

# Water grabbing

Dynamics in Southern and Eastern Africa

6 November 2012, Gert Jan Veldwisch



An interdisciplinary journal on water, politics and development

# Water Alternatives

*A flow of creative thinking*

*Special Issue:*

Water grabbing? Focus on the  
(re)appropriation of finite water resources

*Guest editors:*

Lyla Mehta, Gert Jan Veldwisch and Jennifer Franco



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# Land grabbing debate

A quickly expanding field:

- 2009-10: Rumours are grabbing attention
- 2010-11: Frameworks developed, initial case studies
- 2011-12: Many detailed, empirical case studies, theorising

What's new?

- Multiple crises: food, fuel, finance
- Scale issues: global, quick, and large areas and capital
- Different role of private capital and the state

# Land grabbing debate

Some key findings:

- Capital from everywhere; national, regional, international
- Role of national/local elites
- It is not “empty land”/“terra nullius”, nor marginal
- Beyond enclosures, beyond land



# It's not all about land (and agriculture)

- Land and water deeply entangled
- 'Water implications' of land grabbing, but less visible
- Land rarely 'marginal', water rarely 'abundant'
- Focus on prime land with good access to water
- Water as object of grab itself



# Resource or control grabbing?

Land enclosures as “tip of the iceberg”

A radical restructuring of (agricultural) production: grabbing of control, grabbing of benefits

Corporate agriculture versus smallholder agriculture debates



# Fluid nature of water

- Fluctuating availability across time and space and multiple scales
- Impacts on distribution and quality (beyond volume)
- Dislocated effects
- Different scale in watershed/basin perspective
- Water as basic human right
- Contested resource, unequal access, context of power and control



# Slipperiness of the grabbing process

“Water flows in the direction of power”

Not by itself, but through contestation at different interrelated levels of abstraction:

- Resources: damming/diverting/pumping
- Content of policies, rules and regulations
- Authority and regulatory control
- Discourses and narratives

(The ERA approach as developed by Boelens, Zwarteveen and Roth)

# Slipperiness of the grabbing process

Parallels to land grabbing process, but even more fuzzy!

## Parallels:

Unequal power relations;  
unclear distinctions between  
legality and illegality and  
formal and informal rights;  
fraught with licensing and  
negotiation processes.

## More fuzzy:

Fluid resource difficult to  
manage/control, unclear  
administrative boundaries and  
jurisdictions, dislocated effects,  
fluctuations in availability over  
space and time.



# Dominant discourses and policies enable water grabbing

## IWRM and the Dublin principles

- Water as an economic good
- Licensing of water use
- Participation rhetoric
- Economically efficient water use

# Tana Delta, Kenya

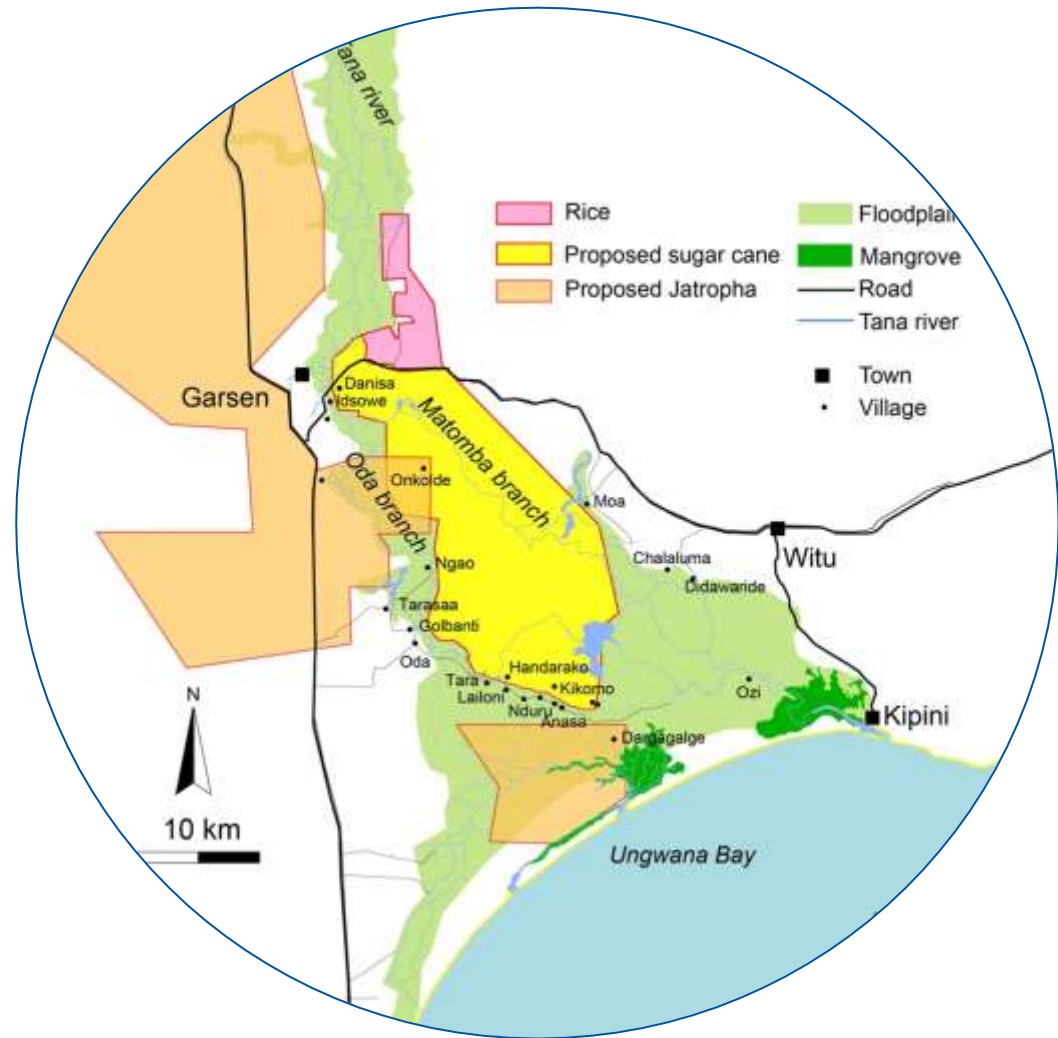
Sugar cane (38k ha)  
and Jatropha (64k ha)

Canadian and Kenyan  
capital

Water use only implicit  
in Jatropha deal

Dry-period bottle-neck  
for sugar deal

Flawed EIAs



Duvail, S.; Médard, C.; Hamerlynck, O. and Nyingi, D.W. 2012. Land and water grabbing in an East African coastal wetland: The case of the Tana delta. *Water Alternatives* 5(2): 322-343.

# ProCana Ethanol project

30,000 ha sugar cane

Forced eviction of existing villages

Too little water left for downstream users

Links into high level politics

Flawed EIA

van der Zaag, P.; Juizo, D.; Vilanculos, A.; Bolding, A. and Post Uiterweer, N. 2010. Does the Limpopo river basin have sufficient water for massive irrigation development in the plains of Mozambique? *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth* 35(13-14): 832-937.

Borras, Jr., S.; Fig, D. and Suárez, S. 2011. The politics of agrofuels and mega-land and water deals: Insights from the ProCana case, Mozambique. *Review of African Political Economy* 38(128): 215-234.

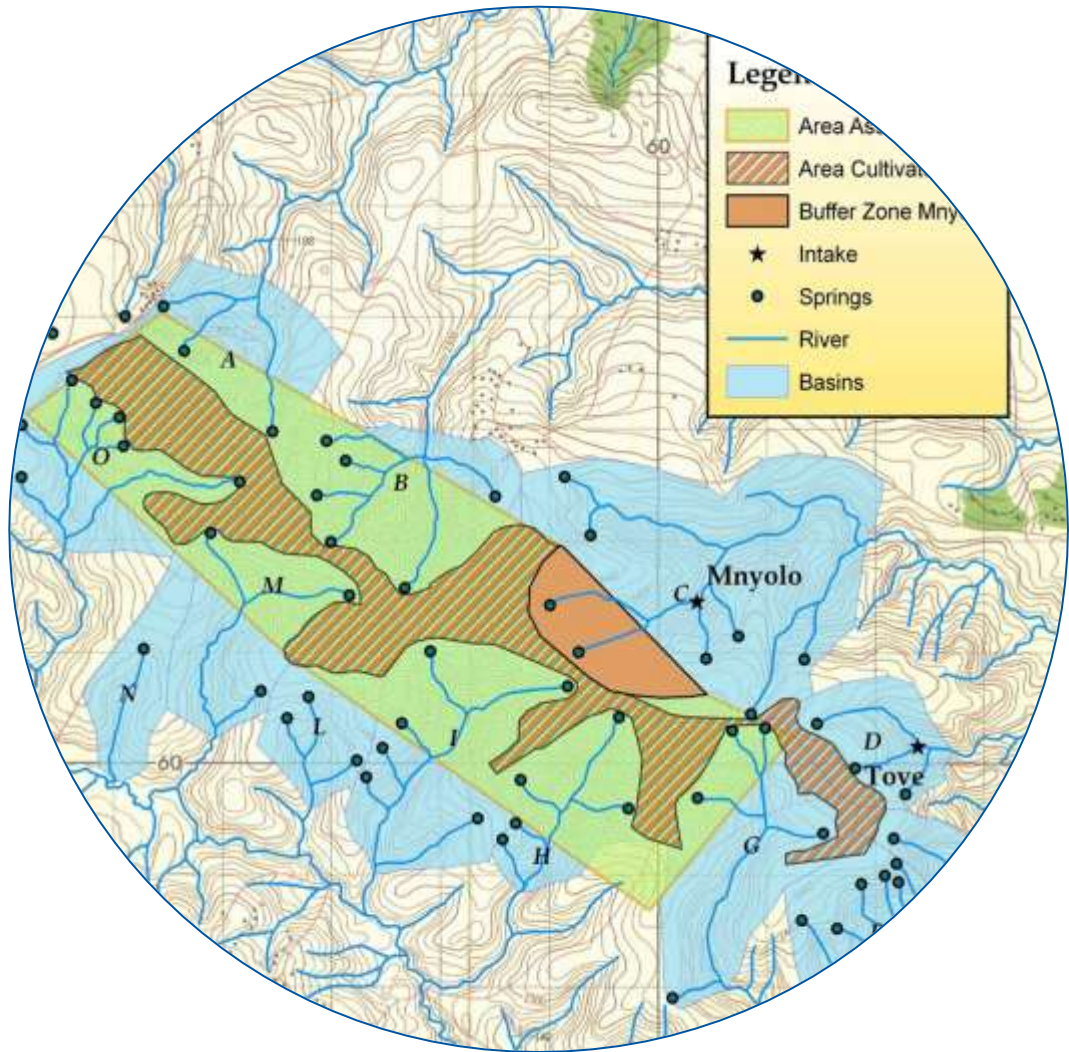
# Contamination of community drinking water

1400 ha livestock keeping

Tanzanian and Kenyan money

Contamination of drinking water sources in neighbouring district

Flawed EIA

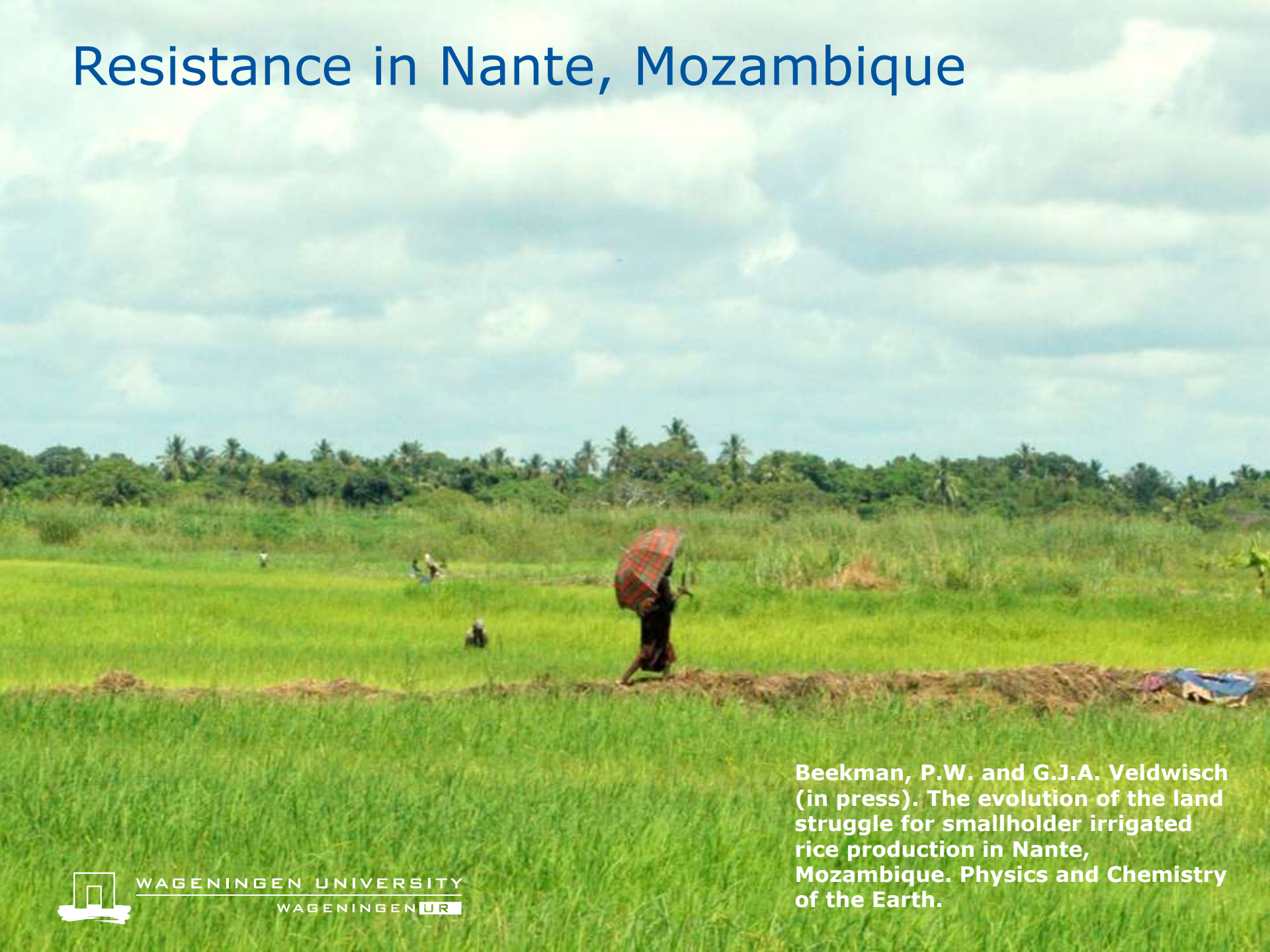


Arduino, S.; Colombo, G.; Ocampo, O.M. and Panzeri, L. 2012. Contamination of community potable water from land grabbing: A case study from rural Tanzania. *Water Alternatives* 5(2): 344-359.





# Resistance in Nante, Mozambique



**Beekman, P.W. and G.J.A. Veldwisch (in press). The evolution of the land struggle for smallholder irrigated rice production in Nante, Mozambique. Physics and Chemistry of the Earth.**





# Contract farming in Chókwè, Mozambique



Veldwisch, G.J.A. (2010). 'Rice value chain development and changing control over land and water resources in Chókwè, Mozambique', paper presented at the Justicia Hídrica Workshop 2010, Cusco, 9-13 November 2010.



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# Far reaching effects

Interactions between fluidity and slipperiness increase the difficulty to get a hold on water grabbing

- + land-water connection
- + dislocated effects
- + basic human right

...the impacts and effects of water grabbing are likely to be felt deeply and widely!

# Implications for policy, research and action

- Urge to this audience to engage with the debate!
- Countering dominant narratives (abundance, efficiency)
- Making local water use practices and their value visible
- Make water-connection to land grabs visible (beyond volumes!)
- Beyond the logic of market fundamentalism and 'fictitious commodities'

# Water Equity Network

- A network of critical researchers, activists and practitioners in Southern and Eastern Africa
- Collaborative action research on Water Equity
- 11-13 December 3<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting, Arusha, Tanzania

Initiated by :

Dr. Blessings Chinsinga  
Prof. Frances Cleaver  
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Dr. Emmanuel Manzungu  
Dr. Gert Jan Veldwisch  
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