

Notes of session: Land ownership and Governance
Global Greens Conference
9am, 1 April 2017

The workshop had 38 attendees from a wide range of countries, who introduced themselves and their interests in land issues which included the following:

- Farming and land ownership / private ownership in relation to housing in UK
- Pressure on the agricultural industry in the Netherlands
- Ecological impact of land ownership in Germany
- Use of bio-fertilisers
- Japan – small islands in oceans belonging to two countries
- Nepal land ownership and landless people
- How free trade facilitates land grabs
- Small scale subsistence farming and the commons
- Australia sustainable food production
- Impact of national parks and sheep farming
- Land ownership and controls over land
- Ownership and legislation in relation to land, in Sweden
- Land concentrated in the hands of small number of rich people
- Bringing in change from home related tax to land tax
- European Parliament – food campaign

Participants then heard from four speakers, from three out of the four Federations:

Ms Ade Indriani Zuchri, Secretary General Sarekat Hijau Indonesia (Indonesia Green Union):



Ms Zuchri outlined the huge impact that palm oil plantations, mining and gas exploration have had on access to land in Indonesia, with the loss of 250 billion hectares of land to these in the last xx years. Indonesia has now become the largest palm oil producer in the world with much of it produced unsustainably. It has also been found that much of the land used for palm oil cannot be productively used to grow other crops, after a palm plantation.

Expansion of palm oil plantations have also had a devastating impact on land that has been an important habitat for the biggest community of Orangutans, their land being burnt for palm oil. Land in this category has included the last remaining habitat for Sumatran orangutans and other important species. Indonesia has one of the biggest forests in the world, outside of Brazil & the Democratic Republic of Congo, with mega biodiversity.

The companies have been given huge concessions from government for access to land with an estimated 30% of Indonesia's territories having been handed over to private companies as concessions; many areas also overlapping with indigenous lands. Now the companies are coming with new 'Green Projects' and 'Climate Fund Projects'.

As a result of loss of traditional lands and land for subsistence farming and the impact this has on being able to make a living, many women and children are going to cities as sex workers. They have lost their previous role of managing the land and lost the dignity associated with having access to your own land, dignity of making and living and their dignity as a human and a citizen.

Ms Zuchri gave an emotional appeal to all those present to support the communities and their party in Indonesia in fighting this land grabbing by companies and in supporting community initiatives bringing together those who have been affected.

For further details please refer to Ms Zuchri's presentation which is available [here](#).

Mr Andy Wightman, Member of Scottish Parliament, Scottish Green Party



Mr Wightman outlined some of the land ownership and governance related issues historically and today in Scotland. He started by emphasizing that land is power; all land relations are understood through politics, law and money. Scotland has had a long history of privatisation of the commons and feudal land ownership and until 1997, the UK's / Scotland's landowners had huge influence over the land laws. As a result Scotland now has a hugely concentrated ownership of land and of private forests, which are held in very large holdings, and little remaining commons. Large tracts of Scottish land can be and are sold on the international market, often to private companies. It is a very unregulated market and land speculation is the reason why house prices are unaffordable for young people in Scotland and the UK. Land ownership is very class based and it is difficult to find out who owns the land. Also, under primogeniture land ownership laws in Scotland, women were disenfranchised, with no right to inherit land, with the land inheritance only going to the eldest son.

Mr Wightman gave an example of a major landowner in Scotland who is Danish and who under Danish law is required to pay tax on land he owns internationally. As a result this person pays land tax on land owned in Scotland to the Danish Government, rather than the Scottish government benefiting, which is ironic.

With all these injustices and problems related to the very concentrated and unregulated ownership of land in Scotland, land reform has become a mainstream political issue in Scotland.

In 1999 the Scottish Parliament was established as a devolved parliament under the UK Parliament and for the first time could make laws about land in Scotland's own jurisdiction. This has been in relation to land generally: not just rural and urban land, also about marine environment/territorial seas. 50% of Scotland is under water!

Mr Wightman outlined that restoration of greater community ownership of land and greater democratic control over its use is a core policy of the Scottish Green Party. The party believe that political power should be as close to the people as possible where there can be more accountability and that community land ownership should be part of this.

In 2014, a Land Reform Review Group was set up. With significant input and influence from many in Scotland, including himself and others in the Scottish Green Party, there has then been recent Land Reform legislation brought in. This includes

the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 starting its implementation on 1 April, the day of the workshop!

Mr Wightman noted that reform includes change in legal relationship with the land (land tenure); fiscal relationships (tax & obligations as an owner); political relationship (decision-making).

For further details please refer to Andy Wightman's presentation which is available [here](#).

Frank Habineza, Chairman, Democratic Green Party of Rwanda and President of the African Greens Federation



Mr Habineza started by outlining the situation in Uganda which had been colonized by the UK. Uganda had its first land law where land was given to the King, who in turn gave out land to chiefs. Landowners/chiefs were connected to the King, and 'squatters' or land users paid tax to the chiefs. This had caused much conflict in the country. In Uganda, the State owns the mountains, lakes, rivers, but the more productive lands are in the hands of these chiefs. Because of pressure to own land, there have also been a lot of forgeries in land titles. Sometimes also the State has sold the lakes and other State owned land to international investors, such as Chinese investors, and local people have found that they then have no right to fish or collect firewood on previously common land/water.

Following the above, Mr Habineza then outlined the situation in Rwanda, a small country but with 11m people (most densely populated country in Africa). With Rwanda being mountainous there is a lot of less productive land. Also with deforestation in the mountains as a result of people collecting firewood etc, soil gets washed away by floods into the valleys and down the Nile into Egypt with problems also with landslides taking away land and homes.

Rwanda has now a new land law, set up about 10 years ago. Before this, all land belonged to the State, no one owned or had any land rights except the Catholic Church which had some of its own land. Traditional ancestral land came under the new land laws which changed land ownership terminologies and land was used under collective farms and communities (similar to the Ujamaa policy in Tanzania). At present, any land that is 'owned' is in practice rented from the state for a number of years, say 25 years. The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda believes that there is a need for new land reform – including that ancestral lands should not have to be rented from the state or that there should be the need to pay land tax on these traditional lands, to the state.

The Rwandan Government has recently brought in a system called land consolidation – where the government instruct people to pool their land and plant a particular crop. This policy was promoted by Kofi Annan under a movement called 'African Green Revolution' (which is being promoted in many African countries) in

order to fight hunger, and many African Governments are following this. The Democratic Green Party of Rwanda wants the repeal of this law and policy.

Mr BK Dalit, Leader of the Nepali Green Party:



Mr Dalit started by emphasizing the absolute crucial importance for young people to have access to land, including as a key asset to enable marriage. For farmers, land is a means of production. For young people, land is the license to get married. Land also gives you wealth – both economic and cultural.

Nepal is a small country, of 147,181 km sq of land, with 21% of people being landless. 12% of farmers have less than 100 square meters of land and Nepal is a country of small scale farmers, not industrialised in terms of agriculture, and most people rely on agriculture.

Since 1990 when multiparty democracy was restored, candidates often went to the people with promises that they would provide land to those who voted for them. 12 commissions have been set up by successive Governments to tackle the issue of land. However despite this, the number of landless people are on the rise, and struggling against the government on land issues.

The Nepali Green Party has a key focus on supporting the struggle of landless people and slum dwellers' movement for people's access to land.

Mr Dalit ended on a call for all those in the workshop to support the work of the Party and the Green's movement for greater access to land by landless people and slum dwellers.

For further details please refer to Mr BK Dalit's presentation which is available [here](#).

Following the presentations, a discussion was held on land issues and how these might be collectively pursued within the Global Greens family. The following was discussed and proposed:

Comment was made that:

- A typical German needs about 1.5 hectares to live on but that a good proportion of that is actually depending on land outside of Germany. It is important therefore to adjust how we live, so that we are not using so much resource.
- International free trade agreements can undermine domestic efforts for land reform, forcing requirements to allow foreigners the right to own land. The EU is currently negotiating trade agreements with Indonesia, East Africa and US etc. We should lobby our governments not to enable this kind of land grabbing as part of trade agreements.

- Sometimes having land titles/individual ownership can end up leading to land concentration, as people may sell to large companies.
- The next frontier for legislating regarding land grabbing will be in space!

The question was then posed, how to balance the relative benefits of common land as opposed to private land ownership?

Frank replied: Previously in Rwanda there was a situation where there was not right to sell land. Before all the land was owned by the State, in the villages, exchanges in land were made on mutual understanding. Following that there was the introduction of land registration. New villages were set up where government constructed houses and provided services, a kind of common land. The land that then remained the Government can use for schools etc.

Ade replied: There party supports an approach to common land, with plans to redistribute large amounts of land to indigenous people, but at the moment farmers don't have the resources to plant on the land. There will need to be good commitment not only from Government but also commitment from local people to use the land.

A further question was posed on whether in the UK we could expect to see land values coming down in future?

Andy replied: commons governance is one of the best ways of repossessing land. However there is a class conflict of interest, including with banks and newspapers that advertise property and land for sale. Younger people currently are being priced out – however if they vote in sufficient numbers, we could succeed, which is an electoral opportunity.

The question of whether Land value tax should be introduced to replace property tax was then posed.

Andy replied: this is Scottish Green Party policy. Socialising rent of all descriptions is key to this. It was interesting to see that even the Financial Times, a traditionally politically establishment newspaper, was advocating this change.

It was also mentioned that in New South Wales in Australia, there is now a land value tax, but it only applies to properties you don't live in.

The following topics / areas for potential collaboration as a Global Greens family were then proposed:

- > Campaigns on ensuring free trade agreements do not enable land grabbing
- > Support for actions to enable landless people and women to secure access to land
- > Feudal ownership
- > Discussion and sharing of ideas / policy on land use (for example on production of commodities vs production of food/subsistence food)
- > Pushing for greater transparency on who owns land and other natural assets
- > Linking with other global land related campaigns, such as [La Via Campesina](#)

It was proposed that such issues could be discussed and collective action taken forward through setting up a Global Greens working group on land policy.

Frank mentioned that we have the Global Greens Charter and it might be possible to send through proposals, action points to become part of the chapter. Also there is a mechanism for campaigns to be collectively worked on.

Agreed action following the workshop:

The notes of this workshop would be written and then circulated to all those who provided their emails at the workshop.

A request would also be forwarded to the Global Greens Committee and Coordinator, to set up a Land issues working group under Global Greens.

(Thanks to Kate Nevens for taking notes of the workshop and Gillian Wilson for chairing the session, both from the Scottish Green Party.)