



Conflict Factsheet

Land Grabbing in the Philippines

Type of conflict
Main

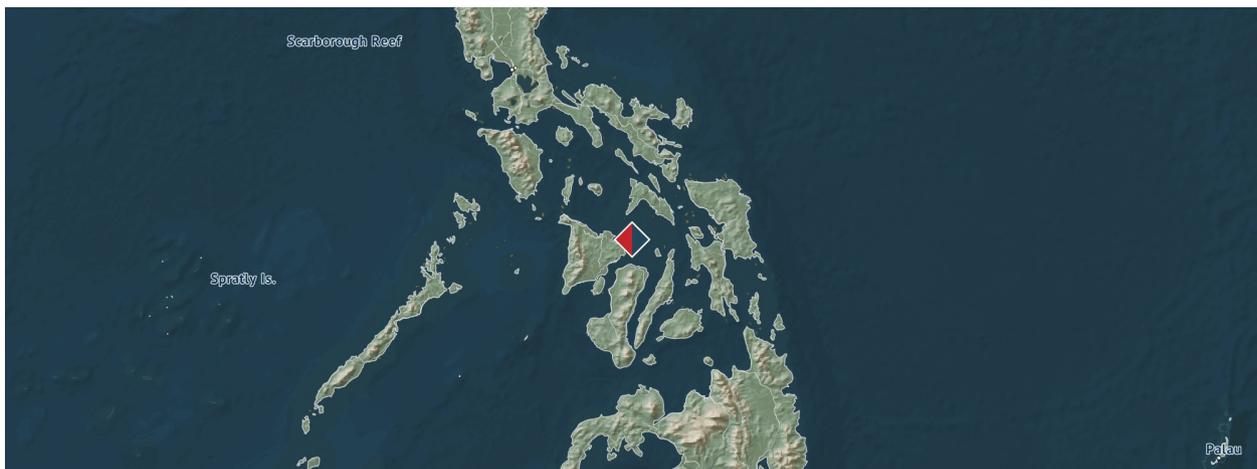
Intensity
1.5

Conflict Locality
South Eastern Asia

Time
2007 –ongoing

Countries
Philippines

Resources
Agricultural / Pastoral Land

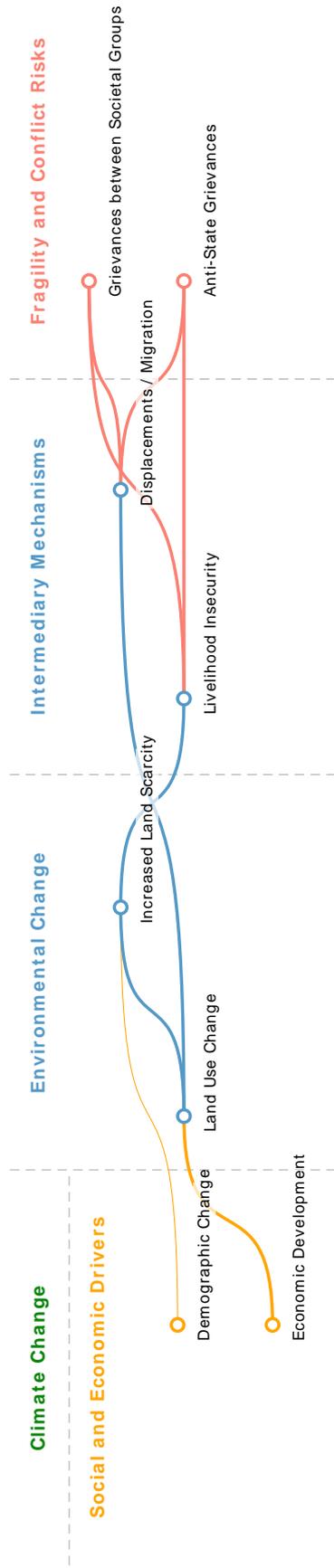


Conflict Summary

Since 2007, the Philippine authorities have increasingly been offering large swathes of land to foreign companies and governments. To clear the way for investors, farmers are often harassed and violently evicted from the land they occupy. This has fuelled tensions and, in some cases, led to violent conflicts.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land

Elite Exploitation
Unequal Land Distribution



Conflict History

In the Philippines, the poorest populations are severely impacted by land leases to local and foreign investors. Land deals are facilitated by attractive investment policies led by the Philippine authorities. Although several agrarian reforms supporting land redistribution in favour of landless farmers have been issued, they are not well implemented and Philippine farmers do not benefit from secure land tenure (De la Cruz, 2011; Cervantes, 2014). This context is facilitating forceful evictions to clear land for foreign investors, with frequent cases of harassment and violence being reported (Padilla, 2011; Saludes, 2015).

Since 2007, this dynamic has accelerated due to increasing land investments. Multiple violent confrontations between local populations, sometimes rebel groups, and investors supported by authorities have erupted in different parts of the country, resulting in several killings, unjustified detentions and human rights violations (Focusweb, 2015).

International rush for Philippine land

In the Pacific, competition over land is intensifying as populations grow and land becomes scarcer. Since the Philippines offer attractive conditions to investors, numerous Asian governments and companies have acquired large swathes of Philippine land. These investments serve three main purposes: touristic and economic zones (mainly ecotourism and real estate), heavy industry like mining, and agriculture, especially biofuels and food production for export (Focusweb, 2015). Many of the investment projects have underlying ecological intentions, for example, the creation of natural protected reserves, ecotourism sites and biofuel production (Uson, 2015). The British company NRG Chemicals, for instance, has acquired 700,000 hectares of Philippine land to grow *Jatropha* – one of the biggest land leases dedicated to biofuels in the world (GRAIN, 2013). The global food prices shock in 2007 has also been followed by increased land investments in the Philippines from countries like India, Kuwait and Singapore (Asian Peasant Coalition, 2012).

The Philippine government has advertised the leasing of agricultural land to foreign investors by promising new jobs and a more efficient use of agricultural land (De la Cruz, 2011). Yet, local communities, albeit directly impacted, rarely benefit from large agricultural investments (Uson, 2015).

Growing inequalities in access to farmland

Matters are further complicated by the fact that the Philippines suffer from a highly skewed distribution of land. Wealthy landlords and the state own the land and provide farmers with rights to land plots, a system facilitating evictions and making access to land titles difficult for farmers (Vargas, 2003). This inequality creates tensions between societal groups and elites. Although there have been efforts since 1988 to redistribute arable surfaces via the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme (CARP), these have had limited success, partly because of considerable power asymmetries between farmers and landed elites (USAID, 2011). In this context, large-scale land leases supporting the interests of foreign investors further add to the pressures endured by local communities and thus fuel resentments (Saludes, 2015; Focusweb, 2015; Uson, 2015).



Protests and violent repression

In opposition to large-scale land acquisitions, peaceful demonstrations have been organised on a regular basis. In 2012, for instance, several agrarian organisations protested in Manila against land grabbing, specifically calling on Asian governments to stop alleviating food insecurity in other countries at the expenses of their own people ([Asian Peasant Coalition, 2012](#)). Peasants also gathered in January 2015 for a 'Pilgrimage for land, social justice and peace' ([Saludes, 2015](#)). In addition, some rebel groups, such as the New People's Army, have adopted brutal responses, notably by damaging projects' facilities ([Farm Land Grab, 2014](#); [Gomez, 2011](#)).

Investing companies and landlords have called on increasingly violent intimidation methods to evict farmers, including destruction of crops, house burnings, physical assaults and arrests ([Uson, 2015](#); [Focusweb, 2015](#)). In some cases, farmers refusing to leave and loud opponents to large land leasing projects have even been murdered, acts allegedly perpetrated by order of investors and local authorities ([Mongabay, 2015](#); [Via Campesina, 2014](#)).

Resolution Efforts

Improving access to land tenure

Efforts have been made at different levels to improve access to land rights for Philippine citizens. The legal framework has been strengthened several times to tackle this issue, in particular via the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme. Since 1988, it has aimed to fairly redistribute land to farmers but was not completed in the planned ten-year period. The programme had to be extended twice to come close to projected results by 2014. Farmers, however, showed strong discontent with the CARP management and contested the efficiency of the land administration system, which keeps facilitating large-scale land leases ([Palladium, 2014](#); [USAID, 2011](#); [Uson, 2015](#); [Focusweb, 2015](#)).

Apart from the state, international initiatives, such as the Land Administration and Management Projects co-financed by Australia and the World Bank, have aimed to improve land titling, providing computerised land records and more transparency ([FAO, 2013](#); [World Bank, 2015](#)). Locally, activists and organisations have also been fighting to facilitate access to land titles ([Focusweb, 2015](#)). A group of lawyers, for instance, managed to draft a bill that was passed in the Congress in 2010 and allows 60,000 more title issuances yearly ([ODI, 2015](#)).

A legal framework supporting land tenure rights already exists, but its limited success so far hinges on greater implementation efforts. Experience has shown that partnerships between all concerned actors are essential and that involving local administrations in titling makes the process more efficient ([World Bank, 2015](#)).

Mobilising influential actors around abusive land leases

Many protests against investment projects have taken place in the Philippines. Some strongly mobilised communities backed by legal arguments and influential allies have already succeeded in deterring

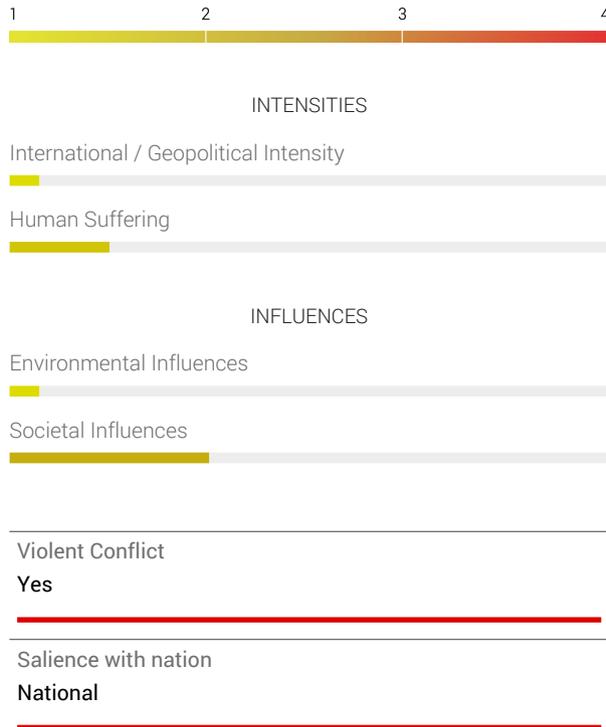


investors. Advised by a network of social justice advocates, local protesters in Sicogon, for instance, built their arguments on state law and fought large landowners through several court cases, which they won, and abuse reports to police authorities (Uson, 2015). In the case of a large-scale Chinese investment project by Jilin Fuhua Corporation, public outrage, supported by a supreme court case and congressional inquiries, forced governmental authorities to suspend the lease (De la Cruz, 2011). Similarly, many initiatives across the country try to call on decision-makers to reconsider large-scale projects. In Palawan for example, the Coalition against Land Grabbing, a local NGO, gathered signatures to call on the Vice-Governor to prevent palm-oil expansion on their island (Mongabay, 2015).

Raising awareness among local populations

Advocacy groups also ask for the right of communities to transparent information, not only about their rights but also about planned investment projects affecting them (Focusweb, 2015; Via Campesina, 2014). Since farmers are directly concerned by these land leases, better communication means as well as consultation and participatory tools are essential to handle the investments in a transparent and inclusive manner as recommended by the UN's Committee on World Food Security in its Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (FAO, 2012; Focusweb, 2015).

Intensities & Influences



Resolution Success

| | |
|---|---|
| Reduction in geographical scope | There has been no reduction in geographical scope. |
| Increased capacity to address grievance in the future | There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future. |
| Grievance Resolution | Grievances have been partially addressed. |
| Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity | There has been no reduction in intensity |



Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Social inclusion & empowerment 1

The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme was launched by the state in 1988 and aims to fairly redistribute land to farmer. However, farmers continue to express strong discontent with the efficiency of the land administration system, which keeps facilitating large-scale land leases. Advocacy groups are also defending the right to transparent information, as well as prior consultation about planned investment projects affecting communities.

Strengthening legislation and law enforcement 2

A group of lawyers drafted a bill to facilitate access to land titles. The bill was passed in the Congress in 2010 and allows 60,000 more title issuances yearly.

Improving actionable information 2

International initiatives, such as the Land Administration and Management Projects co-financed by Australia and the World Bank, have aimed to improve land titling by providing computerised land records and more transparency.

Promoting social change 2

In some cases, strongly mobilised communities backed by legal arguments and influential allies have succeeded in deterring investors.

Resources and Materials

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Further information

<https://factbook.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/land-grabbing-philippines>