



The challenge of locating land-based climate change mitigation and adaptation politics within a social justice perspective: towards an idea of agrarian climate justice

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ABSTRACT

The global land rush and mainstream climate change narratives have broadened the ranks of state and social actors concerned about land issues, while strengthening those opposed to social justice-oriented land policies. This emerging configuration of social forces makes the need for deep social reforms through redistribution, recognition, restitution, regeneration and resistance – book-ended by the twin principles of ‘maximum land size’ (‘size ceiling’) and a ‘guaranteed minimum land access’ (‘size floor’) – both more compelling and urgent, and, at the same time, more difficult than ever before. The five deep social reforms of socially just land policy are necessarily intertwined. But the global land rush amidst deepening climate change calls attention to the linkages, especially between the pursuit of agrarian justice on the one hand and climate justice on the other. Here, the relationship is not without contradictions, and warrants increased attention as both unit of analysis and object of political action. Understanding and deepening agrarian justice imperatives in climate politics, and understanding and deepening climate justice imperatives in agrarian politics, is needed more than ever in the ongoing pursuit of alternatives.

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Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) as constructed and promoted by the World Bank and FAO and in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been gaining in popularity and momentum since the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21) in Paris in 2015. Their version of CSA is constructed out of recycled building blocks from the new institutional economics tradition obsessed with the pursuit of economic efficiency in the allocation and use of scarce resources, like land, and the win-win management of carbon emissions. Both aspects have been brought together under CSA. More than just a flashy new term, CSA constitutes an important ideological milestone where the notion of *ecological sustainability* is conjured as urgent and strategic alongside the neoliberal notion of *economic*

efficiency. From an agrarian and environmental justice point of view, how this new conjuncture recasts land politics is (or should be) a major concern: how does it answer the core political question of who ought to get which land, for how long, for what purposes and with what implications, and who ought to decide?

For those who see the global land rush as an opportunity, there is a tendency to portray many of the current users and uses of scarce land, water, sea and forest resources as economically inefficient and necessarily belonging more to the past than the future. The *World Development Report 2008*¹ sets the contemporary stage on re-evaluating agriculture and its role for development, emphasising the role of market-based mechanisms in the allocation and use of resources, and the need to assist those who do not have the potential to become efficient and competitive producers to get out of agriculture.² This neoliberal logic extends through the use and expansion of carbon metrics to nature conservation and climate change politics in the era of global resource rush. The groundbreaking critical conceptual framing of this intersection is the notion of 'green grabbing' – the grabbing of land and related natural resources in the name of the environment – by Fairhead, Leach and Scoones in 2012.³ Conceptually, CSA is an organic extension of the *World Development Report 2008* that is founded on the quest for economic efficiency and the role of agriculture in capitalist development⁴ on the one hand, and the World Bank 2011 report on the global land grabs, on the other.⁵ In the latter report, the global land rush is seen as inherently good for agriculture and for the rural economy, but needing proper governance to minimise collateral damage such as widespread expulsion of villagers from their land without compensation. A code of conduct for corporations to help them practice corporate social responsibility has been put forward by the World Bank to address problems associated with land grabs.⁶

The explicit assumption that some resource users and uses are *economically inefficient* has helped frame land and agricultural policies against peasant agriculture and in favour of industrial agribusiness agriculture. Meanwhile, another assumption, or insinuation – that some resource users and use are *environmentally destructive* – has been informing long-standing big neoliberal nature conservation initiatives, many (if not most) of which are attempts at commodifying nature and have varying degrees of impact on affected communities.⁷ The formulation in CSA takes mainstream advocacy to another level by framing it strategically within the context of addressing climate crisis and environmental destruction through 'ecologically sustainable agriculture'. This revives an old colonial-era assumption that some resource users and uses are ecologically destructive, e.g. shifting agriculture,⁸ artisanal fishing and pastoralism, and combines it now with the global land rush related assumption that some resource users and uses are economically inefficient. CSA brings these two narratives together in a single frame, where they can work hand-in-glove to reinforce each other's messages, with far-reaching implications for land politics.

How today's climate change politics intertwines in reality with neoliberal land politics is an empirical question, one which this paper explores. The global land rush has already been researched extensively. Overall, much of this research has focused attention mostly on the discernible impacts of known land deals on specific local communities within their declared boundaries.⁹ In turn, policy actions tend to respond to the pattern of these specific cases (taken as iconic examples), and almost always privilege procedural response formulas, such as multistakeholder dialogue platforms, formalised grievance mechanisms, conflict resolution processes, making cadastre records more transparent and formalisation of (usually individual) private property land rights. What is much less explored are the broader

political-institutional impacts of land grabbing on society more widely, that is, on the society-wide land questions including those pertaining to the social function of land. This broader concern is the focus of the present exploration.

Our starting point is that poverty, powerlessness and inequity in the countryside are often linked to the land question. The relatively recent capital accumulation and development processes produced at least four types of contemporary social groups whose livelihoods depend on land access: (1) those who were coercively expelled from their land partly because of the global land rush, (2) those who still have access to land but their access is seriously threatened by the land rush and other capitalist relations penetrating the countryside, (3) those who have lost access to land (and those who have never had access to land at all) due to longer term historical processes of social differentiation and exclusion and (4) those who did not lose land despite being swept into the land rush but have been incorporated into the emerging enterprises through a variety of arrangements like contract farming or land leasing. Each of these four types of resulting life-livelihood changes undermines in varying ways and extents the social function of land and instead contributes to or reinforces persistent poverty, powerlessness and inequity. In our view, only deep social reforms, i.e. system-wide structural and social justice-oriented land policies, can effectively and meaningfully address the problem. Specific interventions can take a variety of forms: land reform, leasehold reform, tenancy reform, land restitution, forestland reallocation, reforms of contract farming and land leasing arrangements, fairer wages and better labour conditions, and so on. Historically, such policies and interventions have been difficult, but not impossible, to achieve.

This exploration of the broader concern outlined above is informed by our long-standing empirical research in different countries and regions of the world, as well as by our ongoing work in Myanmar and Cambodia, where large agrarian sectors remain key to the national economy, especially in terms of providing employment and livelihood to a majority rural population. In both countries, the inability of their non-agricultural sectors to fully absorb all those looking for jobs is contributing to a growing informal sector concentrated in the capital and other urban and peri-urban centres. Mining industry and tourism are key growth sectors, which also lead to social and environmental conflicts. Both countries have long history of armed conflict and violence in the countryside where land resources and territory have been contested, and both are hotspots in a land rush where Chinese and regional capital are key players. State-sponsored promotion of so-called 'available lands' for reallocation to foreign and domestic investors is a key common feature as well. Large-scale land investments for food, animal feed, biofuel (or flex crops), pulp, timber and mineral ore are increasingly joined by projects framed (or reframed) as climate change mitigation: hydropower, nature conservation and REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), among others. Both countries participate actively in the UNFCCC process, and have explicitly committed to climate change mitigation and adaptation. To varying extents, rural-oriented civil society organisations are actively addressing land issues through organising and advocacy. As one would expect, important differences in terms of state character, class formation, capital accumulation and spread and strength of civil society, among others, has contributed to the specific trajectories in contemporary land politics taken by each country.¹⁰ Yet both countries have undergone a significant recasting of their respective land politics in the dual and converging contexts of regional land rush and climate change politics.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 is a brief discussion about CSA, focusing on its land dimension. Section 3 is a discussion on the ways in which the global

land rush has altered land politics. Section 4 is a discussion on the ways in which climate change politics have altered land politics. Section 5 is a concluding discussion focusing on the implications of how we think about land politics.

Climate Smart Agriculture's land politics

Officially, CSA aims for three outcomes: *increased productivity, increased resilience, and reduced emissions*.¹¹ This is partly based on the projection that the world population will be 10 billion by 2050 and on the related assumption that global food production would thus need to be increased by 50% from its current level. Central to CSA is a particular kind of land politics. In the 2016 World Bank Group *Climate Change Action Plan*, faith in market-based mechanisms and associated approaches with respect to natural resource (re)allocation and use is reaffirmed in an important section entitled, 'Climate-Smart Land Use, Water, and Food Security'.¹² The World Bank document is silent on shifting cultivation, a long fallows form of agroforestry that is widely practiced globally and, after a long period of being maligned and criminalised, is slowly (re)gaining support from some climate justice advocates in light of its many contributions, including to its climate change mitigation properties.¹³ Its silence does not mean that the World Bank supports shifting cultivation; rather, this silence alongside the emphasis on the CSA triad of productivity, resilience and reduced emission resoundingly suggests that shifting cultivation is included in the list of those users and uses that the Bank thinks will have to go, e.g. peasant and indigenous peoples' production systems, shifting cultivation and pastoralism, while industrial farming systems and technology are promoted instead, e.g. GMOs, modern seeds, agribusiness plantations alongside big conservation initiatives.¹⁴ The World Bank document is also silent on how and how much an expanded industrial agriculture sector contributes to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. More importantly, the World Bank's version of CSA is silent on land redistribution, recognition and restitution, and how these measures may have relevance for climate change mitigation and adaptation questions. Neither does the FAO's version (based on the massive 570-page Sourcebook of 2013) mention these three key social justice land policies – especially ironic in light of the FAO's key role in developing and implementing the 2012 Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure (VGGT). The latter recognises all three of these measures as part of a new international standard on land, fisheries and forest tenure regulation.¹⁵ Ignoring the social justice aspects of the guidelines, the FAO CSA Sourcebook adopts or follows the World Bank's narrow 'tenure insecurity' language and framework as the reason for lack of investments in land, whether from farmers themselves or corporate entities, and leaves open what kind of resource tenure regime could guarantee 'security' for marginalised land users and holders. What the World Bank terms Climate-Smart Land Use¹⁶ is essentially their answer to who ought to get which land for how long and what purpose in light of the three aspirations of neoliberal versions of productivity, resilience and reduced emissions.

The ways in which the global land rush has altered land politics

The narrative justifying and legitimising the global land rush suggests that some forms of peasant production systems and pastoralism are considered to be 'economically inefficient' in terms of land use and land users, and that something has to be done about this.¹⁷ The current land rush has been actively promoted and facilitated by central governments.¹⁸

Subsequent actions have altered the balance of social forces that have interest in land and the political opportunity structure for land claim-makers. Social forces opposed to social justice-oriented land policies of redistribution, recognition, restitution and fairer terms of incorporation of villagers within emerging enterprises have been strengthened politically, while the big picture political impacts are far wider and deeper than any aggregated impact of specific land deals on local communities. Making progress on redistribution, recognition, restitution and fairer terms of incorporation has become even more difficult in light of the land rush. A closer look at Myanmar is illustrative.

Myanmar is one of the world's hotspots of land grabbing where large swathes of arable land has been grabbed from the villagers, especially over the past 25 years and with a significant spike after 2010.¹⁹ The quasi-military government in 2012 enacted several new laws related to land that initiated a land market based on a Western-style private property rights system, partly by declaring all unregistered land as 'vacant, fallow or virgin land' and subject to allocation to domestic and foreign investors. Much of the land held, occupied and used by villagers across the country and especially in ethnic border areas is long-standing, locally managed and regulated customary land not registered with the national government. Registering and getting the government land use certificates is neither easy nor guaranteed, and is often out of reach for much of the rural working class and non-Bamar ethnic population. Despite deepening political polarisation based on land politics and a growing popular clamour since 2010 to democratise land access and control in Myanmar, redistributive land reform and associated fundamental principles, such as 'land to tiller' (ensuring all those wanting to work the land get land) and 'land size ceiling' (preventing too much land accumulation by few elites), do not figure in the National Land Use Policy (NLUP). This is despite important other progressive provisions in NLUP.²⁰ For instance, land restitution today remains one of the most difficult redistributive land policies in the current context of Myanmar where the number of dispossessed people is increasing because of the recent spike in land grabbing. This is in addition to many already existing claims for land restitution of people who were forced to flee their homes and their farms due to armed conflict and a long history of forced military hamletting.²¹ Estimates by NGO professionals working on this issue suggest that there are about million internally displaced population (IDPs) and refugees in Myanmar today.²² Meanwhile, those who were displaced due to armed conflict are likely to face an uphill battle in trying to regain their original lands and villages as the global land rush may have already gained ground in those spaces. Several rounds of ceasefire agreements in recent decades between ethnic armed organisations and the government have opened the door for corporate interests to penetrate spaces that had previously been off-limits because of the war, a phenomenon that has been called 'ceasefire capitalism'.²³ The current government has taken the path of promoting extractive industries to lift the country's economy. The extractive sector not only includes mines and timber extraction, it also includes various forms of agro-extractivism. The latter is seen in the dramatic expansion of monocultures of oil palm, rubber, sugarcane and maize. In the states bordering with China, for example, cultivation of sugarcane, maize and banana has dramatically expanded in recent years, converting biodiverse shifting agriculture communities into sedentary monocultures. This is done largely through informal, individual transactions involving layers of land brokers operating below the radar of formal institutional monitors, taking advantage of the informal land property structure. The combination of militarised forced evictions, recent corporate land deals, expansion of extractive industries and laws that facilitate and legitimise these

corporate and military land grabs and villagers' dispossession have put the issue of land politics at the centre of mainstream development policy discourse. Ceasefire agreements or efforts towards such agreements with major ethnic armed groups have put land politics at the centre stage of such negotiations. The official response is to deploy market-based and market-friendly policies, and a consistent political stance of committed unwillingness to pursue deep social reforms in land property systems. The seduction of corporate profits and rent-seeking pay-offs are too strong to resist. This is while protests and mobilisations from the villagers and their allies – especially by the fledgling national network of grassroots organisations, Lands In Our Hands (LIOH) alliance – are not yet that strong to be able to push for significant concessions towards deep social reforms around land size ceiling to cap corporate land greed and a 'guaranteed minimum land access' to villagers.

The story of Myanmar is not a unique one. We see similar patterns in Cambodia²⁴ and more generally in Southeast Asia, where we see how the political momentum of the contemporary land rush is dialectically linked to weakened political alliances and absence of political momentum for social justice-oriented land policies of redistribution, recognition and restitution. There is not a single country in the region today that has a political momentum on deep social reforms around land that is anchored on the principles of land size ceiling to cap corporate land control and guaranteed minimum land access to ensure equitable land allocation (e.g. the twin foundations of social justice-oriented land politics). This is despite the compelling case for such a policy: significant agrarian sector, very large un- and under-employment and widespread socio-economic and political inequalities. Arguably, the political impact of the land deals may be the most profoundly complex and far-reaching implication of the land rush. This can be seen in several ways.

First, the land rush tends to strengthen the landed classes and corporate power in relation to the overall balance of forces in these societies. This is because the opportunities for lucrative land-based enterprises that such land investments promise to bring about encourage landed classes and agribusiness to hold on to their lands even tighter and to vigorously oppose any redistributive land policies.

Second, within these states, the land rush is both strengthening and being strengthened by actors and policy currents that prioritise capital accumulation. States are not monolithic entities: they internalise social class differentiation and dynamics, as well as political contradictions in society. Following O'Connor and Fox,²⁵ we see states in capitalist societies generally performing two fundamental but contradictory tasks: facilitating *capital accumulation* (through corporate investments, taxation, etc.) while maintaining a historically determined minimum level of *political legitimacy* (through social policies, social reforms, etc.). The land rush is sparking contention between these two broadly competing currents within the state; the capital accumulation current seems to be getting the upper hand.

Third, even as states are marked by the type of competing currents just described, they are also marked by institutional interests and conflicts as well. Central states, especially those experiencing financial challenges, tend to embrace the land rush as an opportunity to generate material benefits from cashing-in on resources over which they have asserted historical and authoritative claim. Anticipation of benefits through taxes, job and livelihood generation, and basic social and physical infrastructures (roads, schools, clinics) can become a driving force. Meanwhile, in societies with long-running efforts by the central state to extend its authority over territories marked by counter-claims and (sometimes armed) challengers including indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and class-based insurgent movements, state

actors may try to shape large-scale investments to support state territorialisation campaigns. Finally, where rent-seeking traditions remain entrenched in state bureaucracies, surging corporate interest in land constitutes new opportunities for corrupt bureaucrats to exploit for personal gain.

Fourth, in light of the global land rush, smallholder agriculture and other production and tenure systems in the countryside (pastoralism, artisanal fishing, shifting agriculture – in customary tenure) in these societies is being further maligned, marginalised or ‘invisibilised’ in the mainstream narrative. The role of discursive power in these dynamics is evident too, as ‘investments’ are routinely made to appear in official pronouncements and policy papers by definition as only those made by corporations. Public investments and investments made by rural villagers (peasants, pastoralists, fishers) – if and when they are mentioned – are portrayed as inconsequential at best, and destructive at worst.

Fifth, historically, social and cultural tensions based on social class and identity (gender, generation, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion) are widespread in many of these societies. One of the most disturbing and egregious political impacts of the land rush has been to reignite old tensions and fan the flames of new ones. Many of what are labelled today as religious or ethnic tensions and conflicts have deep historical roots in a basically agrarian dimension.²⁶

In sum, to date, the land rush has been altering the balance of state and social forces and ‘political opportunity structure’ in many societies,²⁷ largely favouring the landed classes and elite actors engaged in capital accumulation, while marginalising social justice land policies of redistribution, recognition and restitution, and dividing and weakening rural working poor and their allies and movements politically. In this context, however well intended, public policy interventions focused narrowly on formal-legal and procedural issues around land deals *alone* are unlikely to stop or even slow this fundamental trend, much less to advance agrarian and social justice. Rather, precisely because such narrow responses fall short of more daring system-wide reforms around land redistribution, recognition, restitution and fairer terms of incorporation, they are more likely to ratify and reinforce these trends.

The ways in which climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives have altered land politics

More or less the same state and corporate actors who previously coveted the lands that are now the object of the land rush increasingly invoke the issue of climate change to complement and reinforce their efficiency arguments. This invocation is potent because it can further tilt the balance of state and social forces against social justice-oriented land policies. Many climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives are land-related, i.e. they require land or have impact on land and, regardless of original intention, recast the political economy of land and associated resources – water, seas, forest.²⁸

One phenomenon that links the global land rush and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies is the rise in popularity, materially or discursively, of flex crops and commodities – a rise that has been enabled by climate change politics (through incentives to agrofuels and through CDM and REDD+ projects). In Borras et al.’s definition, flex crops and commodities:

have multiple uses (food, feed, fuel, fibre, industrial material, etc.) that can be flexibly interchanged while some consequent supply gaps can be filled by other flex crops. Flexibility arises

from multiple relationships among various crops, components and uses. Specific forms of flexible-ness and multiple-ness can become more profitable through several means – e.g. changes in market prices [...], policy frameworks [...] and technoscientific advance facilitating conversion of non-edible feedstock [...]. The latter's economic viability depends on low-cost feedstock, which can be cheapened by several means, e.g. mining nature, super-exploitative labour, more intense market competition and land grabs. Current examples include soya (feed, food, biodiesel), sugarcane (food, ethanol), oil palm (food, biodiesel, commercial/industrial uses) and corn (food, feed, ethanol).²⁹

The multiple-ness and flexible-ness of uses at a commercial scale can be real, anticipated or imagined but has the same overall impact: the dramatic increase in the global production of these crops and commodities. Producing these crops and commodities is usually done through large-scale, industrial monocultures, even when at times these incorporate individual smallholders through a variety of contract growing schemes. The notion of 'flex crops' helps to highlight different sectoral 'value chains' that get entangled to form 'value webs' and truly cross-border, international interconnectedness.³⁰ A sugarcane plantation in Cambodia that is producing only sweeteners is just as embedded in the global 'flex sugarcane complex' as the sweeter-ethanol oriented production in Sao Paulo, Brazil. This means that a particular company operating a sugarcane plantation and mill does not necessarily have to produce multiple products of sweeteners, ethanol and others to be considered part of the 'flex sugarcane complex'; the company is subsumed, objectively, within the global complex of flex sugarcane. The global expansion of flex crops has depended on a major recasting of global land control, which in turn has been one of the most profound and far-reaching implications of climate change narratives getting entangled with land politics.

The relatively recent proliferation of sugarcane plantations in parts of Cambodia,³¹ Myanmar and the Philippines³² or the oil palm boom spreading across Southeast Asia³³ including areas outside the Indonesia-Malaysia hub such as Tanintharyi Region in Myanmar, and the corn boom in northern Myanmar³⁴ – all are part of the global flex crop complex. In these places, the connection between climate change mitigation and adaptation ideas and expulsion of people from the land may not be very explicit or immediately obvious. But this relative 'invisibility' does not make the connection less real. Indeed, this relative invisibility makes it especially difficult to detect, diagnose and regulate. This is one reason why the issue of indirect land use change (ILUC) is hotly contested by bureaucrats and activists in the European Union.

Among the social groups that have been empowered and emboldened in the era of climate change politics are big conservation organisations that seek to enclose vast tracts of land, forest or water, usually located in the Global South, in the name of preserving biodiversity, preventing deforestation and nature degradation, or sequestering and trading carbon stocks. The idea behind carbon offsetting schemes is simple: industrialised countries can maintain ecologically polluting industries both locally or investing elsewhere by having the poorer countries in the Global South create some artificial balance in GHG emission. In exchange, the latter receive payments through various (usually market-based led by northern investors) mechanisms. But the exchange also depends on the partial or full disruption of villagers' lives and livelihoods, which involves instituting predetermined prohibitions on: villagers' access to the forest to gather non-timber forest products, landing rights of artisanal fishers or pastoralists' access to grazing in particular areas. Because no formal physical expulsion or displacement is involved, it is often erroneously assumed that the impacts on 'participating' (affected) communities is less adverse or not always and immediately considered as something wrong or to be protested on the part of villagers. In reality this condition may

even be more problematic, as shown by much of the critical scholarship on REDD+ and on neoliberalisation of nature, which has quite forcefully raised the issue of the far-reaching impacts of such exclusionary practices.³⁵ In some cases, offsetting initiatives allow 'investors' to capture control of the benefits of resource use twice: first through extractive (mostly mining) type projects and second through the offsetting that is portrayed as compensating for the emissions/biodiversity destruction created by the first one.

Indeed, the green economy concept placed economic growth and nature conservation under the same umbrella in a wider iteration of the climate mitigation narrative 'who pollutes pays', while also serving to justify business as usual. It is deployed especially by those who covet villagers' land as a cloak to cover up/green wash straightforward resource grabbing agendas. Climate change mitigation/adaptation and sustainable development ideas have now become catchall phrases, which allow different elite interest groups to interpret such ideas differently, principally to enable their profit-making agendas. The construction of the narrative itself involves power, and occurs within power relations. This is why an industrial monoculture plantation of fast-growing trees by a South Korean company in Cambodia was able to qualify as a purported climate change mitigation investment under the Clean Development Mechanism – even when they engaged in massive clear-cutting of the natural forest to pave the way for the artificial forest.³⁶

In sharp contrast is the long-standing traditional localised community forestry that is carefully maintained by the villagers in the same Prey Lang Forest of Cambodia. However, situations like these are generally not accepted by green economy authorities as mitigation initiatives. Instead of being seen essentially as effective contributions to addressing climate change and the multiple crises besetting humanity at this time, which could and should be supported through social justice oriented policies, they are typically posited as obstacles to a green economy and targeted for takeover by corporate and entrepreneurial land rush elites and climate change entrepreneurs.³⁷ This is happening with regard to centuries-old practices of production and resource access by indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in Cambodia and Myanmar³⁸ where what Dwyer³⁹ calls the 'formalisation fix' has also become the dominant land policy tool for commodifying such spaces. Under the green economy frame, irrigation for a large-scale agribusiness cassava plantation for ethanol that emerged from what villagers thought as a land grab can be labelled as a climate change adaptation project.⁴⁰ Major hydropower projects – that will export electricity to China⁴¹ while converting traditional shifting agriculture plots into sedentary, chemical-based corn monoculture plantations – can be labelled as mitigation/adaptation and incorporated into World Bank-inspired 'Climate-Smart Land Use' development plans. Ongoing agricultural, conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation in Myanmar and Cambodia may not always explicitly call for the forced eradication of shifting agriculture, but the combination of institutional incentives and disincentives suggests otherwise. Even though in many REDD+ and similar conservation sites 'beneficiary' villagers are told that they will be supported for keeping their traditional ways of relating to and protecting forests, too often in practice, when those projects are implemented, communities are no longer allowed to engage in shifting cultivation inside the officially declared and demarcated conservation sites.

We can draw important insights from the situation currently unfolding in Myanmar and Cambodia with resonance both more widely within, as well as beyond, Southeast Asia.

First, CSA is built upon the triple principles of 'increased productivity', 'increased resilience' and 'reduced emission', with an unmistakable bias of giving extra weight to the first, which

is presented as a vehicle to achieve the other two. In effect, similar to what happens with REDD+, CSA is presented as a way of providing additional income to farmers for keeping their ways of living, while in practice actually marginalising a large part of agrarian societies (shifting cultivation, pastoralism, artisanal fishing) portrayed as the less productive, non-resilient and GHG emitting production systems.

Second, CSA and CSA-friendly narratives, explicitly or implicitly, call for – and essentially *require* – the eradication of much of smallholder production systems (shifting cultivation, pastoralism and artisanal fishing). This can be seen partly in state policies that implicitly mean the eradication of such production systems, such as by not issuing certificates of occupancy to villagers in the midst of threats of counter-claims over the lands and land grabs, or denying them access to grazing lands or fishing grounds.

Third, by constructing a hegemonic agenda around officially designated projects and policies for climate change mitigation and adaptation, mainstream climate change narratives create a dichotomised mitigation and adaptation framework. Only officially authorised and labelled mitigation and adaptation projects (oftentimes these are market-based) are considered to be worthy of state and international funding and institutional support, with REDD+ and other large-scale nature conservation projects as good examples of this kind of (state) ‘legibility’ requirement, which at the same time serves to de-legitimise activities that don’t fit and render them unworthy of state support. The CSA umbrella thus becomes a convenient cover for problematic projects that in turn are portrayed as mitigation and adaptation initiatives, such as the expansion of monocultures for the production of flex crops and commodities, expansion of industrial fishing and intensive industrial animal production even when these clearly contribute to expanding the industrial agriculture that, in its current level, is already one of the single biggest contributors to GHG emissions. The narrative also facilitates the relabelling of large-scale projects that are originally and essentially for industrial purposes into instant mitigation measures, such as mega hydropower projects. It bears stressing that by privileging some types of projects and initiatives, the official narrative necessarily undermines others – namely, long-standing community-based mitigation and adaptation practices, such as community forests, biodiverse and non-monoculture farming systems found in shifting agriculture, pastoralism, agroecology and artisanal fishing, among others – either by delegitimising and invisibilising, or capturing and reorienting, them toward elite-controlled green economy purposes.

Fourth, the official discourse and practice in mitigation and adaptation, in turn, requires institutional reforms that marginalise long-standing, often locally-negotiated and controlled norms and typically flexible ‘living’ regulatory systems in natural resource politics, such as customary ownership and community resource access including social safety nets, while privileging instead formalised private property systems that include clearer and fixed project boundaries and sedentary and fixed cultivation and extraction spaces. Indeed, in many countries marked by intense and/or widespread land conflicts, the formalisation of property that is closely linked to CSA expansion in practice has been mainstreamed as the primary way of ‘solving’ them – despite considerable (and still growing) evidence that there is a strong tendency for this kind of ‘fix’ to create new conflicts or reignite and spread old ones. Such fixes meanwhile almost always benefit large top-down conservation projects and big agribusiness enterprises that, precisely, entail redefining by force and/or fiat core activities like ‘protecting’, ‘mitigating’, ‘investing’ in a way that necessarily undermines and excludes existing traditional practices and customary systems.

Fifth, together the above have reinforced, deepened and extended the political impact of the land rush and, thus, further blocked possibilities for deep social reforms on land redistribution, recognition and restitution.

To conclude: only by looking more closely at the wider political impacts of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies can we see their deeper implications including those that are otherwise not immediately obvious. At a glance, climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives may easily appear to have not yet gained ground in Myanmar, for example, because there are no officially established REDD+ areas (as of this writing). But a deeper look at the various processes that are interlinked in complex ways across geographic space, institutional boundaries and time indicates that climate change politics have long gained momentum and, unfortunately, are already now quite entrenched. Only by looking at the broad-spectrum political impact can we even begin to detect, and thereby begin to understand, how maize monoculture and oil palm plantations in Myanmar are intimately linked to climate change politics. In short, mainstream climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives have reinforced the exclusionary effect of the global land rush by legitimising and facilitating the latter and/or by running a parallel exclusionary process. In this context, land-oriented climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives that are not anchored on the twin principles of 'maximum land size' (size ceiling) and guaranteed minimum land access (size floor) that in turn frame land redistribution, recognition and restitution, are very likely to end up reinforcing land grabs and helping to expand exclusionary and ecologically problematic industrial agriculture and neoliberal nature conservation systems.

Concluding discussion: implications for how we think about land politics

The contemporary processes of the global land rush and natural resource-oriented climate change mitigation/adaptation narrative are recasting the political economy of land, water, fisheries and forests in the rural world, and reconfiguring how capital penetrates agriculture and the countryside. Ostensibly, the twin objectives are to combat what is assumed to be the *inefficient* and *destructive* use and users of scarce natural resources, mostly in the countryside of the Global South. Agriculture is at the intersection of these purported twin processes. Three broadly distinct dimensions of this narrative – reformulated as questions – can be distilled out in relation to agriculture and rural livelihoods: (1) what kinds of agriculture and rural livelihoods are 'efficient and productive' enough to sustain capital accumulation imperatives, (2) what kinds of agriculture and rural livelihoods are 'ecologically sustainable and less precarious' for the population and (3) where do efficient and sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods end and broad range of nature conservation/commodification begin. It could be added that, ultimately, the latter question, in turn, would also train a spotlight on the concept of 'sustainable development' and on the validity and relevance of pursuing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of this architecture. Meanwhile, these three broadly distinct dimensions are addressed through a variety of mutually reinforcing CSA and neoliberal nature conservation policies and initiatives.

Crucially, the lynchpin that links the three dimensions, discursively and materially, is *land*. The common denominator in political terms between CSA and nature conservation/commodification is *land control*. A common policy obsession for these overlapping market-oriented advocacies is *land policy*. Whether one is pushing for an exponential increase in food

production or in carbon offsetting, one necessarily has to confront the issues of land, land control and land policy. A critical examination of this mainstream narrative shows an ideological stand common to all: they are intrinsically averse to social justice-oriented land redistribution, recognition and restitution. It seems to us that what the combined processes suggest is a kind of *climate smart land politics* – that is, a predatory type of land politics that serves the neoliberal campaign against what it assumes and perceives to be as inefficient and destructive use of scarce natural resources. Simply put, climate smart land politics is neoliberal land politics sensitised to the recent corporate rediscovery of agriculture and market-based climate change mitigation/adaptation initiatives.

What is to be done? A vague but promising notion of agrarian climate justice is getting constructed, albeit inchoately, by various social justice advocacies and by resistance from below. Building on this, we argue that an idea of agrarian justice and climate justice combined as agrarian climate justice is a useful normative framework for analysing policy and political issues and actions today. In this context, there are five goals of deep social reforms and ways to pursue them are particularly relevant in the current condition of the rural world today: *redistribution, recognition, restitution, regeneration and resistance*.

First, where wealth and the means of production to create wealth, especially land, in the context of the rural world, are monopolised by a few, wealth and power *redistribution* becomes urgent and fundamental. In the context of agrarian societies, it includes redistribution of access and control of the key means of production – land, water, seas, forests – thus contesting the essence of capitalism. Second, where social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination by one dominant social group over other groups constitute an oppressive social complex, social struggles for *recognition* has become an important struggle. In agrarian societies, this can entail recognition of indigenous peoples' or ethnic minorities' right over their territory: land, water, forests. Third, where people lost their land and territory because of broad corporate resource grabs, or lost healthcare because of scams by financial swindlers, social struggles for *restitution* have to be a key front. In many rural areas, this means restitution of access to land, territory, water, forests, especially in light of the global land grabbing during the past decade. Fourth, ecological and climate crisis is the hallmark of the contemporary period in world history largely caused by capitalism, and has deep roots in the history of capitalism. Social struggles for ecological *regeneration* and environmental justice have become an integral part of broader social justice struggles. Regeneration here is cast in a broader way to include economic regeneration: lands redistributed to rural villagers can easily revert back to the hands of powerful elites without significant structural transformation of the rural economy. Fifth, these four goals of deep social reforms can only be accomplished through fierce, relentless and disruptive *resistance* within and/or against capitalism.⁴²

The five R's discussed above are not to be treated like a checklist from which one can cherry-pick. The five R's are linked in their logic because these are responding to inherently interconnected social processes. These can be seen in a few illustrations. First, contemporary capitalism has seized the opportunity to make profit out of responses to climate change via market-based transactions such as carbon sequestration and trading, biofuels and neoliberal nature conservation. In essence, it is *regeneration by dispossession*, defined here as the capitalist project of operating within and regenerating nature by dispossessing ordinary villagers to facilitate continuous capital accumulation. Many of the conservation initiatives associated with climate change politics, in varying degrees, are associated with this strategy. One way to confront regeneration by dispossession is through *regeneration by restitution, regeneration*

by *recognition, regeneration by redistribution*, or a combination of these, all in the context explained above.

Redistribution, recognition, restitution, regeneration and resistance are broadly distinct but interrelated pillars of deep social reforms. In turn, the three R's can only be pursued if sandwiched by the twin principles of maximum land size (size ceiling) to put a limit to how much land corporations and wealthy individuals can accumulate, and a guaranteed minimum land access (size floor) to everyone who would want to work the land. Without such policies, policy initiatives around land redistribution, recognition, restitution and regeneration are likely to be subordinated to market-oriented policies and social dynamics; demands for land from corporate conglomerates and climate change mitigation and adaptation imperatives will be limitless, while the capacity of other sectors of the economy to absorb villagers who were expelled from their lands is almost non-existent.⁴³

As mentioned earlier, while it is important to understand specific impact of particular land deals, it is also urgent to detect and determine through systematic analysis the system-wide political impacts of the land rush and climate change politics as well. Such impacts are foundational and therefore far-reaching – they play a key role in establishing the basic terms and limits of social inclusion/exclusion for years to come especially in transitional societies. In our view, the political opportunity structure for social justice struggles around land redistribution, recognition, restitution and regeneration has been significantly altered in the contemporary era, making it exponentially more difficult. But while the challenge for deep social reforms around resource politics has become even harder in the era of the global land rush and climate change politics, the potential for the emergence of broad-based progressive multi-class, multi-sectoral and multi-identity coordinated political struggles has likewise multiplied. These are the kinds of political struggle that are most critical today because they can connect previously scattered sectoral struggles. The kinds of social movement that are required in the current context are those that are capable of building on and going beyond conventional stand-alone peasant struggles or peasant struggles that subsume other identities or strategies, e.g. ethnic nationalities, indigenous peoples, internally displaced peoples, people displaced by mines and dams.

There are two sides of this argument. First, climate change advocacy work by state and social forces, especially civil society organisations and social movements currently engaged in social justice-oriented work around climate politics, will be stronger only if deeply sensitised to agrarian issues and movements and intimately rooted in and engaged with questions of redistribution, recognition and restitution of rights and claims by poor villagers over their land, water, forest and territory. Second, the only way the urgency and relevance of land policies around redistribution, recognition, restitution and regeneration in the era of global land rush can (re)gain traction in today's world is if it is sensitised to and embedded within the broader climate justice struggles.⁴⁴

In short, agrarian justice and climate justice have become dialectically linked: one cannot exist without the other. But such intertwining is not without contradictions; it is neither automatic nor static; rather, it is always context-specific and dynamic and iterative. Agrarian justice for some people in specific historical-institutional junctures may mean pursuit of a livelihood for now through a contract growing arrangement with an oil palm plantation, even as a climate justice perspective reveals the perils of an aggregated large-scale oil palm plantation in environmental terms. Such revelations are crucial for informing relevant next steps. Today, justice – broadly understood as a process involving struggles for fairness that

has important dimensions in class and identity (e.g. gender, generation, race and ethnicity, nationality, religion) politics – has deep, entangled roots in agrarian and climate change politics.⁴⁵

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Notes

1. World Bank, *World Development Report 2008*.
2. For a critical review, see Akram-Lodhi, "(Re)imagining Agrarian Relations," 1145–61.
3. Fairhead et al., *Green Grabs*.
4. World Bank, *World Development Report 2008*.
5. Deininger and Bayerlee, *Rising Global Interest*.
6. For a critique, see Borrás, Franco and Wang, "Challenge of Global Governance," 161–79.
7. Brockington et al., "Conservation, Human Rights," 250–2; Castree, "Commodifying What Nature?" 273–97; Arsel and Buscher, "Nature™ Inc.," 53–78.
8. Brady, "Alternatives to Slash-and-Burn," 3–11.
9. Among the more systematic treatments on impact, theoretically and empirically, are Cotula et al., "Testing Claims," 903–25; Zoomers and Otsuki, "Addressing the Impacts," 164–71.
10. Peluso and Lund, "New Frontiers of Land Control," 667–81; Schoenberger, Hall and Vandergeest, "What Happened When," 697–725; Park and White, "Gender and Generation."
11. See World Bank, *Climate Change Action Plan*; FAO, *Climate-Smart Agriculture Sourcebook*; FAO, *Climate-Smart Agriculture: Policies*. For critical reflections, see Newell and Taylor, "Contested Landscapes"; Taylor, "Climate Smart Agriculture."
12. World Bank, *Climate Change Action Plan*, 25–8.
13. Springate-Baginski, "Decriminalising agro-forestry: A primer on shifting cultivation in Myanmar," 1.
14. World Bank, *Climate Change Action Plan*, 25–8.
15. Franco and Monsalve, "Why Wait for the State?"; Franco et al., "Just Standards," 341–59.
16. World Bank, *Climate Change Action Plan*, 25.
17. Deininger and Bayerlee, *Rising Global Interest*.
18. Wolford et al., "Governing Global Land Deals," 189–210.
19. Woods, "Legacy Landscapes."
20. For background information and analysis, see: Transnational Institute, *Assessment of 6th Draft*; Faxon, "In the Law"; Mark, "Are the Odds," 443–60.
21. For relevant analysis, see: Malseed, "Networks of Noncompliance," 365–91; Woods, "Ceasefire Capitalism," 747–70; Woods, "Legacy Landscapes"; Franco et al., *Meaning of Land in Myanmar*.
22. Transnational Institute, "Re-Asserting Control."
23. Woods, "Ceasefire Capitalism." For background information and analysis, see: Transnational Institute, *Neither War Nor Peace*; Transnational Institute, *Developing Disparity*.
24. Hunsberger et al., "Climate Change Mitigation," 305–24.
25. O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*; Fox, *The Politics of Food in Mexico*.
26. Vellema et al., "The Agrarian Roots," 298–320.
27. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.
28. Bulkeley and Newell, *Governing Climate Change*.
29. Borrás et al., "The Rise of Flex Crops," 94.
30. *Ibid.*, 93–115.
31. McKay et al., "Political Economy of Sugarcane Flexing," 195–223.
32. Rutten et al., "Smallholder Bargaining Power," 891–917.
33. Pye and Bhattacharya, *Palm Oil Controversy*; Montefrio and Dressler, *The Green Economy*.
34. Woods, "CP Maize Contract Farming."
35. Heynen and Robbins, "Neoliberalization of Nature," 5–8; Corbera, "Problematizing REDD+," 612–19; Mahanty et al., "Social Life of Forest Carbon," 661–4.
36. Scheidel and Work, "Large-Scale Forest Plantations."
37. Work and Thuon, "Inside and Outside the Maps," 360–77.
38. Milne, "Under the Leopard's Skin," 323–39; Franco, "The Right to Land at Crossroads in Myanmar"; Franco et al., "The Meaning of Land"; Dressler et al. "The Impact of Swidden Decline," 1–20.
39. Dwyer, "The Formalization Fix?" 903–28.
40. Hunsberger et al., "Climate Change Mitigation," 305–24.
41. Lamb and Dao, "Perceptions and Practices," 395–413.

42. "For a related treatment, see Martinez-Alier et al., 'Is There an Environment Justice Movement?'"
43. For broader treatment, refer to Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics."
44. This broadly builds on Ribot's work on vulnerability and climate, see "Cause and Response."
45. Harris, *Global Ethics and Climate Change*, 35–6.

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