

Annex Land Matrix Asia Launch



(August 3, 2015, Yangon, Myanmar)

Mr Jun Virola, Land Matrix Asia Focal Point and AFA's Knowledge Management Officer, opened the launch of the Land Matrix with a short video animation about the Land Matrix. The objective to launch the AFA land matrix is for better appreciation by the AFA members.

JUN provided an overview of the land matrix which is a powerful research tool to ensure accountability in land investments. People need data to get decisions over land.

The Land Matrix Initiative is a global and independent land monitoring initiative which has the aim to: Promote transparency and open data in decision-making over land and investment. It was set up to respond to the lack of data on large-scale land acquisitions. It was initiated by CIRAD, ILC (where AFA a member), GIGA (manages the database), GIZ, and University of Bern, and launched in 2012.

Since 2014, the Land Matrix Initiative has been in a process of decentralization with five (5) Regional Focal Points as partners. AFA was selected as the focal point for Asia, with areas of work in: data gathering, networking, research and communication.

JUN shared that basically the Land Matrix records intended, concluded or failed land acquisitions. As of February 2015, around 18 million hectares (has) of land is in operation, while only 3.6 million has is actually producing.

What is AFA doing? JUN shared that AFA hosts the regional data unit of the Land Matrix which he is managing. There is one data assistant who reviews the database, and currently doing desk research. All the data on Asia in the land matrix has been validated thru desk research by AFA. AFA is also validating the data through 8 AFA members to make data more reliable than desk research. A network of data contributors is being established in 40 Asian countries.

Country coordinators are responsible for 4 tasks:

1. gather data: validate and add new data

-ideally train one person from 1 AFA member

2. networking

-introduce land matrix: you are looking for data on land deals 200 has and above

3. research

-field investigation

-encourage partners to collect research

4. communication

JUN also presented an overview of land deals in Asia and case studies in Myanmar (data as of February 14, 2015).

– 10.5 million has is under contract in Asia

– 398 land deals (81%) have been concluded, indicating high success rate in negotiation

– Intended size exceeds size under contract, indicating possible expansion of contracted area in future

– 4.8 million has is under contract, while 1.3 million has is actually producing

– What kinds of lands are being targeted?

-4%: smallholder agriculture

-77%: no information

– Most of land being acquired is to be used for food, non-food, unspecified agriculture, agro-fuels, etc

- How do the deals look like? some examples from Cambodia based on AFA study in 2009, all communities evicted; FNN did study / video

o Some companies use sub-companies to lease lands more than the allowed 10,000 hectares (e.g. Mitr Phol Group)

- o Most lands were leased by the government (economic land concessions)
- o Communities forcibly evacuated.

JUN stressed that if we have the land matrix database, AFA members can spot trends. JUN shared a recent incident at an international forum where the Minister of Land in Cambodia was in the panel. He raised the issues observed in the land matrix for Cambodia which the Minister did not deny because it was founded on hard evidence and data. The Minister had to admit that the data is true, and said that they would cancel those deals that do not follow the law.

With data analysis, AFA members will have the power to raise issues which have policy implications, e.g. food security, land rights. JUN said that AFA will train its members in data analysis. He reported that he had just received information that the International Land Coalition (ILC) will again support AFA next year, hence AFA can be able to give the necessary trainings.

JUN emphasized that when farmers organization speak about data, it has more political weight because it is the communities affected who have access to the data or reality on the ground.

JUN also presented an overview of land deals in specific countries in Asia (as of June 1, 2015):

– Indonesia:

- Most deals have been concluded

– Vietnam:

-Total of 8 concluded deals with different implementation status

– Laos:

-58 deals, most are concluded, majority of the deals involves rubber and timber

– Philippines:

-total of 35 deals, majority of deals are intended for biofuels

– Myanmar:

-15 deals

-high success rate of deals

-60,000 hectares under contract

Some observations from the Asia data:

– Many deals are incomplete

– majority are foreign investments (mostly Asian countries)

– Other countries: No data

JUN made a call to action to AFA members:

- Help us improve the data in the region
- Use the data
- Tell us how it can be made more relevant and useful to you

In 2016, with AFA as regional partner for Asia, there will be an Asia / country pages on the Global Land Matrix online webpage. With 8 AFA members already on board, JUN said that trainings will be conducted with them; as well, country coordinators will be trained on data analysis for advocacy.

Open Forum

The following comments were raised during the Open Forum:

Sopheap:

- FNN already signed the contract. We really appreciate your presentation and the program you are doing and we support it actively; it will be helpful and useful for us.

JUN:

- There is much data in Cambodia because government has an open data policy, and publishes all the deals in the website.

API:

- On customization: all the data deals with private sector, how about deals of companies owned by Indonesian government? They also use and sometimes rent the land.

JUN:

- Our proposals are: We want to monitor foreign and domestic, 200 has and less, how communities are affected
- We need to link up with other networks monitoring similar information
- Trainings in 2015 can be done by skype, or as side events in a meeting
- The Land Matrix is something new and unfamiliar, but we have already validated the data for Asia.