

# Africa Land Purchases May Spark Rights Discord, Group Says

*By Rudy Ruitenberg - Feb 1, 2012 12:01 PM ET*

Land buying in [Africa](#) risks causing civil unrest as governments and investors ignore customary rights of local users, according to the Rights and Resources Initiative, a non-profit coalition of advocacy groups.

Conflict about land ownership has “fractured” Liberia and [South Sudan](#), the Washington-based group wrote in an online [statement](#) today. Two-thirds of land being bought by investors is in Africa, the group wrote, citing research by political economist Liz Alden Wily.

A review of tenure rights in 35 African countries by Alden Wily found governments claim most of 1.4 billion hectares (3.46 billion acres) of rural land, including forests, that is held in common by local communities, affecting at least 428 million rural poor in sub-Saharan Africa, the group wrote.

“Controversial land acquisitions were a key factor triggering the civil wars in Sudan, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and there is every reason to be concerned that conditions are ripe for new conflicts to occur in many other places,” Jeffrey Hatcher, global program director at the Rights and Resources Initiative, was quoted as saying in the statement.

Nine of the 35 countries in Africa which Alden Wily researched were rated as “broadly positive” for their treatment of local customary rights, led by [Uganda](#), Tanzania, [Burkina Faso](#) and South Sudan, according to the group.

[Brazil](#) is an example of a country that has avoided conflict and achieved both forest conservation and development by recognizing local people’s right to forests, the Rights and Resources Initiative wrote.

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