreed specification and quality, the Chinese Government undertake store place them.
7. In providing any technical assistance, the Chinese Government will see to it that the personnel of the recipient country fully master such technique.
8. The experts dispatched by China to help in construction in the recipient countries will have the same standard of living as the experts of the recipient country. The Chinese experts are not allowed to make any special demands or enjoy any special amenities.

Source: Speech by Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, Accra, Ghana, January 15, 1964.