



## Africa's changing landscape: Securing land access for the rural poor



### Overview

This briefing discusses a selection of the major policy themes in African land markets with a view to inform and engage with policy makers and development stakeholders on a rapidly changing land sector. It offers an overview of current trends and provides a set of recommendations on possible solutions to the challenges faced in relation to land reform within the region.

Access to arable productive land in African has been in decline due to the pressure of growing population trends and worsening land degradation as a result of climate change. Many low income rural households are dependent on land to access limited sources of credit, with land providing the only means to channel into financial markets. Recent high profile land purchases covering thousand of hectares of prime agricultural land have raised concerns over equitable land access.

Major expansions in regional land markets have increased investor interest in land acquisitions. Perceptions of land availability and competitive land prices have driven demand for prime agriculture land. Subsequent increases in foreign direct investment have been partially explained by substantial land acquisitions undertaken for the purpose of food production and biofuels. Government responses to land investments have been largely favourable with many countries promoting investor friendly market environments. However provisions are increasingly being adopted to address the threat of land market expansion to local access to communal lands.

The continuing legacy of uneven land distribution remains a major concern in delivering equitable land reform in Southern Africa. Contrasting government policies to address wide disparities in land access persist ranging from radical land distribution policies to moderate measures to protect land rights for marginal groups.

Reform of land governance frameworks has been proposed as solution to the threat that land inequity poses to the rural poor. The importance of customary based land practices and procedures is a critical element in ensuring that land reform serves the interests of the poorest. Forming partnerships between customary and formal land administration may provide the breakthrough in securing gain for low income rural households.