



What happens to the land when agricultural investors leave the site?

A dissemination report about the project »Towards Land Equality – a study of how cancelled agro-investments impact smallholders' land access and livelihoods in rural Tanzania« (2022-2026)

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Cover image: Investment sign, Razaba Ranch, Bagamoyo District, Tanzania.
Photo: Linda Engström, 2014.

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Introduction

This report provides a brief background to large-scale agricultural investments in Africa and Tanzania and overall findings from a research project conducted between 2022–2026 which investigated impacts of such investments in Tanzania that were stalled or cancelled.

When Linda Engström did her PhD (2012–2018), she learned about this trend and tried to understand why so many investments were scaled back or cancelled. Some of the background material in this report are derived from this work. She wanted to explore this further, and after getting her PhD she and Ronald Ndesanjo applied for funding from a Swedish government agency and were successful to get funding for four years for this project about large-scale agro-investments, with a particular focus on cancelled investments, and land access and use after investors leave their investment sites.

The purpose of the project was to understand what happens to the land that is left behind when investors do not start or cancel their operations. We wanted to understand who can access and use the land left by investors, how they use it and why. We also sought to learn from cases where land was redistributed to those who had previously used it or claimed rights to it before its allocation for investment, and/or to immigrants who arrived after the investment was cancelled.

The project covered six investments in five locations in rural Tanzania: RAZABA (Ranchi ya Zanzibar Bagamoyo), in Bagamoyo District, Basanza and Msebei villages and surroundings in Uvinza District, Kisarawe District, and Morogoro Rural and Kilosa Districts. The team has spent more time in Bagamoyo and Uvinza Districts. In the other three locations, shorter studies were performed by master students from Tanzania, Norway, Germany and Sweden.

The structure of the report: The report will start with providing a background about large-scale agro-investments in Africa and Tanzania. Then it will describe the research project and some general findings which apply for all six investments and then key findings from each investment. At the end, we present the research team.

Background

Large-scale agro investment in Africa and Tanzania

In the early 2000s, large-scale agricultural investment experienced a revival on the agenda for rural development in Africa. The idea to invest in land in Africa was a response to multiple global crises of food and energy, climate change and financial instability. This new wave of large-scale agricultural investment has been described as more extensive in scale than previous attempts to promote such large farms. It has entailed an unprecedented surge for large tracts of farmland, not least in Africa. The trend for setting aside large tracts of land for monoculture plantations has been backed by a range of influential global actors, including the African Development Bank, the United Nation Food and Agricultural Organisation, the World Bank, bilateral development agencies including the Swedish development agency-Sida, and transnational companies such as Syngenta, Monsanto and Unilever, and facilitated by governments in many African countries. These actors promised many benefits for the rural people in Africa, including efficient agricultural production, employment, reduced food insecurity, poverty alleviation. They also promised benefits for the governments such as tax incomes and reduced import expenditures.

Tanzania was one of the many countries in Africa targeted for large-scale agro-investment the past two decades. We collected information about such investments from the National Bureau of Statistics, from NGO reports, our own research and other researchers' studies. Our investigation shows that at least 44 investments larger than 1000 hectares, covering approximately 1 200 000 million hectares, have been planned in Tanzania (Figure 1). Out of these 44 investments, 82 percent are currently non-operational. Most of them remained only on paper because investors never managed to plant anything, such as SEKAB/Eco Energy in Bagamoyo District and AgriSol Ltd in Uvinza District. Other investors only managed to plant crops on parts of their land, like FELISA Ltd (Farming for Energy for better Livelihoods in Southern Africa) in Uvinza, Sun Biofuel Ltd in Kisarawe and Mkulazi II in Morogoro Rural.

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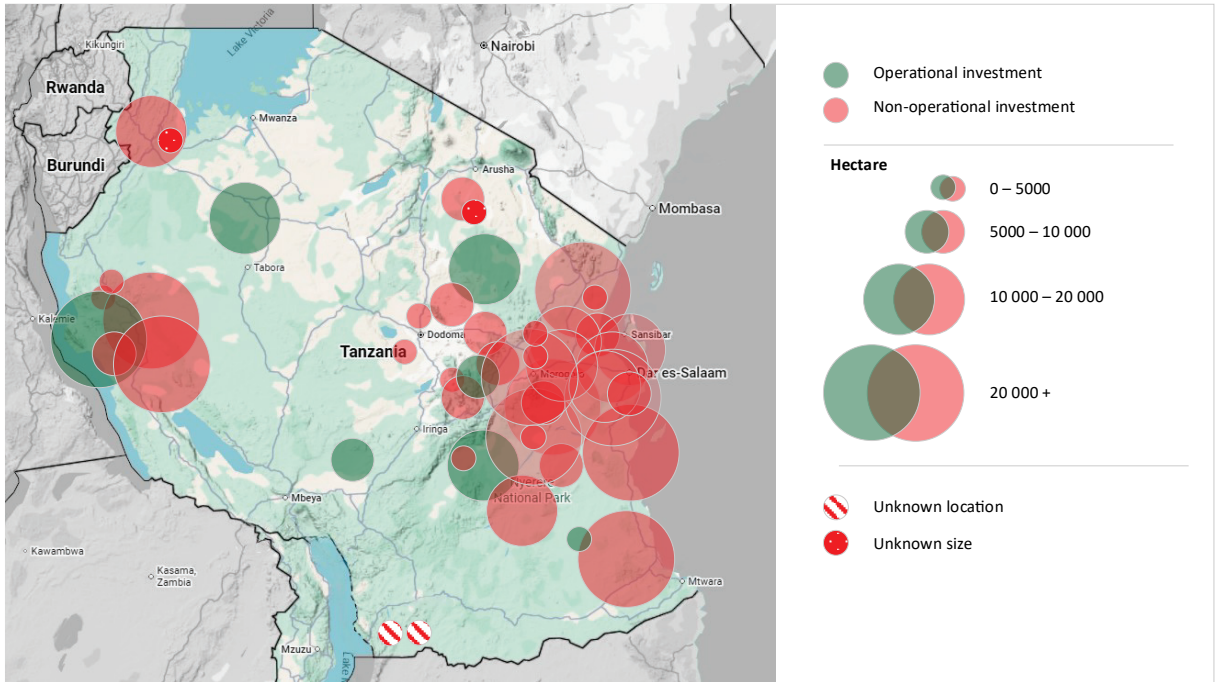


Figure 1. Map of all investments in Tanzania operational and cancelled. Illustration by Clara Jonsson.

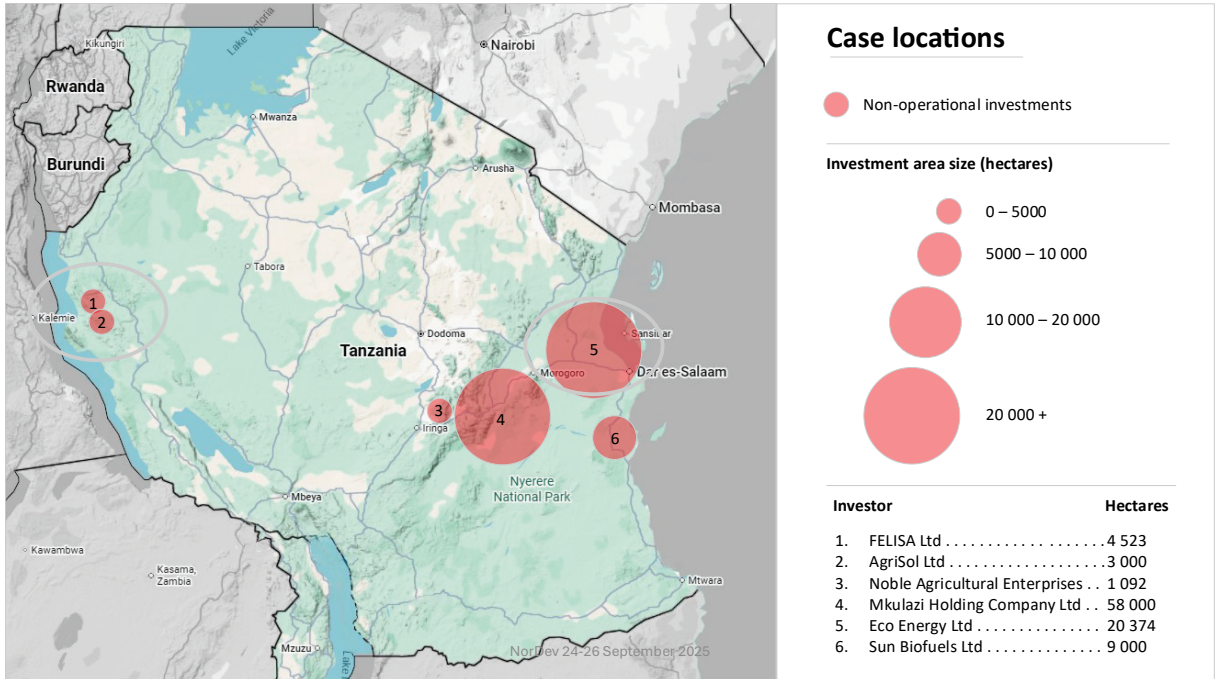


Figure 2. The six investments included in the project. Investments studied in-depth are marked with a circle. Illustration by Clara Jonsson.

Large-scale agro-investments is not new to Tanzania. Such projects were initiated both by German and British colonial powers, for example the ground nut plantations in Kongwa, Dodoma (the Tanganyika ground nut scheme) and the sisal plantations in Morogoro, Tanga and Kilimanjaro. Experiences gained from these past efforts show a mixed track record. Not least, these past projects have frequently displaced pastoralists and smallholder farmers. For instance, the wheat scheme in Hanang displaced Barabaig people from their prime grazing land, causing problems for Barabaigs in identifying new grazing grounds, a struggle that is still ongoing. Combined with strong conservation efforts, mining and tourism initiatives, land for smallholder farming and grazing is getting increasingly scarce in Tanzania.

The Research Project (2022–2026)

In Bagamoyo and Uvinza Districts, we have done 140 interviews and group discussions in 2023 and 2025. We also did a survey with 430 households in 2023 and visited in 2026 to discuss preliminary findings and discuss how to organize our dissemination activities. Within the project, we have had five master students from Germany, Tanzania, Norway and Sweden, studying cancelled investments in Bagamoyo, Morogoro Rural, Kisarawe and Kilosa Districts (Figure 2).

Findings

General findings

If we look at all the six investments to see general patterns, we can see:

Systematic scarcity of land: The systematic scarcity of land and declining soil fertility across Tanzania makes large tracts of abandoned, uncultivated and often fertile land, very important to smallholder farmers, agro-pastoralists and pastoralists. Those residing in villages that lost land to the investments, claim that the population has increased to the extent that the investment land is much needed for their expansion of cultivation and settlements.

Different perceptions: Often, perceptions on what constitutes the investment land and the history of the land (when it comes to both rights and usage), differ between and among villagers, investors and government officials at district, regional and national levels. Overall, there seems to be a disconnect between the villagers' narratives, challenges and needs, and the perception of these from government officials and previous investors. This report aims to present our ›conclusions‹ weighing in these diverse perceptions, based on interviews and observations.

Land used by newcomers: It is rarely the rural communities that lost access to the land, in favour of investment, that re-gain access to it when the investment stalls. Rather, it is often a mix of newcomers to the areas and smaller-scale investors (Figure 3).

High insecurity: Moreover, we can see that many people, although not all, who move into the land, perceive their future as very insecure and are very worried. Some people still live their lives as usual. Others adapt through, for instance, splitting up their families, moving out, investing more in other locations, by downscaling their development plans for instance through not investing as much in permanent housing or crops. Most people rely on God and set their hopes in the government. The insecurity also makes some people organize in different ways to gain compensation to move out or gain formal land rights.

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Figure 3. Who accesses the land post-investment in the six cases?

This figure is a snapshot of who accessed the land left behind by investors at the time of data collection at the respective investment site. Since exact data on access is difficult to obtain, this is an estimate. The proportion is based on the estimated size of accessed land area per group, not the number of people.

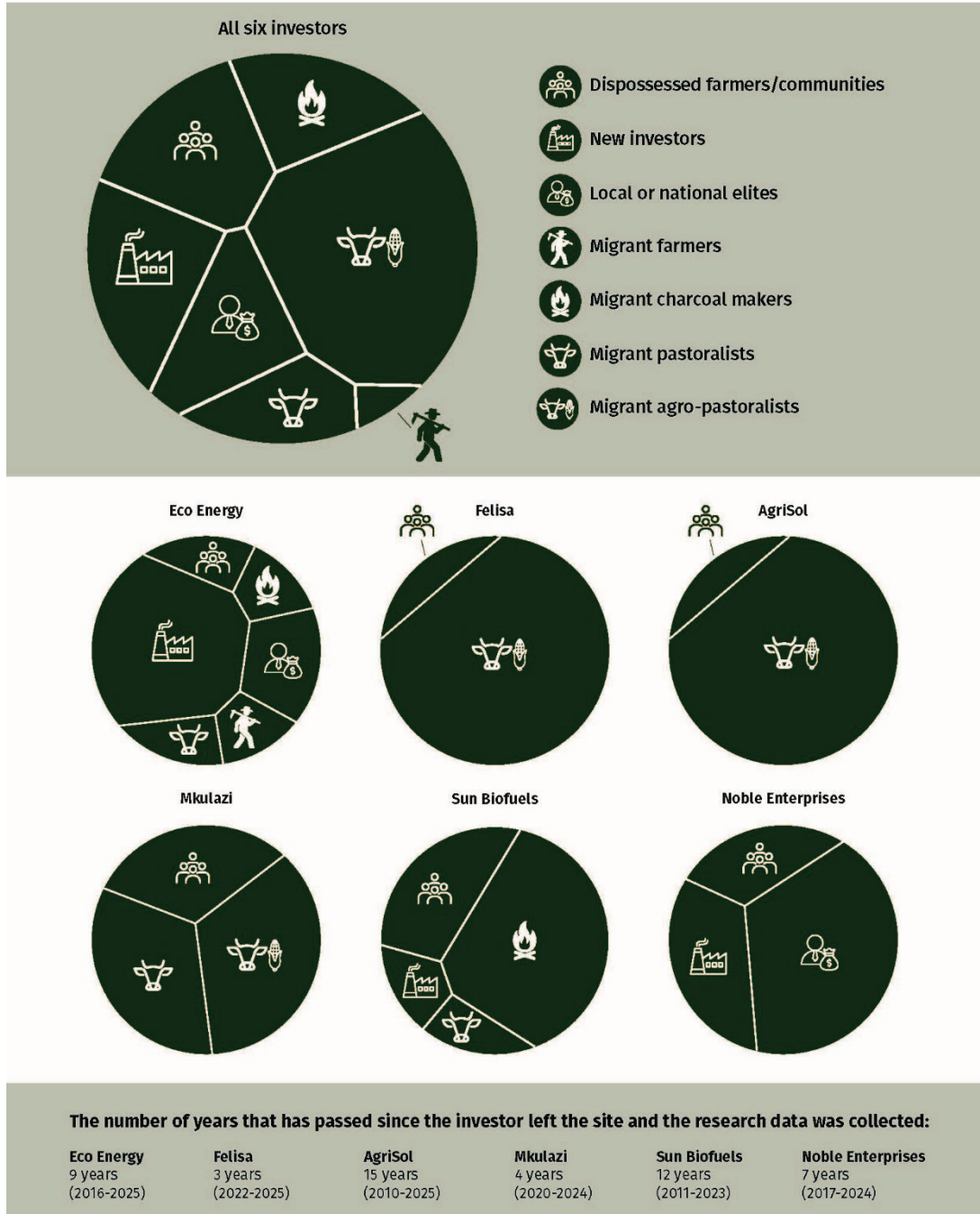


Illustration: Clara Jonsson.

More production by smallholders than by investors: In 4 locations, we can see that smallholder farmers and agro-pastoralists are effective in utilizing

the land as opposed to many investors who acquired big swathes of land and hardly did anything useful with it. We see that agricultural production is higher under smallholder use than under investor use. This production makes important contributions to the local food security and the economy. Most likely, if land rights were secured, the agricultural investment and production would be even higher.

Lacking social services main challenge but still included in census and elections: In many places people are confused because they are denied basic social services including health clinics, schools and infrastructure. At the same time, they are often included in national censuses and are allowed to vote.

Investments have impacts a long time after their cancellation: Agro investments have social, economic, and environmental impacts many years after they were planned, or implemented and cancelled. Projects have impacts in their planning stage, through creating fear and/or expectations among rural people living on, and adjacent to, the investment area. Village borders are often changed before investors even enter, and the land is then converted from village land to general land. The land thus remains general land after the investor leaves, which leaves rural farmers and pastoralists with insecure land access.

Important areas: These areas are becoming increasingly important for the rural people, as more land is used for conservation purposes, mining, large infrastructure projects and land is very scarce in the country. The areas are also important for the government because they play an important role in the well-being of small-holder farmers, who produce most of the food for the country. They play an important role in the local economies and for food security, but also to understand rural-rural migration flows, land use and social relations in rural Tanzania today.

Redistribution of land to smallholders: In the Kilosa case, the redistribution process was ordered by the President, and parts of the land that had been allocated for investment, was redistributed to the nearby villages. In Bagamoyo and Uvinza one can see some signs indicating that the smallholder farmers and pastoralists may be able to maintain land access. In Bagamoyo, a process is led by local and regional CCM leaders to formalize access to 6000 hectares of land. In the Uvinza site, more than 280 CCM membership cards were issued during the duration of our study, this being an

attempt by the people to use the party to channel their demand (to be let to stay on the land) to the authorities (the DC).

Access to knowledge is key: Knowledge of who owns what and why, of what to do if you feel like your rights are trampled on, of what your rights are, of to whom you should turn to in cases such as these. Such knowledge is generally rare, and the lack of information by the government of the status of investments is making the situation of the people even more difficult.

Key findings about the investment cases

FELISA Ltd, Tanzania-Belgium – Uvinza District

Basanza and Msebei villages, comprising the Basanza Ward¹, claim customary rights to the 7000-hectare investment area where the two investors FELISA and AgriSol were granted land for investment (Figure 4). Waha is the major tribe in the area. Village elders refer to how the investment area was used by their ancestral chiefs at the end of the 19th century, and that it is part of an area called Basanza since at least the 1930s.

Nevertheless, in a village border survey in 2004 aimed at producing a Village Land Use Plan, district authorities identified the area as unused. Some of them claimed that the investment area never belonged to Basanza. Another district land officer claimed that the land had been under the government since the very creation of Basanza village in the 1970's, and yet others claimed that they made a deal with the village leadership in the 1990's about that land as investment land. Moreover, at the time of the survey, the area was sparsely used by the Waha because of the distance to the area, a considerably lower population at the time combined with a fear of entering the forest with wild animals. Rather, the village had reserved the land for future use, although some villagers used it for fishing and keeping bee hives.

Disregarding all these claims, following the survey, the area was officially categorised as general land, reducing village land by a quarter, from 27,000 to 20,000 hectares². Thus, the investment area is now *de jure* general land

¹ In 2014, the village Basanza was divided into two villages: Basanza and Msebei, forming the Basanza Ward. Another adjacent village, Asante Nyerere, is also claiming customary rights to a smaller parcel of the land, thus a contested area between Basanza Ward and Asante Nyerere, however our research has mainly focused on the villages in Basanza Ward.

² According to the Village Land Certificate, the village(s) comprises 19 969 hectares.

although highly contested. A decade after the border survey, in 2014, all village informants claimed land shortage and emphasised the importance of the investment area to sustain their livelihoods.

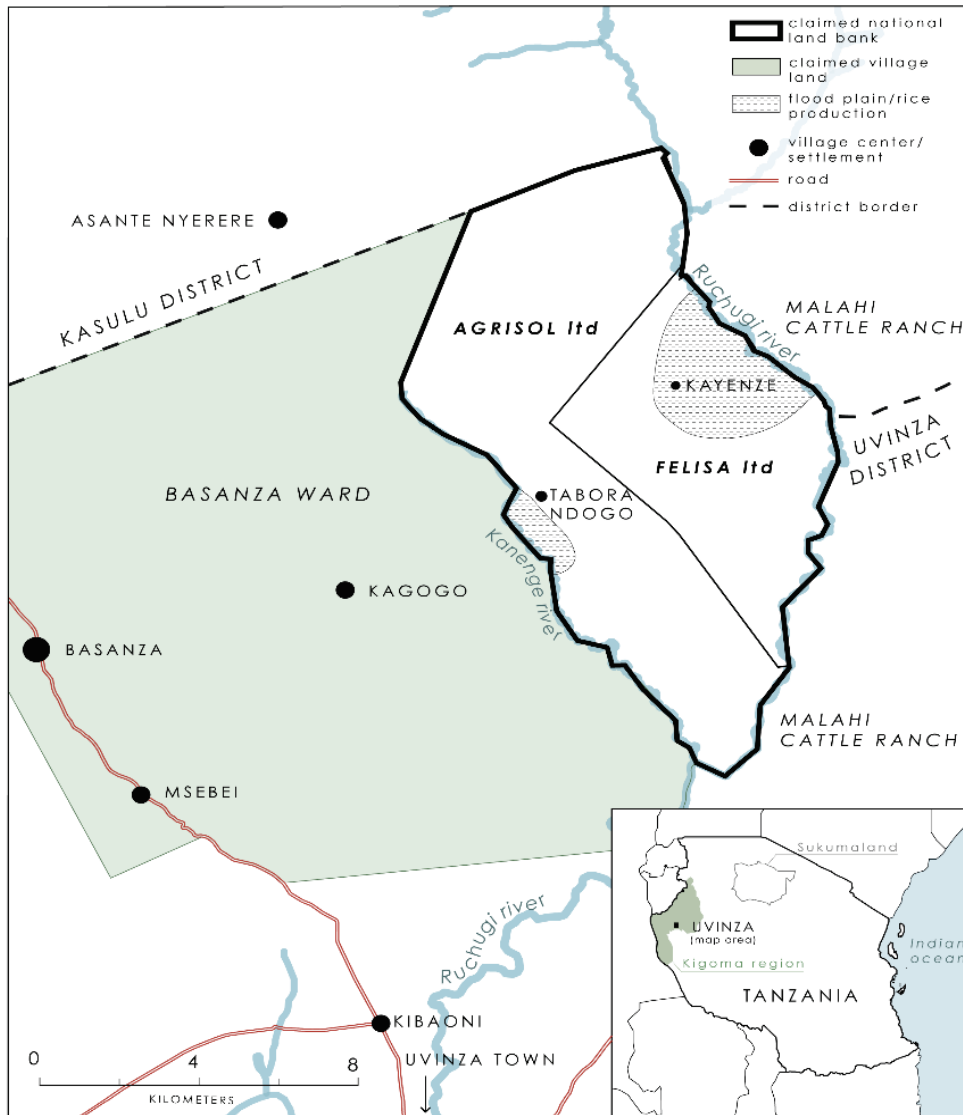


Figure 4. Map of the FELISA and AgriSol investment area and its surroundings³. Illustration by Matilda Iggström..

In the early 2000s, given the limited use of the land but also due to a need for meat and milk, the village government invited, and sold permits to, Sukuma agro-pastoralists, on the land designated for investment. This was the first ›wave‹ of Sukuma immigration in Basanza, an immigration triggered

³ Adaptation of Map 9.1, Wallin-Fernqvist (2023:213) using FELISA Locality STD sheet 93/4 Masanza and interview with Uvinza District Land Officer 11 Nov 2024.

mainly by lack of land in their regions of origin northeast of Kigoma or evictions from other areas.

The founders of FELISA Ltd – one Belgian and one Tanzanian – got the idea to invest in 2004, convinced about the need for increased oil palm production in Tanzania, both as cooking oil and a replacement of fossil fuel for transport (Figure 5 provides an overview of key events related to the FELISA investment). They claimed that it would provide rural jobs, better food security, improved soil conservation and reduce Tanzania's import of fossil fuel etc. The two men were former colleagues at SADC and had performed a gap study and identified Kigoma Region as particularly suitable for oil palm production.

FELISA was registered as company with a 60 percent Tanzanian ownership in 2005 and the process of finding suitable land started in 2005. They opened their Kigoma office in 2006. In 2009, the land title for the investment on 4257 ha was issued. After constructing an oil palm processing facility in Kigoma town, however, the initially available project funds had been spent and the Belgian partner left for reasons that are unknown to the Tanzanian partners. Two Tanzanians have since worked on their own to attract new funding. They have continuously attracted new collaboration partners who eventually leave.

In 2008, village leaders informed the approximately 300 Sukuma households who had settled in the area, about FELISA. The Sukuma's request to the village leaders for new land was denied, so they stayed.

In 2012, the Tanzanian Agricultural Development Bank gave FELISA a 200 million Tsh loan, which they wanted to use to clear a relatively small piece of land to grow sunflower, rice and maize. FELISA initiated and won a court case against the Sukuma on the land at the Kigoma Land Tribunal and initiated a violent eviction. Several people also reported assets to have been confiscated by the police. Some of the evicted Sukuma moved further east into the land that the second investor (AgriSol) would be allocated a few years later. After the eviction, FELISA cultivated a small piece of land, and farmers from adjacent villages started to farm on the idle areas of FELISA land by paying rent to the company.

At the end of 2013, FELISA planted rice 120 meters from the Ruchugi river (Figure 4) since they had been informed that the river never flooded more than 100 meters. However, that year, the river flooded more so all the rice

was destroyed even though they tried to construct ponds to lead the water away. In 2013, they also planted maize and sunflowers – the sunflowers were pressed and sold to local communities and the loan to TADB was repaid.

At that time, the company had set up a fenced camp in the area with some nurseries and machinery, while continuing their quest for funding to produce oil palm. In 2016, they were successful in attracting a loan of 800 million Tsh from the National Social Security Fund, NSSF, which was enough to clear the entire area for production. However, the second loan of 700 million Tsh which NSSF had promised and which would have been used for buying and planting seeds, fertilizer and continue paying workers, was withdrawn. The main reason for that, believes the FELISA Operational Manager, was the new political focus under President Magufuli on processing industry, rather than production. The second instalment was meant for production/farming activities so when it was not coming through all operations halted. This undid even the work that had already been done with the first instalment, since, when the investor was once again stalled, the land was reclaimed by bush and grass. Moreover, they could not lend any money from any bank or institution because they used their land title as collateral for the NSSF loan.

FELISA has not been able to attract any more funding since then. In 2023, they were getting by through producing hybrid oil palm seeds for the Agricultural Seed Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture.

Meanwhile, the first period of time the investment was stalled, some villagers claim they rented land from the company, something which, however, the FELISA executives denounce. Later, upon closing operations by FELISA, a former FELISA employee started renting land to immigrant Sukuma. In July 2022 the then Uvinza District Commissioner (DC) toured Basanza and paid a visit to FELISA land where he held a public meeting with immigrant farmers and pastoralists. According to our interviews with the immigrant farmers in FELISA land, the DC proclaimed that FELISA had failed to continue with the investment and was no longer in charge of the land. This opened a new wave of immigrants from neighbouring areas within the district and Kigoma region. Others came from neighbouring regions of Tabora and Katavi while some as far as Shinyanga, Simiyu and Geita

(formerly part of Mwanza region). More land was cleared and put under farming.

The Sukuma then knew that the former FELISA employee had no rights to collect land rent any longer and thereafter refused to pay their rent. As revenge, the former employee signposted the area with warnings of eviction within seven days. This stirred up a lot of fear that caused many people to move out. Upon being encouraged by the DC to calm down, the situation settled again. It is from this point that the people started occupying the land in their own accord and a lot more Sukuma moved in. Initially, in 2022 and early 2023, it appears as if most immigrating Sukuma paid very little for the land. On the FELISA land, a »hub« called Kayenze emerged where people gather, with some permanent structures such as bars. imejengwa.



Sukuma rice production in the wetlands on FELISA land. Photo Charles Kona, May 2023.

Meanwhile, according to FELISA, anyone who takes over the investment needs to pay the FELISA debt to NSSF, to »release« the land title. In November 2025, a district officer confirmed that the title had been withdrawn by the government and is back with TISEZA. According to TISEZA, FELISA will not regain the title. TISEZA is actively searching for a new investor to the site.

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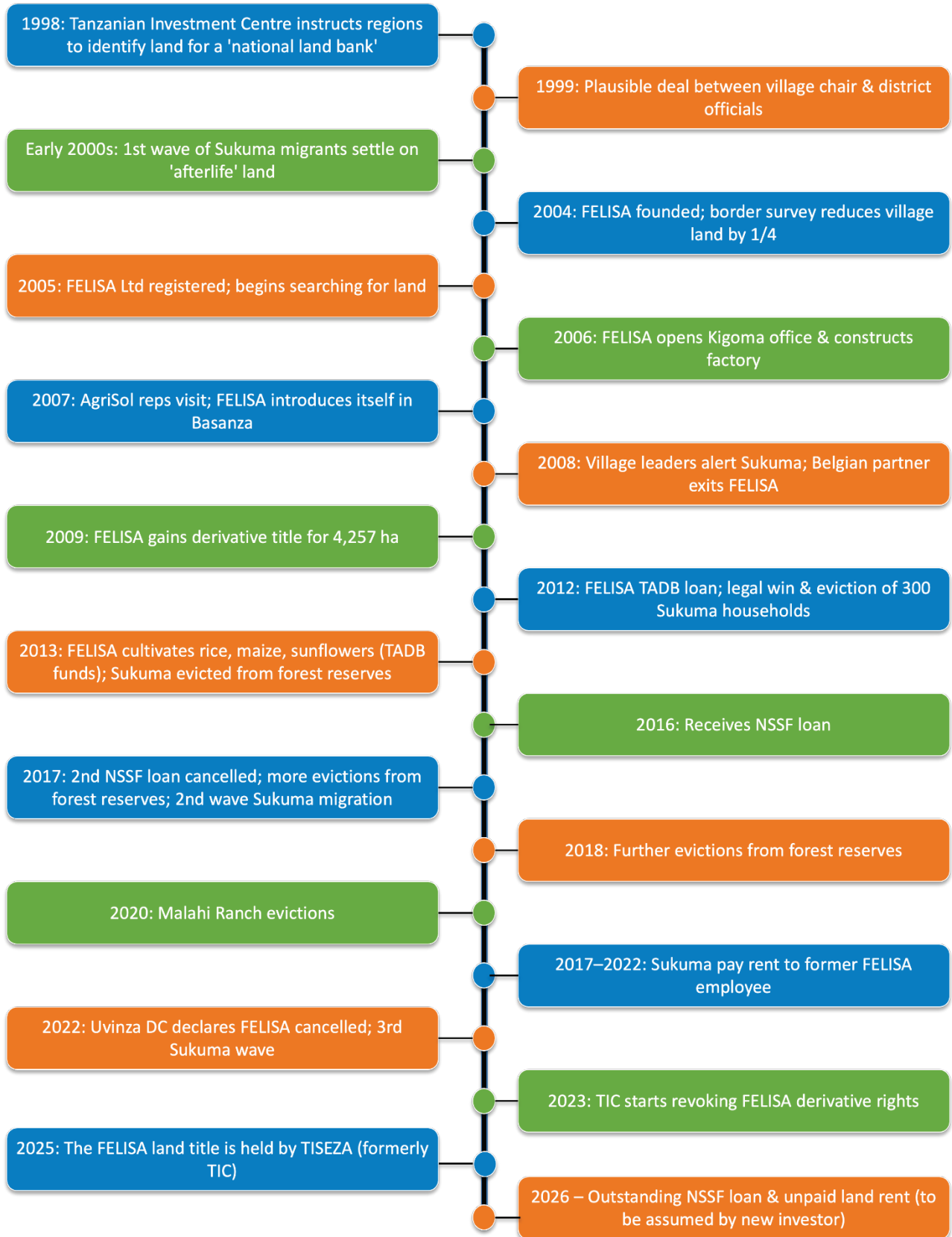


Figure 5. Timeline of key events related to FELISA Ltd.

AgriSol Ltd, USA – Uvinza District

AgriSol Company Ltd (hereafter referred to as AgriSol) was an American company aiming at multi-crop production and cattle keeping on approximately 3000 ha. The information about this investor is limited, mainly because their existence in Tanzania was very brief.

AgriSol Energy Tanzania (the Tanzanian arm of US-based AgriSol Energy) and Serengeti Advisers Limited (a Tanzanian investment and consulting firm) were the domestic front for AgriSol's planned three large agro-investments in Tanzania, two targeting Kigoma Region. Overall, the company enjoyed strong political support in Tanzania and the US. For instance, the Tanzanian Prime Minister at the time marketed the company as part of the Kilimo Kwanza («Agriculture First») initiative launched in 2009 by the National Business Council to promote agricultural development through public-private partnerships. The company also brought the Prime Minister to the US. However, following controversies in the US and protests in Tanzania, in February 2012, Iowa State University pulled out from the deal (Oakland Institute 2012). They got funding challenges and one investor pulled out.

In Kigoma, the company also targeted a larger 10 000-hectare area in Lugufu which was former refugee land (Oakland Institute 2012) which received more attention by NGOs and the district government than their plans in Basanza. In their national campaign, they promised to deliver economic development, modernization, jobs, medical clinics, schools, water sourcing and treatment systems, power generation, and other infrastructure to improve the quality of life for local populations, and to transform Tanzania into a regional agricultural powerhouse.

According to people living adjacent to the area, company representatives were seen on premises once or twice around 2007 but disappeared and did not return. In contrast to the adjacent investment by FELISA Ltd, there has been no investor activity on the AgriSol land. Thus, people started moving in much earlier and have been able to stay since no evictions have been carried out. Thus, some Sukuma have been there more than 15 years. Many of them moved in from Tabora and subsequently, the hub on AgriSol land is called «Tabora Ndogo» (little Tabora). Most of the Sukuma residing in this area, settled there not knowing the land was allocated for agro-investment. Therefore, this area is different from the FELISA area and Kayenze, in that this area has more permanent structures.

The government is actively searching for new investors. For instance, in December 2023, TIC (now TISEZA) announced the land in Tanzanian public magazines in their search for a new investor. In 2025, people living in the area reported declining soil fertility as a main challenge, together with the insecurity of their future on the land.

Several Sukuma informants in 2023, state that the area was saturated with people. Most Sukuma in the area are solely farming, keeping their cattle elsewhere. Rice production has proliferated through their expansive rice production in the wetland areas. Rice is being sold to nearby villages but also to markets further away. The Sukuma who moved in early could access larger areas of land rather cheaply, while those who moved in later rent or buy land from the early newcomers, and land plots are shrinking. Most likely, these are linked – as land gets scarcer, its value increases. Many of those arriving around 2022 were allocated rather large land areas, and many of them rent or sell land to newcomers to use their land as an income strategy.

Through this, many immigrant Sukuma are experiencing substantial livelihood benefits. The sense of insecurity among the Sukuma in the area is, however, very high. People respond differently to the insecurity. Some Sukuma, who could afford it, and to whom the insecurity was a no-go, instead bought village land upon arrival. Others chose to stay on the investment land, some unaware, others couldn't afford the more expensive village land, yet others thought the investment was worthwhile, nevertheless. The different attitude to the insecurity is also reflected in that people use their land differently. Thus, the Sukuma's progression is partly hampered by a de-development situation following a state of limbo due to the cancelled investments and the uncertain future surrounding the land, partly hindering long-term investment in the land. Conversely, the state of limbo post-investment has created more negative impacts on villagers who are disadvantaged by an institutional framework that does not provide for the return of the land to the villages it was taken from.

While there are a few Waha farmers from nearby villages farming in the area, they have not settled there. The reasons why Sukuma use and settle on the land, rather than the Waha, are manifold. First, the area is far away from the villages which makes it time consuming and costly to reach for many Waha farmers. Many Waha farmers were also deterred to enter by the violent evictions from the area, and by the resources of Sukuma to win any

potential court cases between the two groups. Second, the combination of frequent evictions across the country, and their mobility and networks, the Sukuma had the urge and capacity to rapidly spot and inhabit the uncultivated area. Third, Sukuma has a long historical trajectory of rapidly putting larger swaths of land into high agricultural production, including locations to which they migrate. Moreover, rice production in wetlands is a common feature in their trajectory, which makes the investment area, largely wetland, attractive to them. The Waha farmers, on the other hand, generally do not have a tradition to cultivate extensively, especially not in wetlands, although this is now changing. More Waha farmers are now cultivating village wetlands and have also taken up cotton production which was reintroduced by the Sukuma.

The number of Sukuma in FELISA and AgriSol areas is estimated to a total of 50-60 000 in November 2025.



House in the FELISA area, photo taken May 2023 by Charles Kona.

SEKAB/Eco Energy Ltd, Sweden

Initially, the Bagamoyo project was to be implemented by a company called SEKAB (Svensk Etanol kemi AB). It took place at the peak of the biofuel hype, where Sweden had set the highest biofuel target of all EU countries aiming

for a share of 49 percent renewable energy by 2020. As outlined, expectations on the project were huge, promising to produce hundreds of thousands of tons of sugar, millions of litres of ethanol and electricity for the national grid, provide the state with 30 million US dollars in yearly tax revenues, create 12 000–15 000 jobs and add at least 10 million US dollars per year to the local communities, billions of dollars in export revenues and offering Tanzania an opportunity to become independent of oil imports. SEKAB, Europe's largest importer of ethanol at the time, played a major role in promoting biofuels as the future energy source in Sweden. In 2005, three Swedish municipalities bought SEKAB, and the car dealer Per Carstedt was installed as the CEO.

Carstedt, a lobbyist called ›Ethanol Jesus‹ in the Swedish press had no previous experience in Africa. He convinced Sida to support this high-risk project in a complex and partly unpredictable context, and despite several controversies. Carstedt was also an advisor to the Swedish Minister of Enterprise, Energy and Communications, his former classmate. Within a year, projects in Tanzania and Mozambique, but also Poland, Hungary, Togo and Ghana, were in planning, all financed by the Swedish municipalities. These investments amounted to an estimated 1.4 billion SEK of Swedish taxpayers' money. However, after pressure to scrutinise SEKAB's activities, not least from the local media, in September 2007 leading politicians in the three Swedish municipalities stopped all investments and Carstedt was fired as SEKAB's CEO. Meanwhile, the ›buy-in‹ of the Tanzanian government was institutionalised in at least three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), indicating huge expectations. The company was also supported by other key actors in the Tanzanian government: The Minister of Lands, Housing and Settlement at the time initiated a shareholder agreement through a new ›Land for Equity‹ policy, where the Bagamoyo project would serve as a pilot project.

In 2007, the Tanzanian government decided to allocate land to the sugarcane investment and the Zanzibar government agreed to allocate 22 000 hectares of its former Razaba Ranch to the investment, in return for compensation (Figure 6).

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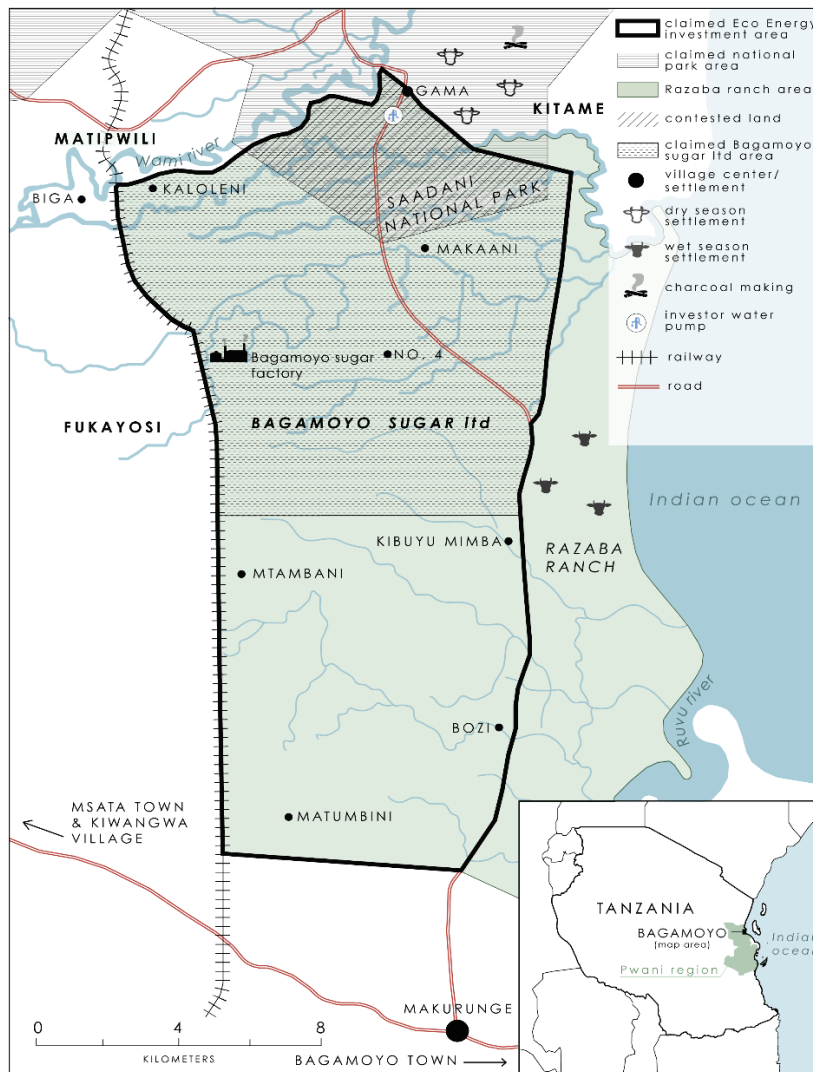


Figure 6. Map of the SEKAB/Eco Energy investment area in Razaba Ranch, Bagamoyo District⁴. Illustration by Matilda Iggström.

In 2007–08, SEKAB established an office in Masaki, Dar es Salaam, and hired a range of consultants, including a Sida officer who later returned to Sida and became a key driver of Sida support for large-scale land deals in Africa. Moreover, SEKAB gained access to 200 hectares of prison land (Kigongoni Farm) outside Bagamoyo town to establish a seed cane farm

⁴ Sources for the map: Interviews, Chung, 2023 Sweet deal, bitter landscape. *Map of the EcoEnergy project area situated in the Wami-Ruvu river basin, Bagamoyo District, Tanzania*. p 22 (Investment area border, road, rivers). Saadani National Park »Where the bush meets the beach«, 2019/1, Hifadhi za Taifa, Tanzania National Parks (national park border). 1978 Map »Zanzibar Cattle Ranch Makurunge, Bagamoyo, Coast Region«, Livestock Development Authority, Zanzibar Cattle Ranch (used for the Razaba Ranch border) May 1978, revised by Razaba July 1978 traced by T Fujioka 28 097 ha.

where sugarcane varieties particularly suitable for the local climate would be refined. The seed cane farm was up and running rather quickly and produced seed cane every season. Since the main estate was not prepared for planting, however, the seed cane crop had to be burnt down every season from 2007 until 2016. The initial timeline as per 2007 that about 3000 ha of plantation would be developed in 2008 was repeatedly delayed.

Initially, SEKAB aimed for investment in two Tanzanian districts; Rufiji and Bagamoyo. On 28 July 2009, SEKAB BioEnergy Tanzania applied for funding from Sida, which was rejected later in 2009. One reason was environmental and social risks and lack of legal frameworks. In 2010, the new company, Bagamoyo EcoEnergy Ltd (hereafter referred to as BEE) was registered in Tanzania, and the focus shifted from ethanol to sugar as the main product. This fitted well into Tanzanian policy with sugar as one of three target crops and high sugar import costs. In the new project plan, a new timeline was presented, according to which sugar production would be initiated in June 2013, that is, three years later than initially planned.

Due to the condition set by the African Development Bank and Sida that the project had to adhere to International Finance Corporation Performance Standard 5 for involuntary resettlement, a total of 1374 people within the site were identified as project-affected people and thus legible for compensation. They were evaluated in 2011 but were never informed about the result of the evaluation. They were promised that they can choose between compensation in kind, that is, new houses on new sites, or compensation in cash. Meanwhile, they were regularly informed not to plant permanent crops or make any other investments, since these would not be compensated for.

In May 2012 Sida received yet another application, which was approved in February 2014. Sida decided to support BEE with a smaller guarantee of 16.2 million USD from its regular development budget. One important driver for BEE requesting a smaller (faster), early loan was that its partners were losing faith in the project due to repeated delays and it became important to show progress. After having paid 6.2 million USD during 2014, Sida set several conditions before providing the next payment, which were not fulfilled. Therefore, in May 2015, Sida decided to stop any further payments to BEE.

On 15 April 2015 the newly elected President Magufuli decided to revoke BEE's Right of Occupancy. In October 2016, the President granted 10 000 ha of land in Bagamoyo to the domestic company Bakhresa. On 11 September 2017, BEE launched a lawsuit against the Government of Tanzania and submitted a request for arbitration at the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes, in Washington DC, claiming to have lost 52 million USD. The Tanzanian government lost this case, and as of late 2025, the money had all been paid to Eco Energy. The around 20 shareholders of Eco Energy have decided investing some of this money in three Swedish NGOs in Arusha, Kilimanjaro and Iringa between 2026–2031, through the three organizations Hand in Hand (Arusha and Kilimanjaro), Solar Sister (Arusha and Kilimanjaro) and Mobility Care (Iringa).

Farmers and pastoralists on the land were generally not informed about the status of the investment over the decade that went by. The delays and lack of information made people feel uncertainty and fear and severely affected people's access to land and their use of it. The farming in Razaba is largely focused on annual crops and withheld development in houses, and many people feel constrained to access more land. Most of the people living on the land has moved out – some kept their land, others abandoned it, while yet others sold land to newcomers. Bagamoyo's closeness to Dar es Salaam has severely pushed land prices. This is one of the reasons why Dar residents have been buying land in Razaba the past 10 years. Some of them farm the land, others seem to have bought land in speculation purposes. Thus, overall, a lot of land is still lying idle in the area. Apart from the Dar people, a mix of people have moved into Razaba the past decades, including Barabaigs for grazing and watering their animals, and farmers from all directions, to cultivate the land. Some of the immigrants have been aware that the land is investment land, but most people don't feel they have any options as to where to go. Some people have lived in the area since their birth, and refer to their ancestors staying in the area, not least the Winde area and other areas to the east. Others came to work on the cattle ranch and stayed on after the ranch was closed.

On the 24 August 2023, a Tanzanian Forest Service (TFS) notice that was given to the people of Razaba which required them to vacate the area in 7 days. When faced with a 7-day eviction notice, local CCM leaders took action to protest to the CCM at regional level. This has led to an ongoing negotiation process within CCM at national and regional levels, about

redistributing 6000 hectares to the Razaba residents. This is an ongoing process. The Bagamoyo CCM Publicity Officer stated that the party has submitted a report to the CCM chairperson regarding the proposed allocation of 6,000 hectares to the RAZABA people and is awaiting her decision. He expressed confidence that the affected residents will either receive land in RAZABA or be compensated elsewhere, although no timeline has been provided.

As of today, the Razaba Ranch is divided into four fractions: 6000 hectares along the coast, allegedly (still) belonging to Zanzibar government. Of the remaining 22 000 hectares, 10 000 ha have been allocated to Bagamoyo Sugar Ltd, under the Bakhresa group, and 12 000 hectares have been allocated to TFS. In 2025, the number of people living on the land was estimated to 5800 people, including the land buyers from Dar es Salaam, who partly are not using their land.

From a legal perspective, it is still possible to get the promised compensation. There is also a chance it may also be increased due to the political turmoil, and it will apply to all who were promised it, including those who left Razaba. Thus, the compensation promised by Eco Energy is still legally binding, and the time frame for compensation is open ended. However, the chances of getting either the compensation or formal land rights, builds on if the people living in RAZABA can build a strong case of customary occupation before colonial powers (1880) or at least before the 1923 British Land ordinance (which gave the government authority of the land). This case needs to build on documentation which could include historical, sociological or anthropological evidence, such as anthropological studies, maps, agreements, letters, court case rulings. The two main laws guiding evaluations are Evaluations Act of 2016 and the Land Acquisition Act.

However, another way to gain formal land rights could be the 12-year consecutive use-clausal⁵, which they could use against the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar (RGZ). This is because the RGZ does not have authority as a government over land on the mainland, rather they are regarded by the Tanzanian law as another foreign government occupying

⁵ According to the Village Land Act (1999, p13), village land is defined as e.g. »land, other than reserved land, which the villagers have, during the twelve years preceding the enactment of this Act been regularly occupying and using as village land, in whatever manner such persons or the village assembly or village council were allocated such land including land«.

that piece of land. For such foreign actors, the 12-year-clausul is valid, but not against the mainland government.



Houses on Razaba land, picture taken 2014 by Linda Engström.

Mkulazi Holding Company Ltd (Mkulazi II), Morogoro Rural District, Morogoro Region

Mkulazi Holding Company Limited (MHCL) was founded by Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa in September 2017 and is run by the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) together with the Prison Corporation Sole (PCS), both state-owned. The company was set to grow sugarcane on 63 000 hectares of land in Mkulazi ward and then refine it into sugar at a planned factory in the area. The investor arrived on the site in 2017. Its initial plan was to manage its own sugarcane production on 38 000 hectares, have outgrower production of sugarcane on 3000 hectares, and grow other cash crops such as sorghum, rice, and sunflower on the remaining 22 000 hectares. The plan was also to use the adjacent Ruvu and Ngerengere rivers for irrigation.

Before the investor arrived, many farmers from adjacent villages farmed on the land, and agro-pastoralist Sukuma and pastoralist Barabaig were settled on the land, often through buying permits from village leaders. When the investor arrived, most farmers left the land while a large part of the Sukuma and Barabaig stayed. Most villagers perceived large parts of the area as village land and some of them witnessed how their ancestors had lived and been buried on the land, while district and region officials claimed it had been general land since independence.

From 2017–2020, MHCL had buildings, and seeds, and started a small growing project. In 2020 villagers report seeing workers from Mkulazi Holding Company leaving, without receiving any information about the status of the investment.

The reasons why the investor failed to become operational, is, according to the investor itself, because of infrastructural challenges in such a large area. The region officers claimed irrigation and the large costs associated with investment, as the main obstacles. When the investor arrived and disappeared, people reacted differently. Some people stayed on the land throughout, others returned to using the land when the investor left, while yet others left for good. This depended on which options they had through assets and networks. Those with few options and assets felt forced to stay on the land, despite the risk of being evicted. Moreover, those with access to political decisions could make more informed decisions. The investment land was way more fertile than the village land. Therefore, using that land meant the difference between having enough food or being forced to become wage labourers in addition to farming, to secure their access to food. The government officers on the village and ward level are aware of that the villagers keep using the land but say that they are allowed to stay until another investor is found.

On 11 December 2023, a ›call for investment‹ for Farm 217 was published on Tanzania Investment Centre's (TIC) (now TISEZA) website, indicating that MHCL's plans for Farm 217 have been abandoned. The call shows how the 63 000 hectares are to be divided into six separate farms comprising circa 10 000 hectares each and the TIC are searching for both domestic and foreign investors. It is also mentioned in the call for investment that Farm 217 is owned by the TIC and potential investors will lease the land from them.

When asked about their lack of public protest most villagers explained several reasons; a lack of trust in the efficiency and fairness of government bureaucracy (especially at the regional and district level); the high costs associated with attempts at complaining; fear of being reported limits the possibilities of resistant speech acts; a lack of knowledge about rights, ways to protest which was partly linked to the lack of information about the investment status.

Sun Biofuels Ltd

The British company Sun Biofuels Ltd arrived in Kisarawe district in 2005, together with a high-ranking Member of Parliament. The company acquired 10 000 hectares (24 710 acres) from 11 villages in Kisarawe district, through a process of deception: all villages were told that all the other already consented to allocate land. The land was covered by forests. The villagers were promised jobs, water wells, schools, health clinics, new roads and technology and new farming knowledge.

After cutting all the forest in the entire area, in 2009, the company planted a small share of the area with jatropha, dug deep wells and ponds for irrigation, and constructed office buildings. Around 700 villagers were employed at low wages (150 to 200 000 Tsh/month) and harsh working conditions, including working long hours and spraying without protection gear, which has given the workers consistent health problems.

After about 2 years, the company claimed water shortage and left, however the water shortage is questioned by many villagers who instead believe they either wanted to sell the forest timber, or search for minerals but found none.

In 2019, another investor, the Tanzanian investor Mtanga Foods Ltd, started using part of the land, and 2021 yet another investor locally called »The Arab« arrived. Both new investors keep cattle, albeit on a tiny share of the area, and the villagers know very little about their business. In the remaining area, guards were hired to patrol when Sun Biofuel left, to ensure against encroachment from the villages. However, through bribes or local connections, or by entering deep into the forest land, villagers and outsiders have been re-entering the area, mainly to cut wood to produce charcoal. The land is not assessed to be suitable for farming, and no or little crop cultivation is taking place. There are also pastoralists in the area, and farmer-herder conflicts were reported. Instead of having a common understanding with common rules for how the village forest can be used as before the investor came, the forest resources are now used on individual basis. As a result, the forest is rapidly being degraded, with only small trees left, and larger areas must be cleared.

When Sun Biofuel had left, the 11 villagers created a joint task force to claim compensation for their loss. The district subsequently agreed to compensate them with 550 million Tsh. This sum was, however, not divided

equally among the villages, nor in relation to the land area they had given up to the company, which caused much confusion and frustration. Second, the money was not going to be paid in cash, rather through projects the villages chose. In the village studied in the master project, this led to hiring a contractor recommended by the district to drill a new village well. However, the money ran out before the contractor had reached the water level, which left the village without money and without the well.

The village has received less and more irregular rainfall after Sun Biofuels cleared the forest, and their land is not enough to feed a growing population. Thus, they abandoned their shifting cultivation traditions. Both changes contributed to severely declining agricultural yields in the area, and an increase in people subsiding to charcoal making on the abandoned land.

Nobel Agriculture Enterprises Ltd, Kilosa District, Morogoro Region

In 2017, President Magufuli initiated a nation-wide programme to redistribute idle and underutilised large-scale farmland to communities. Mvumi village in Kilosa District, was one of the villages that received land back. Out of 2661 acres of land that earlier had been allocated to the Tanzanian company Nobel Agriculture Enterprises Ltd, 1000 acres were redistributed to the village. However, the redistribution process proved to be highly unfair, where politically connected and wealthier beneficiaries secured irrigated plots and larger holdings, while poorer men, women, youth, and pastoralists were allocated smaller, less fertile parcels without irrigation. Differentiation also emerged between long-term residents and migrants, and between those with pre-existing claims and new allottees, leading to enduring conflicts over legitimacy and use. The process was mediated by male-dominated land allocation committees, whose decision-making was marked by corruption, rent-seeking, sextortion, patronage, and procedural opacity. These are thus important aspects to include in all land redistribution processes.

The study shows that the farms were mortgaged by Nobel Agriculture Enterprises. So, it is likely that the investor only wanted the farms to secure loans from banks. Additionally, while it was not possible to find evidence of any operational activities, the investor was leasing land to communities. It was difficult to obtain data on the number of villagers who lost their land from investors who could regain ownership of their land, apart from the plan from the District Council to allocate 300 acres to them.

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The research team

Linda Engström has a PhD in the topic Rural Development at SLU, Uppsala, Sweden. She has a background as a biologist, with studies of orangutans in the Indonesian rainforest and working globally with environmental issues. She has visited Tanzania regularly since 1998 through her studies and working positions. She came across SEKAB in 2008. When they applied for Sida funding, she worked as an advisor to Sida, and was asked to assess the environmental impact assessment of the investment plans that a Swedish consultancy had made. A few years later, she started her PhD studies, looking at the practical implementation of SEKAB in Bagamoyo but also FELISA and AgriSol investments in Uvinza district. She chose to study the Uvinza location since little research had been done about them, and little knowledge was available to researchers but also the Tanzanian society.

Ronald B. Ndesanjo is a lecturer at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam. He holds a PhD in Natural Resource Assessment and Management and has over 15 years of research experience in climate change, natural resource governance, and environmental sustainability. His research focuses on climate change adaptation and mitigation, land tenure and large-scale agricultural investments, and the blue economy, with particular attention to rural smallholder livelihoods. He previously served as a Research Associate in the Resilience Ecology Programme at Aga Khan University, Nairobi.

Charles Kona: Charles Kona has a bachelor in Rural Development Finance and Investment Planning. He is frequently employed to implement

government census work. Charles started working with Linda as field assistant and interpreter in 2016, during a visit to Razaba. Charles played a leading role in planning and implementing the household survey in 2023. He has also been important in creating networks and building and maintaining social relations in the study locations, interpreting, administering certain project tasks and events. Charles has also provided all master students with practical support and interpretation.

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