



The green economy in Tanzania: From global discourses to institutionalization



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Green economy
Agricultural investment
Institutional bricolage
Green governmentality
Grabbing green
SAGCOT

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the transfer of the green economy from a global discursive level to institutionalization at the national level in Tanzania. While there is a growing amount of research discussing technological aspects of the green economy, less attention has been paid to policy implications and governance aspects, especially in developing countries. There is an increasing emphasis on technological and market-based solutions to environmental challenges globally and in the developed part of the world. However, in developing countries, ‘green growth’ often implies transformed control over natural resources – under schemes that are often driven from abroad. Over the last five to ten years, investments aimed at increasing productivity in the rural agricultural sector in developing countries have become a focus area of the green economy, but various concepts of *green* have become confused. Such (mis-) interpretation of the green economy has consequences for implementation and outcomes of various ‘green’ projects. Drawing on governmentality as well as the concept of institutional *bricolage*, I examine how the green economy discourse and policy at the global level have been re-shaped and re-interpreted to fit the existing agri-business initiative of the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania (SAGCOT), which has been championed as a model for green economy implementation in Africa. I discuss how the green discourse has been ‘grabbed’ as an opportunity to ‘greenwash’ SAGCOT in its establishment and institutionalization.

1. Introduction

Since 2012, the ‘green economy’ has been presented as a framework for climate mitigation, a new, ‘green’ driver for economic growth, and a tool for poverty alleviation. The overall aim is to function as a catalyst towards the achievement of sustainable development (United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), 2011). While there is a growing amount of research discussing technological, financial and practical aspects of the green economy, less attention has been paid to policy and governance aspects, especially in developing countries. At the same time, agricultural development has, to an increasing extent, been interpreted as green economy implementation, especially across the African continent (Bergius et al., 2017). This paper examines how the green economy discourse and policy at the global level has been ‘grabbed’ and interpreted to fit an existing agri-business scheme in Tanzania; and how this initiative has been re-shaped and presented as representing ‘green growth’ along the lines of the prevailing green economy trend (Kabubu, 2012).

The years prior to the promotion of the green economy at the Rio + 20 conference in 2012, saw an increased awareness of climate

change and its relationships to economic growth and the financial crisis. For many, these crises presented a “unique moment in history in which major environmental and economic challenges could be tackled simultaneously” (Tienhaara, 2014, p. 1). Governments and policy-makers around the world proclaimed that economic recovery after the financial shocks of 2007/8 should be ‘green’ in order to ensure sustainable growth (Ban and Gore, 2009; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2009). These were not new ideas (see e.g. Pearce et al., 1989), but led to new and invigorated debate around sustainable development (WCED, 1987).

Green economy ideas cover a wide range of areas, but the leading policy papers demonstrate a strong reliance on technological and market-based solutions to environmental problems (UNEP, 2011; OECD, 2009). There seems to be an assumption that we can solve the world’s combined challenges by simply adjusting economic systems (Ehresman and Okereke, 2015). However, what is often lacking in green economy policy strategies is attention to political and institutional implications, as well as issues of power, and social and environmental (in)justice in various ‘green’ transformations (Scoones et al., 2015; Newell and Mulvaney, 2013; Brockington and Ponte, 2015;

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Brown et al., 2014).

Simultaneously, there has been an increase in foreign control over farmland and natural resources (Anseeuw et al., 2012), particularly in Africa. A renewed ‘scramble’ for Africa’s farmland was sparked after the food price-hike in the mid-2000s (Evers et al., 2013; Sulle, 2015). Interestingly, this urge to make money from, or control, Africa’s natural resources and farmland has recently been combined with the idea of the green economy and its implementation. Given that ‘green transformation’ most often includes parallel strategies of poverty reduction, climate mitigation, environmental preservation and economic growth, the pathway chosen has often been agricultural investment in developing countries (GRAIN, 2015; UNEP, 2015). Investing in agriculture and intensifying production are often perceived as efficient interventions in order to curb rural poverty (Kay, 2014). Championed under a green economy banner, this combination has paved the way for large-scale agricultural initiatives and agri-business investments such as the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) (Oakland Institute, 2016; McKeon, 2014; Daño, 2007; Sulle, 2015). According to Nhamo and Chekwoti (2014), we are now witnessing a fourth generation of land acquisition in Africa, taking place under the contemporary green economy transition.¹

Tanzania has embarked on a journey towards a green transformation agenda through the large-scale agricultural initiative SAGCOT – the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania. SAGCOT is a public-private partnership between the Tanzanian Government and more than 100 partners, including agri-corporations, local organizations and associations, a small number of donors and development partners, and most importantly foreign/multi-national investors and business corporations (SAGCOT, 2013). When launching the initiative in 2010, the government proclaimed that this was the new, green road to economic growth, increased agricultural production, and environmental preservation. In order to “unlock the region’s potential,” SAGCOT aims, by 2030, to “mobilize 3.5 billion USD in investments, bring 350,000 hectares of land into commercial farming, create 420,000 new employment opportunities, [and] lift 2 million people permanently out of poverty” (SAGCOT, 2015). Their strategy is to incorporate small-scale farmers into enhanced and commercialized agricultural production and provide market access and agricultural assistance to smallholders through partnerships in value chains, out-grower models, and a small number of plantations (SAGCOT, 2011). SAGCOT is targeting one-third of the Tanzanian mainland, encompassing around five million hectares of land (Fig. 1), with a total population of approximately ten million people. SAGCOT is championed as a typical green economy initiative (SAGCOT, 2013; Kabubu, 2012; Bergius et al., 2017), flagged as green transformation, green growth, or, in its own words, ‘agriculture green growth’ (SAGCOT, 2013).

There is a growing amount of research pointing to the consequences of large-scale land acquisitions and privatization of agricultural investments in Africa in ‘the name of green’ (Byiers and Rampa, 2013; Nhamo and Chekwoti, 2014; Cotula, 2013; Kaag and Zoomers, 2014; Evers et al., 2013), including SAGCOT (Sulle, 2015; Sulle, 2016; Bergius et al., 2017; Coulson, 2015; Chung, 2017). While concerns have been raised about the possible impacts of SAGCOT, both at national and local levels, this study does not aim to point to implications of the initiative itself. Rather, I seek to explore how and why the framing of SAGCOT changed from being an agricultural investment portfolio project to a so-called ‘agriculture green growth’ and ‘inclusive green growth’ initiative, and the ways in which it has been justified as such.

I will do so by drawing on a theoretical framework which combines the concepts of discourse institutionalization (Hajer, 1995), governmentality (Foucault, 1991), environmentality (Luke, 1999), political

¹ Previous rounds of land acquisition took place in pre-colonial, colonial and more immediate post-colonial eras.

ecology (Peet et al., 2011) and in particular, institutional *bricolage* (Cleaver, 2012). The original meaning of the word *bricolage* is a “construction or creation [of something new] from a diverse range of available things,” regardless of the original purpose of those things (Cleaver, 2012, p. 33). Cleaver (2012, p. 45) defines *institutional bricolage* as “a process in which people consciously and non-consciously draw on existing social formulae [...] to patch or piece together institutions in response to changing situations”. It is important to “incorporate awareness of the ‘invisible’ workings of power” into institutional understanding and analysis (Cleaver, 2012, p. 22). The idea of institutional *bricolage* has been used primarily to demonstrate how local communities adjust existing structures and institutional practices in local natural resource management (Cleaver, 2012). I seek to explore how institutional *bricolage* can be useful in explaining how discourses and policies change from policy to practice, in a ‘piece-and-patch-together’ manner, as well as how various sources of authority have re-legitimized the notion of ‘green.’ This work contributes to an understanding of how the green economy moves from being a policy and discourse, to practical implementation, and the findings can provide insight into how green growth is manifest on the ground in a developing country.

Data collection for this research study was carried out between 2015 and 2017, at multi-national and international levels, as well as at national, district and local levels in Tanzania. I used qualitative data collection methods mostly in the form of interviews (80 in total) among agri-business and agriculture sector actors and corporations, global organizations, ministries and government institutions in Tanzania, as well as Tanzanian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and researchers. Members of the SAGCOT board, the SAGCOT leadership and other SAGCOT staff members were among the key informants, as well as SAGCOT partners, representatives from the Tanzanian government and institutions who were involved in the formation of SAGCOT. I also carried out document analysis, as well as using participatory methods such as observation and mapping. Finally, I participated in several high-level international green economy policy conferences with a total number of approximately 2200 participants, as well as the SAGCOT Annual Partnership Forum 2017, with around 500 participants. In addition to activities and interviews carried out at these events, I analyzed the conference sessions, coverage and documents through event ethnography (Campbell et al., 2014) and participant observation.

2. The policies and discourses of the green economy

In the years before and after the launch of the Brundtland report “*Our Common Future*” (WCED, 1987), there was a debate around the concept of ‘sustainable development.’ Already at that point a type of green economy idea was suggested as an alternative to conventional economic models, based on the argument that sustainable development would not be possible if economic systems and the environment were treated separately (Pearce et al., 1989). However, these ideas did not gain substantial traction in academic and policy circles until the late 2000s, when several different schools of green transformations developed, mostly as responses to the ‘triple F’ crisis (food, fuel and finance crises between 2007 and 2010) (Tienhaara, 2014; Death, 2015; Newell, 2015; Dale et al., 2016; Luke, 2009).

2.1. Prevailing policies and discourses

Today, there are several parallel ‘green’ schools in addition to, or as sub-categories of, the overall green economy approach, most notably ‘green growth’ (OECD, 2009) and ‘green transition’ or transformation (Scoones et al., 2015).² UNEP (2011, p. 16) provides the most

² In this paper, I refer to the overall green economy as well as green growth, and regard these as largely being synonymous. However, green growth focuses more on economic

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