Large-scale land deals in the new millennium have attracted much media attention, and several international initiatives are attempting to regulate such deals. However, the existing literature and most regulatory initiatives do not address gender adequately. To fill this gap, Elizabeth Daley and Sabine Pallas reviewed evidence from four case studies included in the International Land Coalition Global Study on Commercial Pressures on Land (conducted in 2010) to identify implications of land deals for women and policy actions to address them. Daley and Pallas analyzed evidence from land deals in Ethiopia, Rwanda, the Philippines, and India from the late 1990s to 2010 using a framework that posits four dimensions of underlying discrimination, relevant to assessing outcomes for women. The study analyzed three of these dimensions in depth – access to productive resources, relative income poverty, and participation in decision making.

Women are disadvantaged. Daley and Pallas found that women are likely to be affected differently – and disproportionately more negatively – by land deals than men. The individual details were crucial. The Ethiopian case study shows clear evidence of relative disadvantages to women because of their reduced rights of access to common property and consequent negative effects for relative income poverty, as well as sociocultural obstacles that block women’s participation in decision making about land deals. The Philippines case study also shows relative disadvantages to women losing rights of access to formerly common property foreshores, with consequent effects for relative income poverty in terms of employment opportunities and also for livelihoods and food security.

Low wages, increased participation in decision making. However, the situation with regard to women’s participation in decision making about land deals is much more positive. The Rwandan case study shows gains for women from increased employment and self-employment opportunities but at low wages and the effects on livelihoods and food security of reduced rights of access to land; all of which are mediated by women’s strong participation in decision making in Rwanda. The Indian case study suggests largely negative effects for women manifesting through reduced rights of access to productive resources and limited employment opportunities for women that adversely affect relative income poverty and their livelihoods and food security.

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