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2010 Scott Kloeck-Jenson Pre-Dissertation Travel Fellowship Report

Thanks to generous support from the Scott Kloeck-Jenson (SKJ) Pre-Dissertation Travel Fellowship I was able to spend September and October of 2010 in Mozambique doing pre-dissertation research on foreign farmland acquisitions. Since the staggering jump in the price of global agricultural commodities that occurred in 2007 and 2008, there has been a major increase in demand for farmland on the part of both states and private investors. This trend has ignited a debate within the global development community over what the outcomes of this investment are likely to be. Some see this increased foreign farmland investment as a potentially positive development for poor countries which lack the requisite capital to invest in their own agricultural sectors. Others, meanwhile, are concerned about the food security and land rights of local smallholder farmers, many of whom are likely to be displaced to make way for foreign-owned plantations. The global media quickly dubbed the phenomenon “land grabbing” and comparisons to colonialism have been frequent. Thus far, however, little empirical evidence is available with which to evaluate these claims. My research will contribute, in part, through a case study of recent foreign land acquisitions in Mozambique.

The eight weeks I spent in Mozambique with SKJ funds allowed me to develop a much clearer picture of how and where foreign land acquisitions are taking place. I spent roughly two weeks of my trip with the Mozambican NGO ORAM (Rural Association for Mutual Support) which works to inform people of their rights under Mozambican land laws. I spent most of this time at ORAM’s headquarters in the central province of Zambézia but also traveled North to visit their office in Nampula province. I used this time to learn from ORAM about the civil society response to land acquisitions and their perceptions of national land governance. I made several trips into the countryside and spoke to some of the farmers that ORAM works with. In Zambézia I spent a weekend attending an annual ceremony held by the Mozambican Ministry of Agriculture to celebrate the start of the 2010 planting season. In Nampula I visited the site of a major recent investment by the Chiquita company.

I also used my time in Mozambique to conduct over twenty interviews with key stakeholders in the farmland acquisition process ranging from government officials to executives at farm operation companies to activists involved in resisting land acquisitions. The bulk of my interviews took place in the capital city of Maputo. These in-depth, open-ended interviews focused on discovering the extent to which the government of Mozambique is willing and/or able to effectively regulate foreign farmland acquisitions and the ways in which increased foreign interest in land is likely to affect the institutions of Mozambican land governance. Among government officials, interviews included administrators at the offices of Provincial Services of Geography and Cadastre (SPGC) of Zambézia and Nampula, the national Center for the Promotion of Investment (CPI) and national Center for the Promotion of Agriculture (CEPAGRI), as well as officials from donor countries involved in helping to determine Mozambican

agricultural policies. In the category of farm company executives, I interviewed administrators at two of the companies that have received some of the largest farmland concessions. In the category of civil society, I interviewed members of ORAM and the National Peasant Union (UNAC) as well as several land tenure consultants with experience working for the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and other international institutions.

These interviews helped me to develop a nuanced picture of the institutions of land governance and how they are changing with growing foreign interest in Mozambican land. I was also able to lay the groundwork for future trips by compiling the contact information for over fifty more people who I would eventually like to interview. Finally, I was able to get access to useful documents that I could only have gotten in Mozambique itself, including studies conducted by the Center for Judicial and Juridical Formation (CFJJ) and the development research center Cruzeiro do Sul. I brought back piles of reports and photocopied newspaper articles which will be invaluable to my continuing work on Mozambique.

I feel honored to have had the opportunity to put the SKJ funds to use in the country in which Scott himself did research. In fact, while I was in Zambézia I found out that Scott's memory is still alive and well. There I met Ingrid Nelson, a graduate student in Geography from the University of Oregon, who is doing ethnographic research in one of the rural areas where Scott had worked. She was actually working with one of the translators that Scott had used for his own research and had met several people who remembered Scott fondly. Ingrid is now hoping to begin a longitudinal study in one of Scott's original host communities when she finishes up her current research project. It is nice to know that Scott's work continues to have an impact even today.