

Master's Thesis Topic Proposal:

Impacts of Large-Scale Agricultural Investments – the Case of Gorge Farm in Naivasha, Kenya

Supervision: Dr. Jonas Luckmann, IATD in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Kerstin Nolte and Anika Muder of Thünen Institute of Rural Economics

Background: International investors have regained interest in agricultural land across the Global South, including East Africa. Large-scale agricultural investments potentially can lead to win-win situations when locally lacking capital is contributed by the investor and combined with local labor. In many cases, however, these mutual benefits are only realized to a limited extent as production is often highly mechanized, requiring little and qualified personnel. In addition, often problems arise such as conflicts with traditional users of land and other resources (e.g., forests, pastures, water bodies). Therefore, benefits and potential drawbacks of such large-scale investments may vary substantially among different cases. The ITAD research group collaborates with the Thünen Institute of Rural Economics within the research project: “[Large-scale land acquisitions and land inequality in Rural East Africa](#)” to gain a better understanding of the impacts of such large-scale agricultural investments specifically focusing on different forms of inequalities.

Case Study: The aim of this master-thesis project is to investigate the case of Gorge Farm, a large-scale flower and vegetable producing enterprise situated close to Naivasha in Kenya. The farm dates back to colonial time and was taken over by an Indian investor in 2007. The farm is FAIRTRADE-certified and produces mainly for export-markets. Focusing on labor-intensive crops the farm relies to a large extent on local labor. Colleagues at Kenyatta University have already established contacts with the farm manager.

Objectives: The task of this thesis is twofold: First, the thesis will offer a comprehensive historical overview of the farm, focusing on how its management, land use and ownership has changed over time with different owners (investor case study). In a second step, the thesis shall identify benefits and drawbacks from this particular farm on the livelihoods of the local community. Specific focus areas may include topics such as food security, access to and control over land, changes in local economic activity and perceptions of inequalities among different affected groups. Research questions would revolve around investor-community relationships and local livelihoods.

Methods: In a first step, the student would study the literature on the economics of large-scale investments to develop the theoretical background for the thesis. At the same time, the student would apply for a scholarship to finance a research stay at the farm. During this research stay qualitative data would be collected. Data collection methods would include interviews with key-experts, such as the investor, farm managers, and representatives from local authorities, as well as focus group discussions with employees and local community members.

Pre-requisites: Knowledge of English as well as willingness and physical ability to travel to Kenya, is essential.

Application procedure: Interested students are asked to send a motivation letter and the transcripts of records with the completed relevant modules and proof of any other relevant qualifications by **April 21, 2025** to luckmann@hu-berlin.de.