



Conflict Factsheet

Land Grabbing Conflicts in Myanmar

Type of conflict
Main

Intensity
3

Conflict Locality
South Eastern Asia

Time
1991 –ongoing

Countries
Myanmar

Resources
Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water

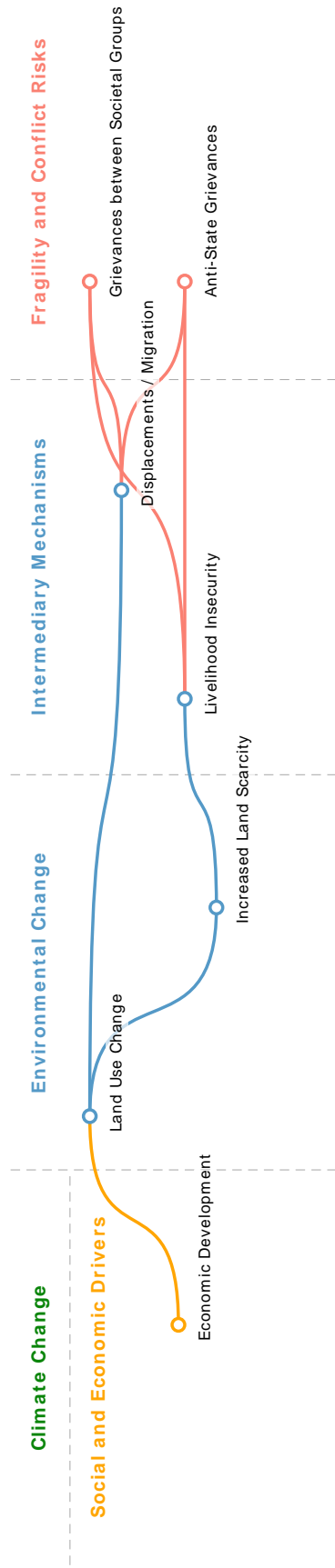


Conflict Summary

The displacement of civilians and the destruction of their livelihoods as a result of land grabbing in Myanmar has led to clashes between Burmese authorities and civilians.



Conceptual Model



Context Factors



Agricultural / Pastoral Land, Water



Insecure Land Tenure



Conflict History

Reports of land grabs carried out by the government's 'army-backed cronies' and foreign companies for the purpose of large scale strategic projects in agriculture and mining continues to grow in Myanmar. Displacing farmers and destroying their livelihoods, while threatening their access to environmental resources, such as water, has led to violent clashes between civilians and land grabbers. As part of their democratisation process, the government of Myanmar has introduced certain measures to address conflict caused by land grabbing. However, the progress of these initiatives is yet to be assessed.

Inequitable redistribution of land

In 1991, the government introduced laws that allowed the expropriation and redistribution of 'wasteland', or land that is not cultivated or used for production. Although small-scale farmers could apply for title over wastelands, the government usually did not recognise land title rights of farmers who did not have the capital to invest in the land. The law aimed to benefit large private and public enterprises, which would attract foreign investment. In 2000, the government again introduced policies that inadvertently encouraged land grabbing. The thirty-year policy aimed to convert 4 million ha of wasteland into productive land run by private agribusiness (Aung, 2014).

Ethnic tensions add to the conflict

Most land grabbing has been, and continues to be, carried out by the government forces and army-backed cronies, with some of this land then being redistributed to foreign companies. The ethnic diversity of Myanmar has also played a role in weakening state capacity to regulate land ownership and stop land grabbing. Tensions between Myanmar's Bamar (or Burman) majority and various ethnic groups—including the Kachin, the Shan, the Karen, the Chin, the Mon and the Arakanese—have fostered distrust and propelled insurgencies for decades.

This adds to the difficulties in controlling land grabbing and supporting the land rights of minority communities. The number of fatalities linked to land grabbing conflicts is difficult to estimate as there has been little quantitative research conducted (Glatz, 2014). However, the rate of displacement is reflected in the amount of complaints made to authorities over land grabbing incidences. More than 4,000 reports of land grabs from farmers were recorded in 2012, indicating the scope of land grabbing in Myanmar (Aung, 2014).

The current conflict situation

Following policy reforms regarding land acquisition and distribution rights in 2012, a commission was established by the government under the auspice of the Farmers' Affairs Committee. Their role is to monitor farmland ownership disputes (Henley 2014). In 2012, the Commission announced that 323 complaints would be brought before parliament for investigation (Aung, 2014). Given the short time period since the commission has been active and land law reforms have been introduced, success of attempts to regulate land ownership and reduce conflict over land cannot yet be assessed.



Resolution Efforts

New laws pose difficulties for farmers

In 2012, Myanmar's government established the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law (VFW Law) and the Farmland Law. These laws aimed at managing the use and distribution of farmland. The Farmland Law established the Farm Management Bodies (FMB), which were replicated at state and local levels, thus replacing community bodies. FMBs are responsible for 'guidance and control' on key land issues, ranging from disputes and transfer of rights to land registration ([Henley, 2014](#)).

These laws and their administrative bodies have, however, been criticised for encouraging land grabbing. The laws do not acknowledge customary land rights - a practice of land ownership that dominates south-eastern Myanmar ([Glatz, 2014](#)). Much more emphasis is placed on official land ownership acquired through applications, a system that is flawed with corruption and loosely respected. FMBs under the auspice of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, although responsible for resolving disputes, also do not have mechanisms for appealing land disputes through a judicial process ([Henley, 2014](#)). This makes it difficult for displaced farmers to legally protest their loss of land.

Next steps

One central criticism of Myanmar's land rights and land grabbing is the lack of unity in land policy across all regions. It is suggested that a central solution to the issue of land grabbing would be found in a unified national land policy, which clearly establishes the priorities for the land sector, and demonstrates how these link to policy priorities in other policy sectors ([Henley, 2014](#)).



Intensities & Influences



INTENSITIES

International / Geopolitical Intensity

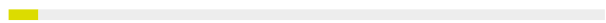


Human Suffering

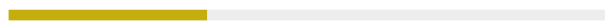


INFLUENCES

Environmental Influences



Societal Influences



Violent Conflict

Yes



Salience with nation

National



Mass displacement

Less than 100.000 and less than 10% of the country's population are displaced within the country.



Cross Border Mass Displacement

No



Resolution Success

Resolve of displacement problems

Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.

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Reduction in geographical scope

There has been no reduction in geographical scope.

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Increased capacity to address grievance in the future

There is no increased capacity to address grievances in the future.

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Grievance Resolution

Grievances have been mostly ignored.



Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity

There has been no reduction in intensity

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Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Mediation & arbitration

2

The government established a commission tasked with monitoring farmland ownership disputes. The success of attempts to regulate land ownership and reduce conflict over land cannot yet be assessed.

Strengthening legislation and law enforcement

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A unified national land policy, which clearly establishes the priorities for the land sector, and demonstrates how these link to policy priorities in other policy sectors, is crucial for finding a central solution to the issue of land grabbing.

Resources and Materials

References with URL

[Aung, N.N. \(2012\). Commission Will Report Over 300 Land Grabs to Myanmar MPs. The Myanmar Times](#)

[Glatz, A.K. \(2014\). Myanmar: comprehensive solutions needed for recent and long-term IDPs alike. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(IDMC\)](#)

[Chao, S. \(2015\). National Updates on Agribusiness Large-scale Land Acquisitions in South-east Asia](#)

[Henley, G. \(2014\). Case Study on Land in Burma](#)

Further information

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