

**POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF GLOBAL LAND GRABS:  
EXPLORING THE LAND-LABOUR NEXUS ON  
GHANA'S EASTERN CORRIDOR**

Adwoa Yeboah Gyapong

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Research School for Resource Studies for Development.

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**Political Dynamics of Global Land  
Grabs: Exploring the Land-Labour  
Nexus on Ghana's Eastern Corridor**

**De politieke dynamiek van wereldwijde  
landhandel: het dwarsverband tussen  
land en arbeid in Ghana**

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*To my dear parents, Ama Ameyoo Fobi and Opanin Kwabena Onusu Gyapong for their unconditional love, hard work and support towards my education; and in memory of Dada Addo-Sem who believed in me.*



# Contents

ABSTRACT.....	XVIII
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 Large-scale agriculture as the development pathway for africa? .....	3
1.3 The land and labour questions in the land grab debate .....	7
1.4 Research questions and significance.....	11
1.5 Analytical framework: an agrarian political economy approach.....	13
1.5.1 Rural social class differentiation.....	14
1.5.2 Social reproduction.....	22
1.5.3 A gendered political economy.....	23
1.5.4 The political economy of livelihoods .....	27
1.5.5 Organized and everyday politics .....	30
1.5.6 State-society relations under pluralistic institutions .....	32
1.5.7 Land grabs and the competing governance tendencies .....	33
1.6 Organization of thesis.....	36
Notes .....	38
2 RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY.....	39
2.1 Introduction .....	39
2.2 An overview of study design: mixed methods.....	39
2.3 The study area: Nkwanta South Municipality Ghana .....	40
2.4 The ‘SGSOG-Herakles-Volta Red’ concession.....	42
2.5 Data from existing literature.....	42
2.6 Primary data gathering.....	43
2.6.1 Planning the data collection .....	43
2.6.2 Survey .....	44
2.6.3 In-depth interviews .....	44
2.6.4 Life histories and stories .....	44

2.6.5	Observations .....	45
2.6.6	Focus Group Discussion (FGDS) .....	46
2.7	Sampling .....	47
2.8	Data processing and analysis .....	49
2.9	Ethical consideration .....	49
2.10	Strategizing around limitations.....	50
2.11	Positionality and methodological reflections .....	52
	Notes .....	54
3	AGRICULTURAL POLICY, FARMING SYSTEMS, AND FOOD POLITICS IN GHANA .....	55
3.1	Introduction .....	55
3.2	Plantations and commercial agriculture under colonial administration: impacts on land and labour.....	55
3.3	Agricultural policies at independence: 1957-1999 .....	59
3.4	Post-2000: invest in, industrialize, and modernize agriculture .....	61
3.4.1	Making Ghana and attractive investment destination in Africa..	61
3.4.2	Boosting national food self-sufficiency, promoting cash crops and creating jobs.....	65
3.5	Labour and the organization of family farming in Ghana .....	68
3.6	Farmland tenure systems.....	71
3.7	The scope of contemporary corporate land deals in Ghana.....	73
3.8	Civil society and land grab politics in Ghana .....	74
3.9	Chapter conclusion .....	77
	Notes .....	79
4	CLASS, GENDER AND THE POLITICS OF LAND ACCESS AND EXCLUSION .....	81
4.1	Introduction .....	81
4.2	Chieftaincy and relative authority over land among the Ntrubos <b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>	
4.3	Family land tenure among the ntrubos .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.4	Small-scale farming and modes of production .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.4.1	Family farms and family labour.....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.4.2	Sharecropping.....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>

*Political Dynamics of Global Land Grabs*


4.4.3	Wage labour on family farms .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.4.4	Mutual support schemes .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.5	The ‘SGSOG-Herakles-Volta Red’ land deal.....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.5.1	Leasing of the Ntrubo family lands to SGSOG-Herakles Farm ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.	
4.5.2	From Herakles to Volta Red farms.....	94
4.6	Formalizing spatial boundaries.....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.7	Dispossession and alternative lands: generational and land-based class dynamics.....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.7.1	Within the affected Ntrubo families .....	97
4.7.2	Among migrants, settlers, and sharecropping families .....	102
4.7	Effects on women’s food access.....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.8	Compensation and the institutionalization of exclusion .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.9	Rent and the reconfiguration of power and entitlements.....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
4.10	Chapter conclusions.....	81
	Notes .....	82
5	LABOUR INCORPORATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY FARMING.....	83
5.1	Introduction .....	83
5.2	The peasant farmworkers and their attachment to land.....	83
5.3	Class and demographic characteristics of farmworkers.....	86
5.4	A gendered division of labour.....	90
5.5	Precarious labour and the ‘weakening’ bodies .....	91
5.5.1	Casualization .....	91
5.5.2	Income insecurity and disparities.....	94
5.5.3	Health care and wellbeing insecurity.....	97
5.6	Labour competition between plantation and family farms .....	101
5.6.1	The seasonality and task-specificity of own labour demands....	101
5.6.2	The family labour dynamics.....	103
5.6.3	Wage labour: ‘I will farm with money’.....	105
5.6.4	Changing access to mutual support schemes.....	107
5.7	Women’s work, (re)production and livelihoods .....	108



5.8 Chapter conclusion .....	147
Notes .....	112
<b>6 THE POLITICAL FRONTS OF DISPOSSESSION AND EXPLOITATION .....</b>	<b>113</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	113
6.2 Land dispossession, investor strategy and local responses .....	113
6.2.1 Mobilizing support and containing conflicts .....	113
6.2.2 ‘Our eyes opened’: The role of advocacy politics.....	118
6.3 Labour politics: class consciousness and everyday action.....	121
6.3.1 Deception, and non-compliance.....	121
6.3.2 Acquiescence?.....	124
6.3.3 Absenteeism: production and action.....	125
6.3.4 Farmworkers’ actions and the constraint of organizing.....	130
6.4 Land-labour politics: class and intergenerational tensions.....	132
6.5 Chapter conclusion .....	138
Notes .....	140
<b>7 FARMWORKERS: AT THE EDGE OF REGULATORY AND ADVOCACY STRATEGIES FOR AND AGAINST LARGE-SCALE FARM INVESTMENTS .....</b>	<b>141</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	141
7.2 Institutions governing land investments and agricultural labour in Ghana .....	141
7.2.1 Job creation rhetoric and a laissez investment environment.....	143
7.2.2 Institutional bypasses, incomplete and overlapping mandates..	146
7.2.3 Legitimation of status quo and repression .....	147
7.3 finding labour in the peasant/food sovereignty way: some silences in the ‘Stop/Roll Back’ narratives .....	149
7.3.1 Farmworkers: In the countryside and in food sovereignty movements’ anti-land grab discourses.....	151
7.3.2 Dispossession, but also exploitation: Differentiated impacts and responses.....	153
7.4 Chapter conclusions.....	155
Notes .....	156
<b>8 CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>157</b>
8.1 Introduction .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>

*Political Dynamics of Global Land Grabs*

8.2 The dynamics of dispossession, land access and control .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
8.3 Labour: on the plantation and in the smallholder economy.	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
8.4 Differentiated political reactions from below .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
8.5 Contribution to agrarian studies and land grab debates .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
8.6 Rethinking policies, regulations and politics	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
8.7 Areas for future studies .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
Notes .....	<b>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</b>
APPENDICES .....	159
REFERENCES .....	171



## List of Tables, Figures, Maps and Appendices

### Tables

Overview of Primary Data Gathering Methods .....	47
Land and labour under British colonial administration .....	58
Power and authority in land matters.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Tenancy Arrangements among Farmworkers (Farm 1)	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Landholdings of Affected Family Groups ...	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Landholdings within Affected Family Groups	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Female Farmworkers' Means of Access to Maize and Cassava.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Farmlands and Farm Sizes of Farmworkers .....	86
Farmworkers' forms of Land Access (Farm 1).....	87
Marital Statuses of Farmworkers .....	90
Gendered Tasks and Targets on the Plantation.....	91
Farmworkers' Labour Commitment to Own Farms.....	101
The Dynamics of Seasonal Labour Demands on Own Farms.....	102
Farmworkers' Sources of Farm Labour (Farm 1).....	107

### Figures

Trend of FDI inflows to Ghana .....	62
Customary land tenure among the Ntrubos	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

*Political Dynamics of Global Land Grabs*

2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Family Representatives' Kinship Relations to the Beneficiaries on their Family Rent Lists ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**  
Farmworkers' Farm Sizes (Farm 1) by Gender. .... 87  
Demographic Characteristics of Farmworkers. .... 89  
Harvesters Output in a Peak Season (May-June 2018) ..... 96  
Women Loose Pickers' Output in Peak Season (May- June 2018) ..... 97  
Women's Attendance to Work on the Plantation in June 2017 ..... 128  
Women's Attendance to Work on the Plantation in September, 2017..... 129

**Maps**

The Study Area..... 41  
Nkwanta Area Councils Showing the Total Land Area Belonging to the Ntrubo Clan..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

**Boxes**

Household and Class Dynamics of Dispossession: The Kumi Family. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**  
Two Female Workers and their Contract Preferences..... 93  
Former Male Workers' Experiences ..... 100  
Family Perceptions of the Plantation and the Future ..... 137

**Appendices**

Survey (Farmworkers) ..... 159  
List of Institutions Contacted ..... 166  
Farmworkers' struggles and Everyday Politics ..... 168



## Acronyms

AFJN	Africa Faith and Justice Network
AGRA	Alliance for Green Revolution Alliance
APFOG	Apex Farmers Organization of Ghana
AU	Africa Union
BIT	Bilateral Investment Treaty
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program
CADFund	China-African Development Fund
CNCR	National Committee for Rural Peoples' Dialogue
CPP	Conventional People's Party
ERP	Economic Recovery Programme
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FBO	Farmer Based Organizations
FDI	Foreign Direct Investments
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FONG	Farmers' Organization Network in Ghana
FSG	Food Sovereignty Ghana
GAD	Gender and Development
GAWU	Ghana Agricultural Workers Union
GCAP	Ghana Commercial Agricultural Project
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFAP	Ghana Federation of Agricultural Producers
GIPC	Ghana Investment Promotion Centre
GM	Genetically Modified
GNAFF	Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen
GOPDC	Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation
IFI	International Financial Institution
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPPA	Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement
LAP	Land Administration Project

*Political Dynamics of Global Land Grabs*

LVD	Land Valuation Division
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHIS	National Health Insurance Scheme
NIE	New Institutional Economics
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NRC	National Redemption Council
OCB	Cameroonaise de la Banane
PFAG	Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana
PFJ	Planting for Food and Jobs
PHP	Plantations de Haut Penja
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
PSI	President's Special Initiative
ROPPA	Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDI	Sustainable Development Investment
SGSOC	SG Sustainable Oils Cameroon
SGSOG	SG Sustainable Oils Ghana
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
UK	United Kingdom
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
USD	United States Dollar
WID	Women in Development
WIR	World Investment Report
WTO	World Trade Organization



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### *Political Dynamics of Global Land Grabs*

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## Abstract

The past decade has seen a tremendous amount of literature on the impacts of the global land rush. Much of the debates have been rooted in theoretical and analytical perspectives that speak particularly to the land question, with little emphasis on labour. Yet, support for large-scale agricultural investments in Africa is largely premised on their labour prospects for local economic development. However, despite earlier calls by some critical scholars to centre labour in the land grabs debate, labour is generally invisible in both mainstream policy and academic research. Following through an example from rural communities affected by an oil palm land deal on Ghana's eastern corridor, which is characterized by migrants, settlers and sharecroppers, this thesis examines the land grab-labour nexus. The central research question is: *How and why do corporate large-scale farmland deals impact land access and control, labour relations of production and social reproduction, and what are the implications of this for rural politics and governance?* The study is situated within a broad agrarian political economy framework. Between 2018 and 2020, primary data was gathered through a mixed-method approach and in a four-phased field visit, spanning a total of six months.

The study shows how land grab processes are directly linked to the complex dynamics of dispossession as powerful actors within the intersecting spheres of state, chieftaincy, family and farming institutions capitalize on the sudden commoditization of land to control and exclude certain groups of people from land entitlements and other material resources that accompany large-scale land acquisitions. The existing rent distribution process, which has also become a pseudo land-tenure formalization instrument, has immense implications for intergenerational land access for people with lineal and derived rights, communal and fragmented landholders, labouring classes and other social groups. Generally, women, youth and sharecroppers bear the brunt of land losses. Throwing light on labour contributes to a better understanding of the complexity of land grab-related impacts, especially one that presents a broader picture of socially

differentiated peasant communities, and thereby the varying benefits from land resources that a dispossession-centric framework may not be able to capture fully.

This study contributes to the emerging but still thin body of knowledge on contemporary land rush that underscores the issues of labour prospects and gender disparities of plantation agriculture. Not only are employment opportunities minimal, but the precarious working conditions characterized by casualization, low incomes, indebtedness, and poor occupational health and safety are also a reminder of how and why capital's need to maintain its own reproduction does not cohere with purported social contributions from land deals. The gendered disparities in incomes also reinforce and widen the existing inequalities between men and women. At the same time, farmers and farmworkers, ardent to maintain their subsistence culture continue to produce staple food crops in spite of the competing demands for residual lands, and the division of labour between own farms and the plantation. The evidence of the labour competition between own farms and the plantation does not conform to any particular pattern partly because of the differences in household demographics/family labour availability, land access, farm locations, the types of crops farmed, the seasonality of oil palm harvest and the casual nature of the plantation work. Nonetheless, there is a general perception indicating a decline in the yields and diversity of their own food production, and difficulties in maintaining their own farms, with women being significantly affected.

Furthermore, placing peasants' political reactions within the context of contemporary land grabs presents rural politics on two broad fronts. On the one hand against dispossession, and on the other hand against labour exploitation and for better terms of incorporation. In a context of relative land abundance, where land grabbing has not entirely disrupted the existing subsistence ethic, political reactions from the affected landholding families have been generally covert, contained and reactionary, and farmworkers' everyday politics through absenteeism, non-compliance, and the continuance of their own food production enable them to maintain their basic food sovereignty/security. Yet, considering the fragile livelihood situations of these remote communities, a corporate 'investment' discourse still overrides a land grab narrative; demands are directed more towards rents and labour than land reclamation, and farmworkers' multiple and individualized everyday politics do not necessarily change the structure of social relations associated with capitalist agriculture. The main connecting

### *Political Dynamics of Global Land Grabs*

string to the land-labour nexus of land grab politics is the question of food. This is closely linked to the global food sovereignty narrative, or to bring it home to Ghana, a kind of local food self-sufficiency whereby almost all affected groups prefer that their food security is derived mainly from their own production and a satisfactory utility of their produce instead of food purchases. This reaffirms the importance of land access for farmers and farm workers, even if land deals create employment and generate income. Nonetheless, there are several points where interests diverge and compete on the grounds of social class, identity and generational differences.

Finally, the study demonstrates that the problems of peasant farming and rural agricultural wage labour are not unconnected. Still, rural wage workers raise particular issues that, unfortunately, have fallen to the margins of both mainstream regulatory strategies that promote 'responsible' farmland investments, and radical anti-land grab civil society groups, including the food sovereignty movement dedicated to campaigns against the threats of land dispossession. On the one hand, from a policy perspective, there are many legislative gaps in the governance of agricultural wage labour. In Ghana, there are no appropriate labour institutions to protect agricultural workers, and the few existent either maintain the status quo or are repressive. Investors, therefore continue to operate under laissez-faire business environments, prioritizing their economic viability often to the detriment of marginalized groups. It is essential to have agriculture-specific legislations that deal with labour issues on both large and small-scale farms. For regulations to be effective, the rights of agricultural workers need to be secure. At the same time, statutory provisions for unionization must be supported by policies and programmes that build the capacities of these hard to organize casual workers. If any large-scale investment is to be justified, the 'why' question from the perspectives of landowners and those attracted to wage labour should not be ignored. Peasants move in and out of seasonal poverty, and desperation forces them to make constrained choices regarding land transfers, as well as inhibit their agency on capitalist large-scale farms. There is the need to address discriminatory agricultural sector policies that leave some small-scale farmers with very few alternatives. Effective investment and labour regulations should also reflect the contested spaces of unemployment, underemployment, rural-urban inequalities, the challenges of small-scale agriculture, fragile livelihoods and power relations within which these investments are expected to take place. On the other hand, if food sovereignty is to realize its

potential power as a counter-narrative to neoliberalism, and as a possible democratic alternative for working people with differentiated and sometimes, competing socio-economic interests, then demands that adequately reflect the diverse agrarian struggles of the rural working people have to be put onto the agenda and more fully engaged with.

# DE POLITIEKE DYNAMIEK VAN WERELDWIJDE LANDHANDEL: HET DWARSVERBAND TUSSEN LAND EN ARBEID IN GHANA



## Samenvatting

De afgelopen tien jaar is er een enorme hoeveelheid literatuur verschenen over de gevolgen van de wereldwijde run op land. Het debat wordt grotendeels gevoerd vanuit theoretische en analytische invalshoeken waarin de landkwestie centraal staat, en arbeid onderbelicht blijft. Toch is de steun voor grootschalige landbouwinvesteringen in Afrika vooral gebaseerd op de daaruit voortvloeiende arbeidsvooruitzichten met het oog op de lokale economische ontwikkeling. Ondanks eerdere oproepen van enkele kritische wetenschappers om de aandacht te richten op arbeid in het debat over landroof, is arbeid over het algemeen echter onzichtbaar in zowel het reguliere beleid als in wetenschappelijk onderzoek.

Op basis van een voorbeeld van plattelandsgemeenschappen die getroffen zijn door de verkoop van oliepalmgrond op de oostelijke corridor van Ghana, waar migranten, kolonisten en deelpachters wonen, wordt in dit proefschrift het dwarsverband tussen landroof en arbeid in kaart gebracht. De centrale onderzoeksvraag is: *wat is de invloed van grootschalige commerciële landbouwgrondtransacties op arbeidsverhoudingen en welke implicaties heeft dit voor de plattelandspolitiek en arbeidsgovernance?* Het onderzoek is gesitueerd binnen een breed agrarisch politiek kader. De primaire data zijn verzameld tussen 2018 en 2020 met een mixed-methodbenadering en veldonderzoek in vier fasen, verspreid over in totaal zes maanden.

Uit het onderzoek blijkt dat processen van landroof rechtstreeks verband houden met de complexe dynamiek van onteigening. Machtige actoren binnen de elkaar overlappende gebieden van staat, stamhoofd, familie en landbouwinstellingen grijpen de plotselinge vermarkting van land aan om controle uit te oefenen over bepaalde groepen en deze mensen uit te sluiten van eigendomsrechten op land en andere materiële hulpbronnen die samengaan met grootschalige landaankoop. Het bestaande pachtverdelingsproces, dat ook een verkapt instrument voor de formalisering van grondbezit is geworden, heeft enorme implicaties voor de toegang tot land door de generaties heen voor mensen met directe en afgeleide rechten, gemeenschapsgebonden en gefragmenteerde grondbezitters, arbeidersklassen en andere sociale groepen. Over het algemeen hebben vrouwen, jongeren en deelpachters het zwaarst te lijden onder het verlies van land. Door een beter begrip van de rol van arbeid ontstaat meer inzicht in de complexiteit van de gevolgen van landroof. Dit brengt sociaal gedifferentieerde boerengemeenschappen beter in beeld en daarmee ook de verschillende opbrengsten van toegang tot land die een op onteigening gericht kader wellicht niet volledig kan omvatten.

Dit onderzoek draagt bij aan de groeiende, maar nog steeds geringe hoeveelheid kennis over de hedendaagse run op land, waarin de problemen van de arbeidsvooruitzichten en de genderverschillen in de plantage-landbouw onderstreept worden. Niet alleen zijn de kansen op werk minimaal, maar ook de preciaire arbeidsomstandigheden die blijken uit tijdelijke contracten, lage inkomens, schuldenlast en ongezond en onveilig werk bevestigen dat de instandhouding en vermeerdering van kapitaal niet samengaat met de vermeende sociale bijdrage van de landhandel. De gendergerelateerde verschillen in inkomen versterken en vergroten ook de bestaande ongelijkheid tussen mannen en vrouwen. Tegelijkertijd blijven boeren en landarbeiders, die hun zelfvoorzieningscultuur in stand willen houden, belangrijke landbouwgewassen produceren ondanks de concurrerende vraag naar landbouwgrond en de arbeidsverdeling tussen de eigen bedrijven en de plantage. Er is geen duidelijk patroon te ontdekken in de

### *Political Dynamics of Global Land Grabs*

arbeidsconcurrentie tussen de eigen boerenbedrijven en de plantage. Dit ligt deels aan de verschillen in beschikbaarheid van arbeidskrachten in het huishouden/gezin, toegang tot land, ligging van de boerenbedrijven, soorten gewassen die worden verbouwd, seizoensgebondenheid van de oliepalmoogst en het onregelmatige karakter van het werk op de plantage. Toch is de algemene indruk dat de opbrengst en de diversiteit van de eigen voedselproductie afneemt en dat het moeilijk is om het eigen boerenbedrijf in stand te houden, wat een grote impact heeft op vrouwen.

Daarnaast wordt plattelandspolitiek op twee brede fronten zichtbaar door de politieke reacties van boeren in de context van de hedendaagse landroof te plaatsen. Enerzijds is er een beweging tegen onteigening, en anderzijds een beweging tegen arbeidsuitbuiting en voor betere deelnamevoorwaarden. In een situatie van relatieve overvloed aan land, waarin landroof de bestaande zelfvoorzieningscultuur niet volledig verstoort, zijn de politieke reacties van de getroffen grondbezitters over het algemeen verborgen, ingehouden en reactief. De landarbeiders reageren met verzuim en houden zich niet aan de afspraken. Door hun eigen voedsel te blijven produceren, behouden ze hun basale voedselsoevereiniteit/-zekerheid. Tegelijkertijd domineert een bedrijfsmatig 'investeringsdiscours' een narratief van landroof, gelet op de kwetsbare levensomstandigheden van deze afgelegen gemeenschappen. De eisen zijn meer gericht op pacht en arbeid dan op het terugvorderen van land, en door individuele verschillen in de alledaagse politiek van landarbeiders verandert er niet noodzakelijkerwijs iets aan de structuur van de sociale verhoudingen die gepaard gaan met kapitalistische landbouw. De belangrijkste verbindende schakel in het dwarsverband tussen land en arbeid en landroof is het voedselvraagstuk. Dit is nauw verbonden met het wereldwijde narratief van voedselsoevereiniteit. In Ghana betekent dit een soort lokale zelfvoorziening van voedsel. Daarbij geven bijna alle getroffen groepen de voorkeur aan voedselzekerheid die vooral berust op hun eigen productie en voldoende beschikbaarheid van hun producten in plaats van op voedselaankopen. Dit bevestigt opnieuw het belang van toegang tot land voor boeren en



landarbeiders, zelfs als landtransacties werkgelegenheid scheppen en inkomsten genereren. Niettemin is er op verschillende punten sprake van uiteenlopende en tegenstrijdige belangen op grond van sociale klasse, identiteit en generatieverschillen.

Tot slot blijkt uit het onderzoek dat de problemen van boerenbedrijven en agrarische loonarbeid op het platteland niet losstaan van elkaar. Landarbeiders stellen nog steeds specifieke kwesties aan de orde die helaas noch in reguliere regelingen ter bevordering van 'verantwoorde' investeringen in landbouwgrond worden aangepakt, noch door radicale anti-landroof activisten. Onder deze laatste groep valt de beweging voor voedselsoevereiniteit die campagne voert tegen de dreiging van onteigening van land. Enerzijds zijn er vanuit beleidsperspectief veel hiaten in de wetgeving op het gebied van governance van loonarbeid in de landbouw. In Ghana zijn er geen goede arbeidsinstanties ter bescherming van landarbeiders, en de weinige bestaande instanties handhaven de status quo of treden zelfs repressief op. Investeerders blijven daarom opereren in een laissez-faire ondernemingsklimaat. Ze geven daarbij prioriteit aan hun economische levensvatbaarheid, wat vaak ten koste gaat van gemarginaliseerde groepen. Het is van essentieel belang dat er landbouwspecifieke wetgeving komt voor arbeidskwesties op zowel grote als kleine landbouwbedrijven. Voor een effectieve regelgeving moeten de rechten van werknemers in de landbouw worden gewaarborgd. Tegelijkertijd moeten de wettelijke bepalingen voor vakbondsvorming worden ondersteund door beleid en programma's die de competenties van deze moeilijk te organiseren tijdelijke arbeidskrachten vergroten.

Om grootschalige investeringen te kunnen rechtvaardigen, moet de 'waarom'-vraag vanuit het perspectief van landeigenaren en landarbeiders worden gesteld. Boeren hebben te maken met seizoensgebonden armoede, en uit wanhoop hebben ze weinig keus met betrekking tot de overdracht van land. Ook kunnen ze onvoldoende tegenstand bieden aan kapitalistische grootschalige boerenbedrijven. Er moet iets worden gedaan aan het discriminerende beleid in de landbouwsector, waardoor sommige

### *Political Dynamics of Global Land Grabs*

kleinschalige boeren weinig te kiezen hebben. Een effectieve investerings- en arbeidsregelgeving moet ook een weerspiegeling vormen van de context waarbinnen deze investeringen naar verwachting plaatsvinden. Deze context wordt gekenmerkt door werkloosheid, te weinig werkgelegenheid, ongelijkheid tussen stad en platteland, de uitdagingen van kleinschalige landbouw, kwetsbare bestaansmogelijkheden en machtsverhoudingen. Om het potentieel van voedselsoevereiniteit als tegenhanger van het neoliberalisme en als een mogelijk democratisch alternatief voor werkende mensen met gedifferentieerde en soms tegenstrijdige sociaaleconomische belangen te kunnen realiseren, is het aan de andere kant noodzakelijk om de verschillende problemen van de mensen die op het platteland in de landbouw werken op de agenda te zetten en beter aan te pakken dan nu het geval is.





# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The first wave of research on land grabs focused on its process, and advanced towards the consensus on the multiplicity and a convergence of issues — the global increasing demand for food, energy and commodities, globalized transport and communication technologies, speculation, internal crises within capitalism — all of which are crucial for the current neoliberal paradigm (Borras, et al, 2011; Hall, 2010; McMichael, 2012; Visser, 2015). As a point of departure, this study adopts Borras & Franco's, (2012, p. 1725) definition of 'land grabs', used interchangeably with land deals, and large-scale land investments as 'the capturing of control of relatively vast tracts of land and other natural resources through a variety of mechanisms and forms, carried out through extra-economic coercion that involves large-scale capital, which often shifts resource use orientation into extraction, for international and domestic purposes', and that which transforms the social relations of reproduction for different groups of people.

Following the general descriptions that country contexts, marked by relative land abundance and weak governance become fertile grounds for land deals, it is not surprising that Africa remains the most targeted region for large-scale land acquisitions. By some estimates, about seventy per cent of the land transacted in recent land deals occurred in Africa. It has been widely acknowledged that land deals in Africa are rooted in the long history of colonial legacy, postcolonial modernization policies, and in contemporary times, the emergence of a neoliberal hegemony upon which agricultural development has been premised on free trade and capital mobility (Amanor, 1999). In Ghana, for instance, contemporary land deals are characterized by both new land acquisitions and relatively old state-led large-scale farms that have, over the years, come under the control of the private sector. The rise in investor rush for rural agricultural lands has

spurred debates about their impacts on rural livelihoods. Some argue that land deals, when well governed can have productive uses through increased food production and employment avenues in farm and off-farm sectors (Deininger, et al., 2011). However, on the other side of the debate, Li, (2011) has argued that such prospects are unlikely because productive land uses associated with large-scale land acquisitions do not occur without exclusionary processes even when land is transferred to the most 'productive' users.

The central question remains who wins and who loses such inequitable processes and what are the mechanisms? Many studies that have researched the implications of land grabs on land and property relations have shown that the impacts are differentiated and context-specific. When land deals transform land ownership and access, they do not only create gaps between legality and legitimacy of existing, modified and new land governance institutions (a common source of land conflicts and contestations), but also expose different local groups and working classes to risks of dispossession from land and its resources such as water, soil nutrients, seeds etc. (Bruna, 2019; Levien, 2017; Moyo, 2011b). Land grab literature provides numerous empirical accounts of forced evictions in Mali, Sudan, Ghana, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Argentina and Colombia (Borras, et al, 2012; Nyantakyi-frimpong & Kerr, 2016; Peelay, 2014); in the case of Bangladesh, where there has been a 'slow-motion loss of entitlements, social exclusion and alienation from the rights and identities' which had been fought for through tensed state-society relations (Feldman & Geisler, 2012, p. 974); and in Ghana where patron-client relations between traditional authorities and certain social groups influence how impacts are differentiated (Boamah, 2014a).

In this burgeoning land grab literature, the labour question appears to have been peripheral to property relations. Some exceptions include the studies by Hall, et al (2017); Li, (2011) and Oya, (2013). Evidence of the implications of land deals for wage labour on plantations as well as the labour on small-scale farms necessary for social reproduction are often presented in transient and 'snapshot' studies. In general, the literature is rather scanty but necessary to get a far-reaching understanding of the complexities of land deals deal and their governance. The labour question in relation to land, raises particular questions about displacement, dispossession, terms of incorporation, and rural politics. In contexts of strong civil society organizations, especially social movements and development

NGOs, campaigns to regulate in order to mitigate adverse impacts and maximize opportunities, or to stop and rollback land deals have not only gained wide popularity but also impacted the outcomes of various land deals (Margulis, et al, 2013). Nonetheless, recent studies have shown that it is not always the case that peasants oppose land grabs. As the impacts are differentiated for social groups and classes, so are the political reactions from below (Hall et al., 2015). There have been accounts of adaptation and co-existence in post-soviet Russia (Mamonova, 2015), resistance and struggles for incorporation in Africa (Larder, 2015; Sulle, 2016), and the overt resistance from workers, dispossessed farmers and indigenous communities in many parts of Southern America (Massicotte, 2010; Welch & Sauer, 2015). Certainly, the historical, political, economic and social contexts within which land grabs take place are vital to shaping the political reactions from below.

This study, on the rural impacts of land grabs is grounded on four main building blocks: i) the class-generational dynamics of land dispossession; ii) labour relations for production and social reproduction, iii) local political reactions around dispossession and exploitation; and iv) a critique of land grab-labour governance within both mainstream regulatory approaches and agrarian movements' food sovereignty discourses. The study site is situated in the Volta (Oti) region of Ghana where over 3000ha of family lands have been acquired by foreign investors for an oil palm plantation. It is grounded in critical agrarian political economy perspectives, informed by analytical concepts including social class differentiation, gender and social reproduction, sustainable livelihoods and 'everyday politics'. The research is premised on a qualitative predominant mixed method that builds on a historical, relational and interactive approach (Schiavoni, 2016). The study contributes to bridging key empirical gaps within and between knowledge and praxis relating to the impacts of the global land rush, and rural wage labour relations in Africa.

## 1.2 Large-Scale Agriculture as the Development Pathway for Africa?

Large-scale land acquisitions have historical antecedents in the colonial period where the promotion of export agriculture, and the institution of indirect rule and tax systems, transformed property rights, labour relations and the global food system (Amanor, 1999; Tsikata & Yaro, 2013). For instance, during the 1930s, many colonial administrations experimented

with the modern food system i.e. capital controlled farming and agricultural production methods. Following the expansion of industry into agriculture, the pace of modernization and technology has been maintained, intensified and carried out across different geopolitical contexts via international political-economic processes: the post-second World War Marshall Plan for Europe, export-oriented colonial policies, and development aid conditions that have since influenced post-colonial policies (Amanor, 1999; McMichael, 1997). This was evident in the agricultural research paradigms of the World Bank in the 1960s, and the unification of international agricultural centres; purported to promote agricultural productivity through experiments with modern seeds, technology diffusion and large-scale industrial approaches.

Although several newly independent African governments in the 1960s were influenced by socialist ideological standpoint and functioned in 'a compromise between technocratic 'developmentalism' and rural Socialism in their socio-spatial equity and poverty alleviation strategies' (Oya, 2006a, p. 203), their policies also reflected the modernization ideologies of the international development paradigm (Huddleston & Tonts, 2007). A key policy direction during this period was the promotion of import substitution industries purported to be dependent on raw materials from the national agricultural supplies. In Ghana and Tanzania, for example, it led to the establishment of state-controlled and parastatal plantations, and agro-processing industries, which operated alongside tenant farmer arrangements and out-grower schemes to underpin agricultural development. There were, however, some exceptions like Cote d'Ivoire, where upon independence, governments maintained strong commitments to private enterprises and relied on the French government for technical assistance (Due, 1969).

Nonetheless, towards the end of the 1960's and in the early 1970s when the global economic crises and increased debts affected many economies, the independent African governments also experienced social and political unrests associated with the not-so-successful interventionist policies. For example, between 1966 and 1981, Ghana was politically unstable and had witnessed several coups d'état. Several policies were introduced by different governments to revamp the agricultural sector, yet many tended to be reactive and failed to address systemic issues in the sector. In effect, from the 1970s, many states began to shift focus to the private sector and market-oriented programmes with agriculture being greatly impacted. State



policies during that period mostly promoted various forms of preferential support for large-scale schemes thereby stifling the growth of many small-scale farms (Smalley, 2013). From the early 1980's, at the height of liberalization ideologies and low success rate of state interventions, various forms of business partnerships were formed with the (international) private sector for the management of large-scale schemes that survived nationalization. This transformation advanced at a time when international debates, foreign policies and development assistance focused on, and attempted to tackle the pertaining issues of poverty and economic stagnation across Africa and in other developing regions such as Southern America (Heidhues & Obare, 2011).

The 'accelerated development' Berg report (World Bank, 1981) served as the most comprehensive World Bank thinking on the causes of poverty in Sub Saharan Africa, and the alternative development strategies that the Bank would be willing to support (Daniel, 1983). The report, highlighted the incessant balance of payment deficits, attributing it to the underdevelopment of the agricultural export sector and the over-extension of the public sector, mainly regarding administrative controls (Amanor, 1999). Whilst the report acknowledged the role of external factors, it focused excessively on state-created distortions and domestic policies, thus policy recommendations were oriented towards devaluation, improved price incentives for agricultural exports, low protection for industry, and a decrease in the use of direct controls (John Sender & Smith, 1985). This line of analysis generated debates on the role of state, and prospects of agricultural development in Africa. The underlying assumption was that liberalized agriculture could better enhance access to export markets, capital, modern technology, research and innovation, and improve land productivity than when under state control (Toulmin, & Gueye, 2003).

However, a key element that ran through most critiques was a defence of the potential of state policies to address redistributive development better than the alternatives suggested by the World Bank. Others also highlighted the negative implications of food imports for food self-sufficiency (see Daniel, 1983; Colclough, 1983:28). Sender & Smith, (1986) while pointing out the flaws of these major critiques also argued that getting the prices right does not guarantee increased agricultural outputs. Through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and development conditionality in the 1980s, many states promoted the divestiture of public and parastatal agricultural programmes, joint ventures, and contract farming

schemes. This process often resulted in the transformation of traditional agrarian systems to favour large and medium-scale transnational corporations (Amanor, 1999; Huddleston & Tonts, 2007). Other examples include Cameroonaise de la Banane (OCB) plantation sold to French-owned Plantations de Haut Penja (PHP) in the late 1980s (Fonjong et al, 2016). By the 1990s, when many of the initiatives that came out of the SAPs had been generally unsuccessful, the policy environment shifted from rolling back the state to bringing the state back in, but this time to facilitate markets and the private sector. As noted by Oya, (2011) this policy phase expanded the space for privatization and deregulation. The quasi-privatization of the Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation (GOPDC) in 1995 is another case in point.

From the 1970s to date, (neo) liberal policies have underpinned much of the agricultural development in Africa though manifested in different ways and sometimes even masked under neo-populism in some small-holder policies (see World Bank, 2008). The evolution of policy changes in agricultural development are often seen as relatively distinct policy phases with some continuities (Oya, 2006), yet they all fall into one historical pattern which is concerned with the extension of the modern agricultural food system and agribusiness (Amanor, 1999, p. 32). In the aftermath of the 2008 world food crises, transnational corporations, and agribusinesses have re-entered development policy, and 'practice' through the promotion of capital investment in agriculture under the rhetoric of efficiency, productivity and employment. Many of these developments have also been targeted at modernization of the traditionally predominant small holding systems via their integration into the markets of large-scale schemes and/or the establishment of plantations, and the enabling of an environment for private investments into industrial scale agriculture production (Amanor, 2010).

Today, the food system is challenged with environmental, political and socioeconomic stressors (Pereira & Ruysenaar, 2012). Africa has always been the hardest hit by food crises, food insecurity and poverty. About eighty percent of food grown in Africa is by small-scale family farmers, yet seventy per cent of rural farming households in Africa live below poverty lines. This makes sustainable access to land resources crucial for the development of the continent's one billion plus population (GRAIN, 2014). Whilst agriculture-led growth has had a transformative impact on poverty reduction in Asian countries, neoliberal market-oriented strategies have

not yet worked effectively in Africa (Diao, et al 2010). Prospects for, and impediments to capitalist development in the countryside continues to be an issue that requires critical research and policy attention.

### 1.3 The Land and Labour Questions in the Land Grab Debate

The steady increase in transnational investor interest in agricultural land in developing countries has prompted large-scale commercial land deals in Africa. Yet, not only has the notion of abundance been challenged, the developmental impacts of land deals continue to be a subject of ongoing debates. The debates are often divided between two broad ideological perspectives. Researchers from the tradition of Neoclassical/New Institutional Economic (NIE) perspectives including International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, incline toward the developmental potentials of land deals. Underpinning this viewpoint is that if there are properly functioning institutions, markets can be well governed to facilitate development (Harriss, et al, 2003; North, 1993). Rural development thus occurs when institutions such as market-led land reforms, private property rights, and labour regulations enable (self-interest seeking/ profit maximising) individuals/farmers to become efficient given their available resources (Gyasi, 1994; Lipton, 2006; North, 1993; Popkin, 1979). Adherents recognize that investors are attracted to countries with a relative land and labour abundance and weak governance. This is the reason they push for consultative and transparent land institutions that can help minimize the evictions and dispossession, and could lead to win-win outcomes. Deininger, et al (2011 p. xv) have argued that ‘when done right, larger-scale farming systems can also have a place as one of many tools to promote sustainable agricultural and rural development, and can directly support agricultural productivity. One of the often-highlighted ways through which land grabs can be of development potential is through employment opportunities for rural economic development. As argued by Popkin, (1979), peasants attraction to large-scale investments is a key element of their adaptive efficiency or evidence of how they are able to respond to new opportunities. Here, NIE perspectives pay much attention to regulatory frameworks that promote or inhibit the participation of those affected by land grabs. Emphasis is therefore placed on the effectiveness of these institutions, and peasants’ access to information about their rights.

Institutions are however premised on unequal power relations and therefore perceive this new wave of investments from its adverse and

differentiated effects on livelihoods and natural environment of the rural working poor. Through capital accumulation, land deals produce and deepen the processes of social differentiation in agrarian societies—whereby the social relations of (re)production benefit some while others lose out (Akram-Lodhi, 2007; McMichael, 2014). Harvey’s (2003) theory of accumulation by dispossession, which builds on Marx’s primitive accumulation theory, explains how the advancement of neoliberal capitalist strategies since the 1970s<sup>1</sup> has become a means by which power and wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few (capitalists/entrepreneurs) through processes whereby the public is repeatedly deprived of their assets in spaces where capitalist circuits are reproduced. This process of accumulation by dispossession is embedded mainly in neoliberal capitalist strategies of privatization and financialization but is also significantly facilitated by state redistribution projects and policies. From this perspective, land deals expose the rural working poor and peasants, in general, to being vulnerable to marginalization and dispossession which eventually leads to deprivation and poverty. As argued by McMichael, (2008 p 213), land deals and corporate food systems are not just about capital accumulation and dispossession of peasants. Equally crucial is the fact that it has a tendency of ruling out the place for peasants, closing doors to alternatives and removing peasants and their systems of production from history.

Compared to studies conducted on the direct land implications of land deals, empirical evidence pertaining to what happens on the ground when investors need land but not labour, or need both land and labour, has been rather limited (Li, 2011). In the past two to three years, some studies have begun to track employment implications of land deals with an emphasis on job generation, conditions of work, and income. Some of the studies pertaining to the African context have shown that the absorption of rural labour is not always assured, especially when there are no matching skills, and poor labour conditions and farming models are highly mechanized (Dubb, 2016; Nyantakyi-Frimpong & Bezner Kerr, 2017). In cases where labour-intensive production models are implemented, especially in the horticulture sector, it is often accompanied by a process of ‘feminization’ of labour — where women’s employment is tied to specific tasks as they are considered as having ‘nimble fingers’, being less conflictual and more willing than men to accept lower wages (Kay, 2015). In the recent study conducted in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia by Hall, et al, (2017), they showed that there are instances when land deals have created more jobs

but with highly uneven distribution of wages. Permanent and highly skilled outsiders usually get higher wages than their counterparts who are doing manual jobs. Some findings also suggest that in some instances, wages and working conditions for farm work have been low and have not improved, yet farmworkers persisted. Assurance of regular wage income appear attractive to peasants with unstable cash returns from farming (German, et al 2013).

When land deals transform land ownership and use, the agrarian question of labour becomes inevitable. Land deals modify labour regimes in the rural agrarian communities when they displace populations or pre-existing landless people seek livelihood opportunities, and on the other hand, investors require hired labour. With a convergence of job seekers and offers available, wage labour becomes the new source of income. Here, the questions of ‘who does what’ and ‘what do they do with each other’ provides a ‘relational’ dimension to unpacking the complexities of land deals. Yet we do not know much about how the dynamics play out in different contexts. As such, even in the light of recent studies, what, and how much we know about the land deal-labour-livelihoods is still partial. The scale and scope of current studies are limited to a few case studies and countries. The study conducted by Hall et al (2017), which stands out as a major source of insight into the emerging patterns and trends of the labour implications of different models of land deals, raises new and important questions relating to gender and class dynamics of impacts, and the ways in which affected people navigate the opportunities and risks associated with it.

What opportunities do land deals offer to farmworkers whose land access and control are not guaranteed by tradition? For many, their access to farm work opportunities could be a coping mechanism and survival strategy against unfavourable policies and traditions (see Byres 2003; Oya, 2010). Regarding women who do not have guaranteed cash returns from their family farms, how do their incorporation as farmworkers address their needs for household reproduction? Similarly, what are the implications of seasonal and casual employment for the near landless, migrants and the youth? When land deals employ a significant amount of unskilled and semi-unskilled labour — although often not the case, it could have the potential of addressing their cash needs, at least in the short to medium term. Nonetheless, land deals could also have negative trade-offs for long-term sustenance of livelihoods of farmworkers- in terms health, social

relations and the deepening of structural inequality. These impacts would be socially differentiated across the different classes and groups of the farmworkers: landless, migrants<sup>2</sup>, divorced/separated/single women with or without dependents; ethnic minorities, permanent and casual workers, skilled, semi-skilled, less land, landless, proletariats, those engaged in other non-farm economic ventures etc. The measure of impacts may also depend on their perceptions of the work they do, aspects viewed as opportunities and at the same time as threats (Behrman, Meinzen-Dick, & Quisumbing, 2012) which could be shaped not only by working conditions but also by their class struggles and the effects (how it alienates or empowers them), social backgrounds, past experiences, present situation, alternatives available and their own expectations.

The above require empirical investigations into the land-labour implications of land deals. However, three major reasons account for the gaps in research. First, because the land grab phenomenon is primarily associated with enclosure, related studies have often approached it from theoretical and analytical handles that speak particularly to the questions of land and capital accumulation, dispossession and displacement (see Hall, 2013; Levien, 2011; McMichael, 2012). Inherently, these theories do well to address how land deals shape access to and control over land resources but do not primarily capture the labour question. Second, and closely linked to the above, the term 'land grab' has always had strong political connotations. As Larder (2015 pg.840) has rightly noted, land grabbing has emerged as an effective framing opportunity for social movements, human rights groups and other civil society organizations to raise 'awareness around the potential negative impacts of increased flows of finance capital into land' — that land grabs dispossess family farmers or peasants from land, their primary means of livelihood. By so doing, the research agenda both theoretical and empirical, has been centred around the land question, often leaving the labour question to its margins. Third, limited access to information, methodological and other practical challenges have also influenced the scope of studies on labour. The time distribution of employment costs and benefits is often uneven, different types of impacts are experienced at different times of project lifespans, transformation in land access and use is the most visible in the short term, labour-related impacts may only materialize at later stages, unreliability and elusiveness of data on income, and the full implementation of most of the widely publicised land deals occurred at later periods making it methodologically

problematic to assess impacts (Cotula et al., 2014; Carlos Oya, 2013b). Besides, many companies do grant researchers full access to plantation data or to observe wage labour conditions.

Under-exploration of how and why the labour question relates to land has implications for how we interpret, suggest alternatives to, and politically intervene in the current era of a global land rush. Not fully understanding the impacts on labour means that the debates around land grabs may continue to be set between the two broad narratives that are inherently premised on particular ideological groundings. While such debates could be theoretically stimulating, they may not be able to provide the needed inputs for political interventions if not empirically grounded. Indeed, there is growing evidence that suggests land deals are not transformative development projects. Yet, there are dynamics in the short, medium and long-term livelihood implications for the different rural groups in structurally unequal agrarian societies. With such heterogeneity and differentiation, neither can we claim a simplistic ‘win-win’ scenario between investors and farm workers as the World Bank<sup>3</sup> puts it (World Bank, 2011), nor interpret deals as totally labour-displacing projects without thorough and stylized empirical studies.

Peasants’ politics within this land-labour nexus can be affected by the degree of their insertion into global discourses but even more significantly at domestic level, are the historical, economic and social specificities that shape political reactions from below. In Ghana, through the actions (e.g. market-led land policies) and inactions (e.g. poor implementation of labour regulations) of the state, an enabling environment is created for foreign and private investments in agribusinesses in the name of efficiency, productivity and employment (Yaro, 2012). These ideas also often resonate with the legitimating imperatives of traditional land institutions. In addition, cash-strapped rural folks who maintain both an economic and cultural attachment to land are often caught in a complex web of trade-offs. Under these contexts, in addition to the fact that there is not a strong base of rural social movements, land grabs are often received as a continuum between acquiescence and outright resistance.

#### 1.4 Research Questions and Significance

Following a case study of a 3750ha land transaction between the Sithe Global Sustainable Oils Ghana (SGSOG) and families of the Ntrubo Clan in Ghana, the central research question of the research is to examine

*How and why corporate large-scale farmland deals impact land access and control, and labour relations of production and social reproduction; what are the implications of this for rural politics and governance?*

Specific research questions guiding the study are:

- a. What is the character of dispossession, and how has the land grab reconfigured access, entitlements and control over land resources for different social groups, landed and labouring classes?
- b. What is the extent of incorporation into land grabs and the livelihood implications of the dynamics in the social relations of production?
- c. How have the affected communities and social groups perceived and reacted towards the land acquisitions, and particularly how do the claims and demands against land dispossession relate to that of labour exploitation?
- d. How and why should land grab governance effectively address the everyday struggles of the differentiated social groups and working classes, including farmworkers? What is the role of the state and civil society?

The research offers a significant contribution to knowledge and policy on land and rural labour in Africa. It contributes to the land grab literature in a very relevant way, mainly by filling relevant empirical gaps. The findings from the study would be useful for policy-making and practice especially in Ghana even as it considers different and competing interests within the recent trend of large land acquisitions. The land-labour nexus remains an important issue for today's developing countries where countries are characterized by increasing pressures on land, high rates of rising joblessness and underemployment.

Arguably, although 'employment benefit' narrative remains the most compelling justification for large-scale land investments, many of these claims have not been sufficiently supported with data on rural labour



dynamics. Data on rural agrarian systems in West Africa in relation to labour and class formation is relatively scanty and ‘outdated’. In a literature search on rural labour in West Africa/Ghana, I found out that many of the relevant and thorough studies were published between 1970 and 1990. Indeed, they provide evidence of substantive and complex labour relations in the countryside, but the findings also provoke the need for fresh views on the ongoing changes in rural agrarian societies that inserted into capitalist markets. Knowing the dynamics of rural labour experiences will contribute to knowledge production on rural labour markets and agrarian change in Ghana.

The study sheds lighter and contributes to ongoing research that engages with the complexities surrounding the persistence of the global land rush and its impacts. The emphasis on rural labour experiences in relation to access to land, the character of accumulation and of dispossession and rural politics contribute to knowledge and poverty targeted policy-making around recent global trends of large-scale transnational agricultural investments in developing countries and also in the light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which call for reduced inequalities, and project the role of decent work in economic growth. Proponents of large-scale land investments claim that the global powers behind pro-poor policies and the SDGs show optimism in the developmental potentials of land deals for rural people. This research provides rich inputs from empirical evidence to critically test such claims.

### 1.5 Analytical Framework: An Agrarian Political Economy Approach

The global land rush phenomenon is embedded in long-standing debates and fundamental questions in the agrarian political economy regarding the politics of resource distribution. To unpack the prospects for and impediments to capitalist agriculture in the countryside, Bernstein, (2010) suggests asking questions about who owns what, who does what, who gets what and what do they do with what? In the analysis of the land-labour implications of land deals, the dissertation takes a rather eclectic approach that is broadly along agrarian political economy lines, and anchored on both Marxist tradition and the non-Marxist radical agrarian populist tradition around ‘moral economy’ in the sense framed by James Scott. I also engage in feminist debates on social reproduction and interweave sustainable rural livelihoods perspectives in this research. The study engages with

key concepts including the ‘agrarian question’, accumulation and class differentiation as employed in the Marxist agrarian political economy framework to understand the social relations of production associated with land deals and to explain the dynamics of farmworkers’ interests (politics and struggles) that arise out of unequal power relations between capital and labour and within the different classes of labour — especially women, migrants and ethnic minorities. This is particularly useful for unpacking the historical and structural implications of land deals and more broadly, agrarian change in Ghana. Given that there are diverse determinations beyond class that also shape capital-labour relations, this is where sustainable livelihood perspectives can offer a relevant conceptual handle. Whilst recognizing the utility of the expanded dimensions of a sustainable livelihoods approach, that which Scoones (2015), terms ‘the political economy of livelihoods’, it will be employed mainly in the analysis of short to medium-term implications of land deals on social groups especially women, ethnic minorities, migrants etc. and how the diversity of livelihoods strategies are shaped by access to and control over resources and institutions. Finally, as the study seeks to examine the political reactions around land deals from those affected, conception of ‘everyday politics’ emerging from moral economy perspectives (Kerkvliet, 2009; Scott, 1986) will be adapted to analyse the agency of rural people in dealing with impacts. Certainly, this also intersects with livelihoods, class relations and politics. I am conscious that all three approaches will have their distinct take on each of the clusters of issues around capital accumulation, social differentiation, political reactions from below, and so on. Cognisant of the potential tensions between these approaches, I consciously navigated them here.

### 1.5.1 Rural Social Class Differentiation

In order to comprehend the dynamics of change and impacts of land deals, an agrarian political economy framework serves a useful analytical utility. It focuses on the social relations of, and the power dynamics of re (production), where land, capital and labour are central to rural development (Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010). In many rural areas in Ghana, farming plays a key role in the livelihoods thus making land and labour relations crucial for development. Historically, the African agricultural system has been characterized by family farms, small scale or the peasant mode of production. Farming has been built on a resource base — land, seeds, livestock,

fisheries, water, family labour, social networks and local knowledge and skills (Otsuki, 2014) that were fundamentally uncommodified, and oriented towards survival and subsistence (Toulmin, & Gueye, 2003). However, over the years, this mode of production has been affected by the wider political economy which is reflected in the ways in rural people's access to land have been shaped by their integration into unfavourable state-society and market relations. Rural people's land access, use and benefits have been restructured, generally. Peasants produce cheap food and those whose land access has been constrained also sell their labour cheaply in order to survive. In as much as the 'peasantry' persists, it has also been evolving as a group that is differentiated in their relations to land, capital and labour. The forms of social differentiation, how and why they occur are necessary to understanding rural development dynamics in agrarian societies. Within an agrarian political economy framework, social differentiation is central in the analysis of rural development. Marxists and Chayanovian strands of agrarian political economy provide different entry points into the analysis of peasant differentiation as reflected in the Lenin-Chayanov debate.

For Marxists, the main driving force for differentiation has been the penetration of capital into peasant societies. Marx (1876) theorized on the trajectory of capitalist agriculture starting from 'primitive accumulation' which is the historical process of forceful separation of peasants from the means of production that leads to the emergence, appropriation and dispossession which creates and differentiates between the two classes: a class that controls land and labour, and a class of proletariats who are separated from their means of production and work for capital as wage labour to obtain its means of subsistence. Byres interpreted the agrarian question as that of a continued existence of obstacles to unleashing accumulation in the countryside and capitalist industrialization. Following Byres, and after years of researching this puzzle, Bernstein posits that the classic agrarian question was an 'agrarian question of capital' centred around three problematics: accumulation, production and politics. Capitalism thus blocks the possibility of achieving an egalitarian distribution of the material conditions of life, thereby placing rural agrarian societies into differentiated class relations. The development of agriculture in capitalist societies raises an 'agrarian question' that ought to be resolved (Kautsky, 1899). That is a question of 'whether, and how, capital is seizing hold of

agriculture, revolutionising it, making old forms of production and property untenable and creating the necessity for new ones’.

Lenin’s engagement with the agrarian question was shown in his empirical study of the development of capitalism in the village economy in the context of Tsarist Russia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lenin, 1964). Following the dynamics of commodity relations — property, income and labour relations, he postulated that the peasantry becomes differentiated into rich, poor and middle peasants. Rich peasants or rural capitalists were the small minority of owners of commercial-scale farms that were usually linked to industry. The necessary condition for this was large sizes of land and wage labour. Poor peasants on the other hand, were rural proletariats, a class of landless or near landless peasants who were compelled to depend on wage work other than land as their primary means of subsistence. They struggle to reproduce themselves as capital or from labour on their own farms thus placing them in a ‘simple reproduction squeeze’ (Bernstein 2010). The middle peasants had just enough land for their subsistence, and within its social relations, it fluctuated between the rich and poor peasant classes. They could ‘reproduce themselves as capital on the same scale of production and from labour on the same scale of consumption’ (Bernstein, 2010, p. 104) but they did so precariously with rich farmer aspirations but also the fear of plunging into the poor farmer class. This often times reinforced the extremes; many incline towards the top but just a few succeed (Lenin, 1964, p. 134). For Lenin, this represented a structural and an economic problem, which, eventually leads to the permanent dissolution of the middle peasantry, and the creation of a polarised rural economy — one consisting of capitalist farmers and another, the wage labourers/proletariats. However, because this process is a necessary stage for the transition to capitalism, for those who become differentiated out, i.e. rural labourers who are ‘double free’ i.e. free of property, and free to sell their labour power, could also migrate to fuel industrialization through their labour supply. As such, although migration was perceived to be a major cause of the breakdown of the peasantry, the bonding nature (to land) of feudal relations at the time, was conceived to be an impediment to the development of capitalism.

The analysis of Marxist variants of the agrarian political economy continue to be centred on the nature of social differentiation, its accompanying labour relations, and future of the peasantry. The expansion of commodity relations in rural agrarian systems, and the patterns of capitalists

control over land and labour resources as influenced by the institution of private property right regimes, and land markets, and the implications of the restructuring of labour processes etc. take precedence in their analysis of rural development. Marxist traditions assess rural development by employing a materialist interpretation of historical development and a dialectical view of social transformation. Thus, the social structures of class relations where people find themselves are the key determinant for their development. These social structures usually work against the interests of the marginalized classes thereby making them victims. In rural development, dominant classes cause the impoverishment and exploitation of marginalized classes who become separated from means of their (re)production. It is the transition from a class in itself to class for itself — when they become conscious of their marginalized positions and have the autonomy and capacity to understand it, that strengthens their agency to politically mobilize to change their situation.

In contrast with Marxist interpretations, for agrarian political economists influenced by Chayanov, social differentiation is largely cyclical and demographic. Historically, this has been premised on Chayanov's empirical studies of the Russian peasant economy in the 1920s. He postulated that farmers in the countryside were embedded in family economies where wage labour is absent and they engaged in simple reproduction making use of available household labour (Thorner, 1966). In contrast with Lenin, Chayanov argued that differentiation within the peasantry was not driven primarily by social-historical processes of class formation (of capitalist and proletariats), but rather traced it to natural historical processes of demographic change that occurred with family growth, household characteristics, kinship ties, and cyclical mobility within and across generations (Shanin, 1974; Thorner, 1966; Wolf, 2001)<sup>4</sup>. Although towards the end of Chayanov's writing, he engaged with class differentiation of the peasants, noting that Russians peasants at the time generally fell within the 'middle farmers' rank, he maintained that hired labour and capitalist penetration was very minimal due to the farmers ability to survive capitalism by means of drudgery and self-exploitation' (Thorner, 1966). Emerging from the Chayanovian perspectives, most moral economists continue to argue for the persistence of the peasantry and family labour, but as shown in the previous section, not as that of a fixed characterization, but as production units that are constantly evolving through dynamic processes of change (Edelman, 2005; Shanin, 1973; van der Ploeg, 2010). Most scholars with

some inclinations towards a Chayanovian interpretation of agrarian change and moral economy of the peasantry (Scott 1976) recognize class differentiation of the peasantry. However, their take on class is seen through a populist perspective, a binary lens of ‘them versus us’. This implies that the peasantry in itself should be considered as a class that has social structures of relations (usually one that is subordinated) with non-peasant elites/ruling classes; landlords; capitalists; and the state. Ascriptions of the peasantry as a single class is usually linked to their descriptions related to their near subsistent mode units of production, utilization of family labour, dependence on nature/agroecology, their persistence as well as the general ‘peasant condition’ of socio-economic vulnerability which can be linked to natural causes, household demographic changes, capitalist subordination and the policies of ruling classes and states (Desmarais, 2008; McMichael, 2015; Shanin, 1974; van der Ploeg, 2014). Moral economy perspectives, like Marxists interpretations of rural development, also follow the logic of differentiation and exploitation, but they tend to perceive this from a binary interpretation of class, whereby the policies and activities emanating from ruling elite classes threatens the subsistence of peasants (a single marginalized class) or that which unsustainably transforms their mode of (re)production (Shanin, 1974).

Within and between these broad theoretical strands, the conceptualization of social class differentiation is still contested. Indeed, there are also several conjunctures and nuances that may not fall within a particular tradition as they may associate with processes that relate to both Marxist and Chayanovian perspectives or even transcend them. For instance, Becker, (1989) argued that although structural antagonism between capital and labour is real, it is an abstraction due to the fact that its manifestation in struggle is premised on many other factors including age, sex, etc. thereby making capitalist class structure so complex that not all individual wage workers are uniformly threatened by the logic of capital and to the same extent. Similarly, Berry, (1984) critiqued the appropriateness of Marxist approaches to the African peasantry from its historical generality and inability to fully analyse the shifting realities of agrarian change in Africa. O’Laughlin (2016) in her tribute to Bernstein’s work on the agrarian question in Africa, has noted that in spite of the inherent challenges within Marxist approaches, it has offered an important alternative to the almost hegemonic neo-liberal explanations that limited the analysis of rural poverty and development to market relations. Besides, it has also expanded an

open and creative research on class dynamics in Africa as evidenced in the various studies on land reforms in Southern Africa (Moyo, 2011a); class and gender dimensions of hunger in Africa (Tsikata, 2003; A Whitehead, 1990); commodification and changes peasant modes of production in West Africa (Amanor, 1999; 2012); and colonial questions surrounding land re-distribution and the forced eviction of white settler farmers in Zimbabwe (Bernstein, 2002; Moyo 2003) among many others. Beyond the African question, it is worth noting that both Marxists and Chayanovian perspectives of rural class differentiation have influenced debates of rural development in critical agrarian scholarship and policy, e.g. small versus large-scale agriculture, of industrial versus non-industrial agriculture, whether or not the peasantry has/will disappear etc. (Bernstein, 2010; Lenin, 1982; Lipton, 2006; Shanin, 1973; Thorner, 1966). While these debates have waxed and waned in the past, they have been revived partly as a result of the global resource rush, as well as the contentious politics waged by agrarian movements, notably *La Via Campesina* and the food sovereignty movement.

Following colonial penetration in the late nineteenth century and commercial expansion in Ghana and Africa in general, capitalist development advanced steadily through the introduction of a trade economy, labour reserves and concessionary companies. These have transformed agricultural land use and production methods from colonial times through independence and to the contemporary period where there has been a renewed interest in land and commercial agriculture (Amin, 1972; Moyo, 2003). From these historical processes, the current wave of land rush and its associated land concentration and large-scale production systems continue to shape and change the social relations of production in rural agrarian societies. Borrás and Franco (2010) provide a typology of four (4) possible directions in land use changes associated with land deals: food to food; food to biofuels; food to non-food; and non-food to biofuels. Whilst the first two represent a displacement of food production by commodified food/biofuel production, the latter two present an intensification of land use from the forest, marginal or so-called idle lands for food and biofuel production (Hall, 2010). Yet, in all instances, they could be for both the domestic market and/or exports. This relates to the case of enquiry that is characteristic of the food-food trajectory, and the state and customary institutions are highly implicated. Here, Bernstein's question 'who owns what' becomes very relevant. In one of the old state-led oil palm land grabs

in Ghana, some chiefs lost custody over their lands while others were benefiting from some ground rents. Many migrants and sharecroppers also lost their investments and became displaced, while others have been compelled to migrate or have been integrated into out-grower schemes (Amanor, 1999). Because of the nature and complexity of changes in land relations, Ribot & Peluso (2003) call for analyses that transcend land rights and entitlements to that which looks into the power relations of access i.e. the ability of different groups and classes to derive benefits from land resources. The impacts on access affects different classes and generational groups differently: landless and near landless proletariats, smallholders who may not adequate land for production and those who are forced into petty commodity activities, women, the aged, and the youth whose land access is often constrained among others (Bernstein, 2010; Borrás, et al, 2015; White, 2012).

To unpack the land-labour nexus, an agrarian political economy approach, serves as a useful analytical framework. The labour question can be analysed within two major trajectories. One is when capital needs land but not labour (Li, 2011). This pathway occurs when labour becomes surplus to the requirements of a more efficient agriculture as often dominant in the 'modernization' and 'transformation' rhetoric of both domestic and foreign policies on agriculture (World Bank 2008). A few find jobs in other sectors of the economy: off-farm jobs, wage work and in urban areas. However, the most likely outcome is the continuous expulsion of rural people from the land through primitive accumulation and expanded reproduction (Harvey, 2003). Hence, land deals are implicated in the creation of what Marx calls a 'relative surplus population', referring to the 'relative redundant population of labourers who are of greater extent than suffices for the average needs of the self-expansion of capital' (Marx, 1977, p. 437). Marx postulated that for a 'successful' transition to capitalism, this reserve army of labour is to be absorbed in industry. This also alludes to classical economic literature as theorized in the Lewis (1954) model where he theorized that movement from the rural agricultural to the urban industrial sector characterized structural transformation. The idea was that transfer of labour may proceed without decline in agricultural output, and at a constant real wage; and that food might be transferred with labour. Arsel & Dasgupta, (2012) argue that structural transformation literature does not adequately account for the role of land supply in the movement between productive sectors, thus question the agricultural, socioeconomic



and environmental implications of structural change. Still, following the truncated trajectory of agrarian transition in Africa, whereby there has not been a reliable pathway from agriculture to industry, or from country to city, the question thus remains, ‘what happens to the livelihood trajectories of rural people displaced by land deals?’

Second is the question of what happens when both land and labour are needed. Here, rural people may not be expelled but rather they are likely to be subsumed into large-scale enterprises as wage workers or contract workers. A class lens, as guided by the question ‘who does what’ and ‘who gets what’ is relevant for understanding the differentiated interests and impacts on those incorporated; e.g. a landless wage worker’s interests differ from those who own land, in the same way that casual and permanent workers’ interests may not only differ but sometimes even conflict. The class positions of workers could determine the power of their agency — to negotiate conditions and have choices and options. For example, a landless and bonded wage worker who does not have adequate alternative sources of income may have limited choices on negotiations as compared to a casual landed wage worker. It also helps to analyse the long-term cycles of inequality associated with land grabs. As has been already noted, because contemporary wage farmworkers do conform strictly to the classic single class of proletariats, the term ‘classes of labour’ as used by Bernstein, (2007, p. 1) is employed to connote ‘the growing numbers who now depend directly and indirectly on the sale of their labour power for their own daily reproduction’. That is both wage workers who possess some means production (land) as well those who alternate between small wage work and small-scale petty commodity (Lerche, 2010). These land-based class differentiations intersect with generational and demographic differentiations within households in terms of population size, gender, marriage, age, sex, characteristics. A class analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the different layers of political reactions from below, which goes far beyond outright resistance to include varying forms of acquiescence and incorporation (Hall et al., 2015). This second trajectory also opens up debates about semi-proletarianization and social reproduction (Cousins, et al 2018).

### 1.5.2 Social Reproduction

Following Marx, private property, free labour, accumulation and markets are defining features that sustain capitalist production. These factors, as discussed in the preceding section, shape the nature of economic relations and class-based differentiation, but are also, in themselves, dependent on capital's commodification of land and labour through both overt and covert expropriation and exploitative processes that enable its expansion and the accumulation of surplus. As such, capitalist relations produce and reproduce capital on the one end, and labour on the other. In the case of the latter, Marx equated the cost of labour to the wages necessary for the purchase of commodities that sustains workers' social reproduction (Marx, 1976). Central to Marx's discussions was thus, the dynamics of capitalist relations, particularly how lowering the cost of necessary commodities profits capital through relative surplus appropriation; leaving important gaps in external process outside of wage relations (Cousins, et al, 2018).

Beyond the conditions that shape economic relations on the site of production, many feminist political economists have drawn attention to the social relations of care that facilitate the reproduction of the workforce, both biologically and as compliant wage workers (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2017; Razavi, 2009b). In other words, social reproduction which Fraser, (2014, p. 61) defines as the 'forms of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds' serve as an indispensable background condition for the possibility of capitalist production. Social reproduction is thus constituted in four aspects: (a) biological reproduction of the species, and the conditions and social constructions of motherhood; (b) reproduction through migration and its enabling conditions (Shah & Lerche, 2020); (c) the reproduction of the labour force which involves subsistence, education and training; and (d) the reproduction and provisioning of caring needs through either privatized kinship networks or through state institutions (Bakker, 2007, p. 541). Through the concept of social reproduction, we understand that within capitalist economies, labour in particular, is not only needed for the production of goods and services, but also has to be reproduced for the continuance of this system; the process of labour reproduction is therefore not only material but also social and embedded in historically established norms and institutions (Picchio, 1992).

Earlier debates on social reproduction centred on how and why women's unpaid domestic labour subsidized capitalist reproduction under Fordism, to promote working-class consumerism in cities while inhibiting the development of commodity consumption in the periphery (Fraser, 2014). Recent interests in the concept reflects more broadly, how the everyday activities of maintaining life and reproducing the next generation are gradually being realized through the increasingly privatized forms of social provisioning; the role of both paid and unpaid domestic activities, and therefore the infiltration of capitalist market relations in historically non-marketized aspects of the economy (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2014). As such, production and social reproduction in rural agrarian societies are being co-shaped, and encompass contradictions and tensions that often remain at the centre of class, identity and generational struggles and rural politics. While neoliberalism is marked by a crisis of social provisioning, it is not simply a crisis of care, but also tends to destabilize the process of social reproduction upon which capitalist production depends<sup>5</sup>.

In this study, the concept of social reproduction provides analytical insight in examining the dynamics of dispossession, wage labour relations on the plantation and labour on family farms. It guides understanding into how dispossession affects women farmers and their sources of subsistence and the interrelated process that contribute to the reconfiguration, and transformation of existing social contracts and relations of production. It informs analysis on the role of households and kinship relations, particularly women, the youth and children in enabling production on the plantation; the relations and the nature of inter-dependence between the small/family farming the plantation, given the large extent of semi-proletarianism in the affected communities; and how state institutions as well as local norms and traditions influence the social relations of production.

### 1.5.3 A Gendered Political Economy

As it has been highlighted above, land-based social differentiation intersects with other social and identity-based differences, co-shaping each other. In his study on the shortcomings of classic agrarian political economy theories of rural differentiation, mainly Marxists interpretations, White, (1989) highlighted the need for dynamic and adaptable frameworks that approach social differentiation from a contextualised and relational viewpoint. Similarly, Oya, (2004) even notes that the application of class

in the rural African context may even defy objectivity. In some rural places in Ghana for instance, a prominent basis of differentiation is ‘strangerhood’ rather than class, whilst elsewhere in Ethiopia, state policies of land distribution has made class a less significant, if not a non-existent means of differentiation (Moreda, 2016). To better understand rural agrarian structures and visible transformations in the era of the global land rush, other demographic and identity-related forms of differentiation (gender, age, ethnicity, religion, social status etc.) usually raised in moral economy perspectives, cannot be overemphasized. To explore other identity issues that are evident in the land grab-land-labour nexus in West Africa (particularly, Ghana), I employ ‘gender’ as a feminist analytical tool that considers the issues of ‘feminized identities — not only women but also migrants, ethnic and religious minorities whose agency, skill, reason, capability and power remains threatened, structurally and systemically.

A great number of gender studies have been influenced by, and are now central to the large body of literature of on Gender and Development (GAD) and Women in Development (WID). Boserup's, (1970) study on women's role in economic development has most often been referred to as the starting point for understanding women's position in development. Her study, together with the growth of feminist research at the time, provided a critique of modernization theory and provoked projects aimed at addressing the economic exclusion of women in development (Okali, 2011; Waylen, 1997). Most significantly, these debates drew attention to the omission of women and adding them to dominant narratives of development. Gender advocates, economists, and international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) inclined to new institutional economics have usually approached agrarian studies from this angle, most often pointing out allocative inefficiencies driven by the structure of male and female incentives in farm households (see World Bank 2001). Such ‘gender-aware’ or ‘gendered disaggregated’ perspectives (Elson, 1998) make women empirically visible, and it is usually a useful point of departure to explaining how women and men are differently related and affected by development (Elson, 1998). Nonetheless, several critiques have been levelled against this approach to studying gender in development for being too narrow, depoliticising women's subordination and not addressing fully the structural privileging of men and masculinity (Lockwood, 1992; Peterson, 2005). Peterson, (2005, p. 500), therefore calls for ‘productive and

transformative gendered political economy that not only adds a women's dimension but expands into investigating relationships among women's and men's identities, activities and inequalities of power'.

Agrarian political economy perspectives, arguably, offer convincing grounds for a social relations analysis of gender (da Corta, 2009). In doing so, the study sets out to explore two broad interrelated aspects of gender relations in communities affected by land grabs: i) How power is constituted in domestic and capitalist relations of (re)production and ii) the institutions, ideologies and norms that structure or reinforce power relations in access to and control over land, conditions of work, income and reproduction (Razavi, 2002, 2009a; Venkateshwarlu & da Corta, 2001). It widely acknowledged that in West Africa, with or without land grabs, women and other minority groups' access to and control over land resources (including complementary inputs for production) remains restricted and insecure (Doss, et al 2014; Kevane & Gray, 1999; Tsikata, 2003). As such, whilst land deals that provide new opportunities to women and other marginalized groups could be transformative, those that take away their already limited access further worsens their welfare even if there are some income gains to men (Behrman et al., 2012). Questions of rights over land, the existing tenure institutions, patterns of inheritance and how benefits from land are determined to (dis)empower marginalized groups, are all important contextual issues for examining gendered relations (Agarwal, 2003).

One area in the land grab literature where gender issues are mostly discussed is the labour question, usually set in the context of agribusiness and the growing feminization of labour. However, the oil palm sector is a rather male dominated field, further complicating the direct and indirect impacts on women of different social classes. A gendered analysis of the implications of land deals on wage labour relations looks into the to the role of gendered domestic relations in structuring labour and product markets (Razavi, 2002). Here, we are reminded to look into how the bargaining positions of feminized wage labourers are shaped by domestic relations. In their study in India, Venkateshwarlu & da Corta, (2001) and da Corta, (2009) found out that women's bargaining power for good conditions of work, sometimes fall when they become de facto family heads or when they have to contribute to paying off debts taken by a patriarch. Their disadvantaged situation is even compounded when widowed, divorced and separated in places where there are no reliable social systems of

support. Under such structural constraints, they may not overtly resist land grabs but are likely to remain in it under weakened employment relations. A gendered political economy looks not only into how power relations disempower marginalized groups, but also the extent to which land grabs provide opportunities or not, for building the capacities and skills of wage workers, how this is differentiated among women and men under different task allocations and contracts, and how this is influenced also by institutions and norms (Behrman et al., 2012; Harriss-White, 2003). In their research in Ghana, Torvikey, et al (2016) found out that even when land deals have generated many jobs for men and women, they have favoured men who occupy more secure forms of inclusion in administrative positions and as out growers, while women have been largely integrated as disposable casual workers on farm and factories.

These gender/identity-related issues intersect with class to produce even more complex outcomes. Under the prevalent contexts where their gender and migrant statuses deny them land ownership, and when the loss of the 'wifey' status can also strip them of their entitlements, they also become dispossessed, thereby transiting them into landless/near landless classes in urgent need for alternative sources of income and reproduction. Such double vulnerability makes wage work both attractive and exploitative (Julia & White, 2012). This may consist of inclusion (attractiveness to specific production tasks), disadvantaged inclusion (wage disparities, and gender-blind/biased/neutral working conditions), and forced inclusion that also doubles as exclusion (when they are forced into wage work because of unsupportive institutions, e.g. their inability to own land, men's control over family farms, and limited diversification options). Also, when women are forced into wage labour as a result of dispossession, or even in the case of landless migrants, their class positions also affect how much land deals affect them. Under varying social conditions, both class and identity relations revert backwards and forwards, suggesting the need to view class-gender analysis in relational and interactive way.

#### 1.5.4 The Political Economy of Livelihoods (Livelihood Perspectives)

In the context of rural Ghana, a livelihood approach is analytically and practically useful as a complementary approach to agrarian political economy for assessing how land grabs affect land and labour relations among the rural working poor in Ghana whose choices are shaped by the everyday struggles of unemployment, cash and basic needs etc., in order to make a living. This does not represent a shift from class-based approaches as O’Laughlin, (2002) has cautioned, but one that places class differentiation within the context of everyday struggles and livelihood strategies. To examine the implications of land grabs on the day-to-day lives of rural working people, a livelihoods approach is very relevant. Usually centred at the household level, livelihoods perspectives start with what people have and how people live differently.

Most livelihood studies draw on Chambers and Conway’s (1992, p. 7) definition of livelihoods as ‘the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living’. Livelihoods are thus sustainable when they can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance their capabilities and assets, and support future generations. Assets comprise the human, natural, physical, social and economic that interact across space and time and also vary across social, gender and ethnic groups (Bebbington, 1999). They serve as ‘stocks of capital’ existing either as a stock (e.g., land) or from surplus value necessary for a household’s capabilities, means of survival and reproduction (Bebbington, 1999; Ellis, 1999). They are therefore dynamic, context-specific, and households may reduce or increase some at the expense of others (Morse & McNamara, 2013). Second, the mediating processes within which assets can be accessed and utilised has been categorised as the contexts, conditions and trends focusing on political, socio-economic, cultural demographic and natural environments, social differentiation, institutions and organizations (Scoones, 1998, 2009) or the vulnerability contexts and transforming processes. Third, the particular livelihood strategies of rural people are shaped by how assets, mediating processes of the households of the rural working poor can be combined, substituted and switched to generate sustainable outcomes (Scoones, 2009). Livelihood perspectives thus analyse the complexities and trade-offs in livelihood strategies to guide development intervention. In rural development, emphasis is usually placed on how livelihoods are shaped around interventions such as agricultural

intensification, income diversification (non-farm employment) and migration (through remittances) etc. in ways that are sustainable —that they reduce poverty, enhance well-being, capabilities and resilience and protect natural resources (Scoones, 2009).

Critical viewpoints on the livelihoods approach have mainly centred in its analytical limitations in capturing power relations and structural issues that affect the peasantry (de Haan, 2006; O’Laughlin, 2002). It discusses structures as ‘context’ and not understood as cross-cutting relations to be analytically probed. Small (2007) attributes the negligence of power relations to the fact that the framework did not emanate from a theory of social or economic change, grand or otherwise, rather relies on an array of current international development paradigms that narrowly focus on participation, empowerment and poverty reduction. Wiggins (2002) however does not fully agree with such claims, but attributes it to an ‘economic capture’ — a microeconomic equation of input resource plus structure equals outcome, which sometimes leaves discussions of power relations to its margins. This also resonates with an earlier argument by Bryceson, (1999) that livelihood perspective mostly captures short-term impacts of capitalist development because even when income diversification through wage work is provided, it produces long-term inequalities and speeds up de-peasantisation processes in rural communities — a blind spot of the framework.

In response to some of these critical standpoints, Scoones (2009) acknowledged that within the livelihood perspectives, class and other identity relations and structural questions of agrarian change have not been central yet not absent. He, for instance, argued that sustainability is negotiated in a maze of politically defined opportunities and constraints thus suggesting the importance of not narrowing it down to simple coping strategies (Scoones, 2015). ‘Stresses and shocks must be coped with and recovered from; assets and capabilities must be maintained and enhanced; and natural resource base on which many livelihoods depend must not be undermined’ (ibid p.73). In response to the critiques, Scoones, (2015) in his small book on sustainable livelihoods and rural development, provides an expansive account on the framework, highlighting the role of power and politics on livelihoods as they unfold in specific contexts. For instance, empirical accounts of agrarian transitions revealed that there have always been many determinants and relations, and in most cases, the ideal types vary widely. He has reinstated the livelihood approach within the context



of long-term, historical patterns of structurally defined relations of state control, and of differential patterns of production, accumulation, investment and reproduction. This he terms as the political economy of livelihoods (Scoones, 2015, p. 74). It is therefore important to look into multiple livelihoods strategies, how they coexist and produce agrarian dynamics to shape social relations.

Livelihood perspectives provide understanding of the structures and processes involved in the ways in which land grabs impact access to, and control over land — looking at both dispossession (e.g. loss of land, crops, and food etc.) and the (un)sustainability of the alternative livelihoods associated with it (e.g. through (in)access to alternative lands, compensations, employment opportunities etc.) As Scoones (2009) has rightly argued, the complexity, diversity and uncertainty of rural futures make livelihoods perspectives very essential. Land grabs can provide differential outcomes for peasants, but peasants may adopt varying livelihood strategies, given their available assets, contexts and institutions. The land-labour nexus that is the focus of this research would be assessed through some elements of the livelihood framework. It allows for the recognition of value differentiation. Peasants have differentiated *raison d'être*, differences in their attachment to land, and place different values on different forms of assets when we consider assets as not as only inputs but also as outputs that explain people's sense of 'well-being' (Bebbington, 1999). For instance, the attractiveness of wage work to women and migrants, reasons people sell their land to engage in wage labour etc. The approach is both conceptually and operationally supportive to African rural dwellers' drive for income diversification given the constraints of small farming (Ellis, 1999). For example, for the landed farmer who becomes seasonally food insecure, livelihood perspectives can provide insights into their preference for certain employment contracts, e.g. the extent to which casual contracts on land deal sites becomes a viable livelihood strategy for them. The sustainability elements of livelihood perspectives can also provide a useful framework for explaining how the land grab related impacts on land and labour also affect access to income and means of social reproduction. For example, even if those dispossessed from their land get incorporated into land deals as wage workers or out growers, to what extent will these strategies enhance their well-being? It also means assessing the vulnerabilities and contexts of rural groups and classes (women, migrant workers, landless workers) and how they are able to adapt to various working terms and

conditions in order to determine the sustainability of their strategies to sustain the livelihoods of their households.

In effect, everyday life experiences and livelihood contexts shape how people benefit or not from land deals, as well as their political/economic reactions especially in the short to medium term. In a country where there are high rates of unemployment/underemployment<sup>6</sup>, inadequate socio-economic infrastructure, many people tend to embrace promises of job creation as promoted by the state, traditional institutions and investors. Some youth are also turning away from family farms because systemically, small-scale agriculture is becoming unattractive, and many are persuaded by promises of modern forms of production, good jobs, and incomes (White, 2012). Socially deprived rural communities are also squeezed between declining agricultural returns and poor access (economic and physical) to basic needs thus for most people, their land, and labour related interests are premised on expectations on improvements in their social conditions (Bryceson & Howe, 1997). It is not surprising that often times, communities tend to rate the promises of schools, health posts and pipe-borne water over other structural needs (see Amanor, 1999 on the GOPDC case). Under such livelihood contexts, different social groups and societies are affected differently and perceive land deals differently. In the light of the above findings from literature, it could be argued that, on the one hand, the existing social structures of reproduction that are inherently unequal, make land deals potential short-to medium-term livelihood diversification strategies for people, especially women and other marginalized groups. On the other hand, it also shapes power relations — the ability of people to benefit from or lose out on land deal.

### 1.5.5 Organized and Everyday Politics

Locating peasants' political reactions within the context of contemporary global land grabs presents peasants' politics on two broad fronts. One is the struggles against eviction and dispossession in the defence of the commons. Indeed, this has been the most common assumption and underlying principles underlying anti-land grab advocacies and movements. In the Ghanaian rural context, civil society and organized action remain limited. Radical political mobilizations against land deals rarely occur. Among the few existing and influential agrarian justice organizations and movements,

they adopt advocacy politics and form alliances with domestic and transnational networks with shared interests. They usually advocate policy changes, and organize on principled ideas and values and plead the cause of others (Keck & Sikkink, 1999). This case examines the role of advocacy politics in mediating the issues around dispossession.

Neoclassical conceptions on labour politics are premised on the methodological assumption that peasants are rational and often make decisions upon calculating the benefits and risks of engaging in collective action (Deininger, 1999; Lipton, 2010). According to Popkin (1979), this explains why landless labourers may not necessarily initiate resistance. Although he describes them as the most politically conscious groups, he argued that, even when they resist capitalist interventions, it is usually based on incentives, and/or directed towards new opportunities which aim at taming markets and bureaucrats rather than restoring traditional systems.

Both Marxist and moral economy notions provide useful insights into how to understand the nature of land grab politics from below. Marxist perspectives are premised on the assumption that common oppression brings about class action, yet are generally not very optimistic about the peasants' ability to organize resistance due to the exploitative and controlling nature of dominant classes and state institutions. Proletariats or the working class in particular are thought to be the most potentially radical class because they do not have property, and because of the nature of socialized work place. One puzzle that preoccupies Marxists is why workers do not always think and act in the best interest of their class. Thus, the notions of 'class-in-itself' and 'class-for-itself'; the former being the socio-economic being, and the latter the political translation. The often perceived 'false or lack of class consciousness' is understood as part of the continuum between class-in-itself and class-for-itself (Duggett, 1975; Marx, 1977). Even when peasants exhibit consciousness, they often focus on economic bargaining rather than demanding radical political changes (Paige, 1975). With this in mind, one is able to unpack the attempts in pursuing collective action in relation to farmworkers and the dispossessed. It critically assesses the claims, demands and impacts of collective efforts, but even more importantly, the constraints of organizing and how and where the issues concerning dispossession and exploitation converge and diverge.

Moral economy perspectives, on the other hand, which, like Marxists' interpretations, also follows the logic of differentiation and exploitation,

perceive this, however, from a binary interpretation of class, whereby the policies and activities emanating from ruling elite classes threaten the subsistence of peasants or that which unfavourably transforms their mode of (re)production (Shanin, 1974; Thorner, 1966). Although peasants may be constrained to organize, their everyday ways of life can express agency against the actions of ruling elites who threaten their means of subsistence. Their daily reactions of resistance, the everyday politics involves little or no organization to embrace, comply with, adjust, and contest norms and rules regarding authority over, production of, or allocation of resources (Scott, 1985). In his study on peasant resistance in Southeast Asia, Scott described everyday politics as often unplanned, uncoordinated, and those involved 'typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms'. It is usually low profile and private behaviour of the people and often entwined with individuals and small groups' activities in their struggles to sustain their daily livelihoods while interacting with others like themselves, with superiors and with subordinates.

The study also considers everyday action is a useful analytical tool for examining labour politics on the plantation. In a study by Amanor, (1999) on a post-independence state-led oil palm land grab in Ghana, he revealed how some unemployed youth engaged in illicit night time harvesting of palm bunches even under tight security confrontations. Through other forms of everyday 'action and production', such as land occupation, squatting, divestment by contract farmers, marginalized groups express their dissatisfaction with unfavourable systems. The extent to which everyday politics serve as effective 'weapons of the weak' is however contested. It has to be assessed within the social, economic and political contexts of the affected people.

### 1.5.6 State-Society Relations under Pluralistic Institutions

Now, on the broader questions of governance, the role of the state has been profound in land grab debates regarding states' interests, and their authority and capacity to govern land grabs (Margulis & Porter, 2013; White, et al, 2012). The state remains a complex phenomenon and itself a site of struggle at diverse levels (Jessop, 2007; Watts, 1989). It is an 'ensemble of political, social, economic and coercive institutions that exercise 'public' authority in a given territory (Fox, 1993, p. 11). A state-society approach centralizes the range of actors within the state, and the struggles to shape goals and strategies in relation to pressures from social actors

with common interests. Here, emphasis is thus placed on the relational autonomy and the capacity of the state to act as linked to social actors' degree of autonomy, their identities and perceptions of common interests which are often formed by the identification of rights and claims (Fox, 1993). One key aspect of state-society interactions is to look at how these relations in terms of power, interests, goals, and strategies shift over time, as well as the politics involved. In a country like Ghana with pluralistic land governance institutions, it is important to examine how political struggles around land grabs are mediated by the national policies and customary institutions of land tenure including chieftaincy and family systems within which the land deals take place.

For instance, given the massive publicity on land grabs, and especially regarding oil palm, investors continue to navigate away from negative press and accountability by seeking opportunities and operating in the loopholes within complex customary systems and norms. The past two decades have seen customary tenure being further reinvented by states through several policy reforms and in local spheres, they have become sites of changing institutions and norms. Customary tenure as discussed in this thesis is thus not completely detached from and opposed to formal systems but examined as both overlapping and competing institutional spheres that produce differentiated relations to land (Griffiths, 1986). This is particularly necessary for moving the discussion beyond the state, capital and society as actors, toward the politics within and between these actors as shaped by the existing institutions and structures (Steinmo & Thelen, 2010; Thelen, 2002). Such an approach helps examine how and why land grabs emerge, how the interactions between and within institutions influence political reactions from below.

### 1.5.7 Land Grabs and the Competing Governance Tendencies

The theoretical discussions have suggested that capitalist relations in rural smallholder societies can have diverse implications for different social groups. How then should large-scale agricultural investments be governed to protect the marginalized groups? The view of three competing tendencies: (a) regulate to facilitate land deals; (b) regulate to mitigate negative impacts and maximize opportunities; and (c) regulate to stop and rollback land grabbing put forward by Borras et al., (2013) is an appropriate starting point to understanding the institutional aspects of large-scale agricultural

investments in Africa. Reiterating the caution by Borras et al., (2013 pg168), 'these tendencies are not sharply defined and fixed. Hence the use of the term 'tendency', and each is in turn internally variegated' and also influenced by broader political and ideological contestations around the notions of economic growth and development. These three typical regulatory approaches help to analyse the policy directions of states concerning land deals, at the same time being aware of the political shifts over time.

The tendency (A) of *regulating to facilitate* land deals is embedded in administrative propositions to address the issues of effectiveness, efficiency and transparency in land transactions (Borras et al., 2013; Franco & Monsalve Suárez, 2018). Here, there is the recognition that large-scale agricultural investments are driven by the global demand for food, feed and fuel. However, they are also considered favourable because of longstanding advantages, e.g. market adaptability and economies of scale of large operations (Deininger & Byerlee, 2012). This policy direction facilitates accumulation under transparent and participatory institutions that check on information asymmetries. Proponents promote land formalization programmes, public-private partnerships and property rights purported to secure investments and reduce transaction costs for investors. These propositions are also presumed as preconditions necessary to prevent failed deals, unemployment, and irreversible environmental implications (UNCTAD et al., 2010).

The tendency (B) of *'regulating to mitigate negative impacts and maximise opportunities'* recognizes that large land investments have unfolded already, and cannot be un-done, but can be regulated. Similar to tendency A, policy priorities emphasize the need to ensure that investments are undertaken sustainably and have minimal adverse effects on people and the environment (von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009). However, unlike the 'strategic thinking' underpinning the first tendency that advances investments, this second current adopts a more tactical and practical approach, that is to address the urgent needs of poor people whose livelihoods could be threatened by land deals. In the past few years, human rights advocacy including the call for decent labour standards (e.g. elimination of child labour, right to unionization, social security benefits, generation of new and higher-paying jobs), land use rights, transparency, and the incorporation of small-scale farmers in production and market chains of agribusinesses (e.g. out-grower schemes), have all become prominent ways to address land grabs (Beekmans et al., 2014; Bertram, 2012).

In stark contrast to the first two approaches, is the tendency (C) of *'regulating to stop and roll back'* land deals. It represents a radical stance against large-scale investments. From this perspective, land deals expose the rural people and peasants to dispossession and forced proletarianization, eventually culminating in deprivation and poverty (La Via Campesina, 2007; Moyo, Yeros, & Jha, 2012; Rosset, 2009). McMichael, (2008, p. 213) adds that beyond dispossession, is an equally crucial fact that such investments tend to rule out the place for peasants, closing doors to alternatives and re-moving peasants and their systems of production from history. Similarly, others highlight their embeddedness in global power asymmetries whereby investors as compared to local populations, become better positioned to advance their agenda and benefit more under institutions of property rights (Margulis et al., 2013). Notably, radical agrarian justice organizations such as the food sovereignty movement has been influential in proposing alternatives through campaigns for agrarian reforms that support peasant agriculture instead of large-scale investments. A popular declaration of La via Campesina has been "*Our Land is our identity, it is not for Sale.*" (Borras & Franco, 2012; La Via Campesina, 2007).

While all three tendencies recognize power asymmetries as a constraint to the developmental outcomes of land deals, they diverge on the perceived sources of these power inequalities, and how to deal with them. Whereas policy strategies that navigate towards the first two tendencies show optimism that inclusive participation and transparency could lead to positive outcomes, that of the latter stresses more on the expropriating and coercive character of capitalist development which makes it unlikely to trust participatory processes. Again, from outside and within the third regulatory tendency, some have also drawn attention to class, identity and ideological tensions within which radical agrarian and environmental movements against all forms of large-scale investment operate (Edelman & Borras, 2016). The extent to which they represent the diverse interests of rural people or peasants in different contexts also remains highly debated (Bernstein, 2013). A project may be denounced globally and nationally but receive support from some groups at the local level (Larder, 2015).

These regulatory responses, therefore, do not necessarily lead to particular outcomes but require evaluating what happens on the ground concerning the specific political-economic context within which they are implemented. Thus, it crucial to examine the political processes of certain regulations and why they emphasize certain goals rather than others. In

many instances, institutions operate within high power imbalances (see Visser & Spoor, 2011). For instance, in Ghana, the extent to which people can hold the state accountable on land deals depends on the land tenure guiding the acquisition. Ghana's policy of 'non-interference' in customary and market-based land tenure (Amanor, 2008) promotes capital accumulation while investors also operate under a *laissez-faire* business environment. Even though the state's non-direct interference in customary land transactions empowers traditional land institutions, it also relieves the state from excessive legitimation pressures thereby complicating the balance of power in land transactions and the ability to mitigate negative livelihood implications, e.g. labour impacts. The orientation of regulations/institutions, the business models of investors, as well as the desires of affected communities are all socially and politically constructed, and therefore should be seen as broad patterns of class struggles around capitalist development in the countryside (O'Laughlin, 2002; Steinmo & Thelen, 2010). In effect, the struggles over incorporation imply struggles over the character and orientation of labour institutions and models of production all of which affect the outcomes of and responses to land deals in both expected and unpredictable ways. This study, therefore, attempts to examine the two main competing regulatory approaches (AB, and C) to ascertain the extent to which they speak to the class and livelihood struggles of affected communities and farmworkers in particular.

## 1.6 Organization of Thesis

The thesis is organized in eight chapters. This introductory chapter presents the *problématique* and the analytical framework that guides the study. Chapter two frames the case under study and the research methods employed. In chapter three, the social structures that shape land and labour institutions are reviewed. It also illustrates the role of civil society in land politics in Ghana. The fourth chapter is centred on the land question regarding tenure, dispossession and rents, while the fifth chapter, unpacks the impacts of land deals on plantation wage labour and household farm labour supply and social reproduction. Chapter six examines the nature and forms of political reactions from below, exploring the overlapping, parallel and competing demands related to land and labour. Chapter seven takes a critical look at the competing regulatory approaches to land grab governance to ascertain the implications for addressing the labour



question. In chapter eight, I present a summary of the research findings in relation to the research questions, engage with key theoretical debates, make policy suggestions and conclude the study on areas for further research.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Following the world economic crises and structural adjustment programmes.

<sup>2</sup> The status of migrants is not always a case of being marginalized. This is because in Ghana, the idea of local citizenship is very highly fluid and more often a case of social identity which is interpreted and legitimated by chiefs. Thus, migrants could be of varying classes in relation to their entitlement to land and resources.

<sup>3</sup> Yet, the World Bank also conceptualizes wage labour to be of little economic benefits (high supervision costs and low incentives) as compared to family for reasons which therefore contradicts their land deal job creation narratives (World Bank, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> In the labour-consumer balance analysis he also considered the sum effects of other factors including soil quality, location, crops, market prices, availability of alternative work etc.

<sup>5</sup> While recognizing that there is not always a neat line between production and social production. Pensions for example, are not necessarily equivalent to labour time nor can they be considered the direct equivalent a worker's labour power during his or her active workdays but significant for generational social reproduction (Oran, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Twelve percent unemployment rate out of which about ten percent are underemployed (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015).

## 2

## Research Scope and Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

Researching global land deals requires a great deal of caution in order to provide a credible and convincing account of their processes and impacts (Edelman, 2013). This chapter provides an overview of the case under study i.e. is the demographic, and socio-economic scope of the study covered in this research. The chapter also provides a detailed account of the methods for the empirical fieldwork, a description of the secondary sources of data, the study limitations and the researcher's positionality.

### 2.2 An Overview of Study Design: Mixed Methods

The pivot of this research is to understand the impacts of capitalist development in the countryside, particularly how it affects the social relations around land and labour, and the political reactions from below. To provide answers to the research questions that are framed within a political economy perspective, a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis was adopted. Particularly, a qualitative predominant mixed-methods was employed to allow probing, narratives and discussions that give relevant insights and explain the experiences of the study communities and affected people. As noted by Rossman and Rallis (2003) and Harwell, (2011), qualitative methods help to understand and analyse complex social phenomena and multiple "truths" through contextual, emergent, and interpretive ways. Quantitative data was gathered mainly for statistical evidence e.g. on land sizes, demographic data among others, and in some instances for triangulation purposes.

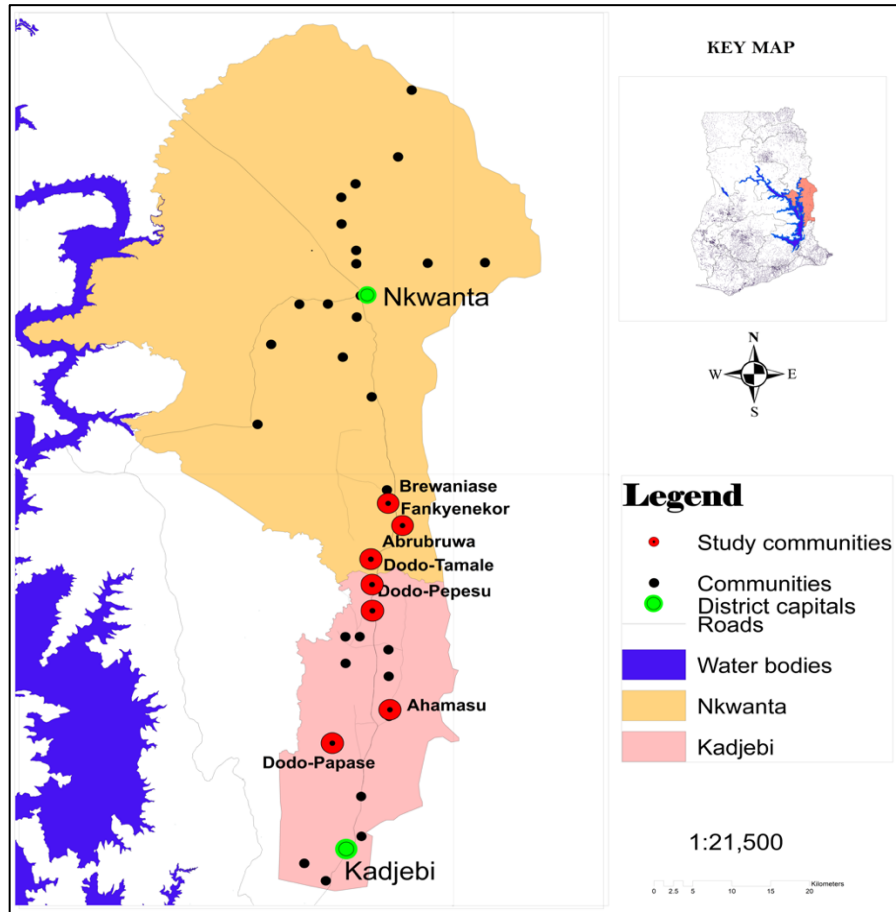
In addition, the research uses a case study approach to answer the research questions. A case study refers to 'an intensive study of a single unit or a small number of units (the cases), for the purpose of understanding a

larger class of similar units (Gerringer, 2007, p. 37). Case studies are considered an appropriate approach when units of inquiry are a social group, community, system, organization, institution, event, or even a person into which one wants to conduct a detailed and contextual study (Bryman, 2012). The ‘case study approach’ is thus used by social scientists to mean many things — qualitative methods with small sample sizes, thick examination of a phenomenon using approaches such as ethnography and process tracing. Bryman elaborates that ‘real-life contextual studies, investigations into the properties of a single observation a single phenomenon, and research that employs triangulation’ (ibid). This research, while engaging with a broader scope of agrarian issues, primarily investigates a specific oil palm plantation land deal, at the Nkwanta South Municipality on Ghana’s eastern corridor bordering Togo. It presents an in-depth study of the land-labour implications of a large-scale land acquisition for an oil plantation.

### **2.3 The Study Area: Nkwanta South Municipality Ghana**

The Volta region is at the easternmost part of the country and very unique because it is the longest in terms of land mass from the north to the south. Often described as a microcosm of the country, the region does not only house all the ethnic groups of Ghana but also stretches across all the country's ecological zones (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). It has a competitive advantage for diverse agricultural activities — crop farming, animal rearing, fishing, hunting and forestry. Indeed, the northern Volta used to be one of Ghana's main hubs for cocoa production. Aside from the production of cocoa and major food staples (maize, rice, cassava, yam etc.), non-traditional export crops such as ginger, cashew nuts, pineapple, paw-paw and mangoes are also on the rise. Not so different from the general country context, the predominant farming systems is the small scale and family farming modes of production, often dependent on sharecroppers, family labour and wage labourers. However, over the years, some crop sectors such as pineapple, mango and rice have seen a rise in medium and large-scale production schemes from both foreign and national investors. The SGSOG-Herakles-Volta Red Farms is actually the largest oil palm plantation in the region. Aside from agriculture, there are other economic activities such retail and wholesale trade including agricultural middlemen, quarrying, construction, manufacturing, and transport services, among others.

Map 2.1  
The Study Area



Source, Author, 2018.

The plantation is located in the Nkwanta South Municipality of the Volta region (now Oti Region<sup>1</sup>). The district, by virtue of its geographical proximity to the northernmost half of Ghana, experiences the existing horizontal inequality that compounds the ethno-religious north-south divide in terms of infrastructure and basic social services and income. It is ethnically diverse and has a large population of settlers. The indigenes of Nkwanta south are the Ntrubos, the Adeles, the Atwodes and the Challas.

Other settler and migrant ethnic groups are the Ewe, Guan, Kotokoli, Ga-Dangme, Mole Dagbani, Basare, and Konkomba people among others. The traditional authority is led by chiefs and family heads. They practice a family land tenure system with patrilineal systems of land inheritance.

## **2.4 The ‘SGSOG-Herakles-Volta Red Concession**

This research is an in-depth study of an oil palm land deal that has gone through the hands of different investors and management. In 2009, two concessions including a 3750ha of family lands in Brewaniase (in Nkwanta South), and a 630ha land in Dodo-Pepesu (in Kadjebi District) were acquired by an American company, Sithe Global Sustainable Oils Ghana (SGSOG), affiliated to Wall Street’s Herakles Capital<sup>2</sup> for 50 years (See Map 2.1). These two deals were to serve as a pilot for a bigger African oil palm investment project. Thus, a year later, when they acquired a 17 times bigger forest lands in Cameroon, it affected their commitment to the Ghanaian investment. During that period also, at least to the public, the company was officially known as Herakles Farms. The Brewaniase concession belongs to families of the Ntrubo clan, while the Dodo-Pepesu lease which did not see the light of production, is under multiple land tenure systems that are individual, family and stool.<sup>3</sup> In 2013, a British owned company took over the management of SGSOG and now operates as Volta Red Farms (further explained in chapter four). Primarily, the research focuses on the Volta Red Farms (originally SGSOG/Herakles farms) of 3750ha.

## **2.5 Data from Existing Literature**

The study involved document or textual analyses of relevant secondary data. Reports, policy documents, legal instruments media articles, academic journals, and books were consulted for this study. For instance, I gathered and reviewed national (Ghana) policy documents including the constitution, the Labour Act, 651 of 2003, other (inter)national soft laws and the voluntary guidelines on land deals, as well newsletters and other media articles from agrarian justice movements including Food Sovereignty Ghana, ROPPA and La via Campesina — that are central to the discussions in chapter seven.

## 2.6 Primary Data Gathering

### 2.6.1 Planning the Data Collection

The study adopts a mixed methods collection approach, but inclines more to qualitative methods. Data collection instruments including in-depth interviews, observations, and life histories among others detailed below, are used to help understand and ‘make sense’ of the everyday experiences and livelihoods of those affected by land deals. The data collection was conducted in four phases, between February 2018 and March 2020. This was planned purposefully. The Akan and English languages were the main means of communication. In very few instances, I sought the help of interpreters for Ewe-speaking respondents.

Phase one was a one-week preliminary field visit in February, 2018. This was an introductory trip to familiarize myself with the area, establish contacts and assess accessibility to the plantations and the communities. During this period, I made contacts at the local government and with management and some supervisors of Volta Red. I also had access to the plantation and spoke to some of the workers and community elders about the intentions of my research. The second phase of the data collection was a three-month field visit in the months of May, June and July 2018. During this period, I conducted a survey of the farmworkers, carried out key informant interviews with dispossessed families, chiefs and elders, farmworkers, management, local, regional and local government state institutions among other relevant stakeholders. This period doubles as the peak season for the oil palm harvest, and as such I had the opportunity to observe the activities and organization of labour in its busiest season.

The third phase was scheduled between mid-January and mid-March 2019. The period was chosen in order to understand the labour dynamics in the off-peak season — a period where many workers are laid off. In February, I spent less time on the plantation and more in the homes of farmworkers to engage with them on their occupations and experiences in the lean season. It also provided the opportunity to conduct follow-up interviews following gaps identified from the preliminary data collation and analysis. I also conducted some interviews with relevant agencies including the Ghana Agricultural Workers’ Union (GAWU). The final data collection was carried out a year later between February-March 2020. Unfortunately, the timing coincided with the unprecedented global Covid-19 pandemic that affected movement and access to respondents.

Data collection during this period was centred at national-level government institutions based in the capital city to have a broader perspective of national policy strategies relating to investment promotion, agriculture, and rural development. I also had the opportunity to do further follow-up telephone interviews with the affected people.

### **2.6.2 Survey**

A face-to-face survey was conducted with the farmworkers to establish the baseline evidence. This was done with 200 farmworkers with the help of four research assistants. The survey data covered six main areas including: demography, land access, farming activities and food security, employment, labour conditions, other occupations, and other community development issues. See appendix 1 for more details.

### **2.6.3 In-depth Interviews**

Interviews constitute an essential tool for generating empirical knowledge by making provisions for people to talk about certain themes (Porta 2014 p.228). In-depth interviews are also relevant for signalling potential sources of information. In this research, I conducted semi-structured interviews often carried out face-to-face and in conversational ways. On several occasions, telephone interviews were also conducted when needed. In many instances, I conducted the interview with the support of a field assistant who helped with taking records. Through interviews, I gathered both basic background information (such as socio-biographical data) and other substantive data core to the research. Interviews with farmworkers were carried out in both their homes and on the plantation as and when appropriate. Interviews were conducted with farmworkers, farm management, dispossessed families, chiefs, state institutions and agencies and labour organizations (for a list of state and traditional institutions contacted, see appendix 2).

### **2.6.4 Life Histories and Stories**

Life histories are in themselves forms of in-depth interviews where personal experiences and life encounters are collected in open and interactive ways for the specific purpose of the research. It was a major approach to studying marginalized groups, migrant workers, women and landless



workers incorporated into land grabs as workers. A key objective of this study was to have a thorough understanding of farmworkers' livelihood trajectories not only their conditions of work, but also their past experiences, what attracts them to wage work, their perceptions about both oil palm establishment as well as the relations of production. A life history approach gives room to other important variables aside from class and identity relations that emerge from the stories of the lived experiences of people. In the process of gathering life histories and stories, I was cognisant of the fact that the outcome of knowledge production through a life history approach is produced by an interactional process between the two parties involved. Throughout the data collection, I constantly reflected on the extent of my own involvement in the process so as to minimise any tendencies of hijacking conversations.

### 2.6.5 Observations

I employed participant and non-participant observation during the fieldwork. Participant observation occurs in three main ways: collecting first-hand data, being interested in and focusing on the actions and interactions of the individuals or groups, and experiencing or being incorporated into the group (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014). By so doing one gets a better understanding what people do, mean, or believe as well as the experiences of those being studied. Participant observation is also relevant for revealing livelihood strategies, differentiation, and the construction of subjectivities and meanings. During my initial visits, I was received with ambivalence and witnessed hesitations from both the company and the affected people in providing me with information, however as my stay prolonged and in my subsequent visits, people became more open. During the survey with the help of three field assistants, I had the opportunity to spend ample time on the plantation and with the farmworkers. I joined their weekly morning devotion/meetings where they voiced out their concerns to management and supervisors. I also had the opportunity to join them on the trucks to their working fields. Particularly, it was very useful for understanding the interactions between supervisors and workers, harvesters and their carriers (head porters of palm bunches), and the of role headmen among others.

Non-participant observations took place in the work and home environments of respondents. For instance, in the process of tracing the

household generational dynamics of the affected families, it became apparent that women could provide more reliable information on their household population figures, e.g. the number of children and of others in their extended families than men could do. The men often had to start counting their children to be able to tell me their numbers, and sometimes themselves redirected me to the women. Again, during family group conversations, some men and family heads sometimes attempted to moderate the impacts of the land deal on their farming activities and livelihoods, yet the women, often the spouses, signalled through their latent mannerisms or quick interruptions to unpack the 'whole truth'. Always, attentive of my environment, I gave these women the opportunity for a one-on-one conversation or to contribute to the discussion, depending on the setting.

#### **2.6.6 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)**

FGD's are usually conducted to build a holistic understanding of a situation based on participants' comments and experiences (Bhattacharjee, 2012). In undertaking FGDs, the internal validity is usually hard to establish and there are likelihoods of unequal participation, yet it is a good avenue for gathering informal information (Creswell, 2009). The FGDs complemented the other data collection instruments. Focus group discussions were held around particular themes and for specific groups. Typically, they constituted 6 to 12 people in a group but there were other instances such as the task-based groupings among the farmworkers where the groups were larger. FGDs were conducted with farm workers, affected families, former plantation workers, unit committee members (local government leaders) and some community members. In a few instances, FGDs with community members were conducted randomly, i.e. when groups gathered under trees gave me the green light to discuss my research with them. FGDs among the workers focused on the issues of working conditions, how they organize their complaints, and other general perceptions around the labour relations on the plantation. In the FGDs among the dispossessed families, I focused on generational issues and impacts on farming, their general perceptions about the plantation and development.

*Table 2.1  
Overview of Primary Data Gathering Methods*

Data Collection Instrument	Unit of Analysis	N	Fe- males	Males	Total
Survey	Farmworkers	237*	50	150	200
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi structured Interviews</li> <li>• Life histories stories</li> <li>• Conversations</li> </ul>	Farmworkers	237*	28	42	70
	Carriers (informal workers)	25*	7	-	7
	Administrative staff and management of Volta Red	14	-	9	13
	Representatives of the land owners' association	15	1	14	15
	Dispossessed family members		11	43	54
	Chiefs	NA	-	6	6
	Staff of State Institutions and Agencies	NA	3	7	10
Focus Group Discussions	Dispossessed Family	NA			5
	Former farmworkers and community members	NA			7
	Farmworkers-Task-based <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harvesters (men)</li> <li>• Sprayers (men)</li> <li>• Loose pickers (women)</li> <li>• Fire control workers</li> </ul>				4
	Community Members	NA			9
Observations	Work and Home Environments	NA			

\* approximate

Source: Author's interviews 2018, 2019.

## 2.7 Sampling

In the selection of respondents, a purposive sampling method was employed. The survey of farmworkers was conducted with approximately 90% of the farmworkers. Focus group discussions, interviews and observations were done purposively to capture gender and other social class differences. Throughout the research, I employed the snow-balling method to identify and locate people recommended as contact persons and institutions relevant for the study.

The SGSOG-Herakles-Volta Red (hereafter Volta Red) oil palm concession was selected purposively for this research. Given the limited data and ambiguities surrounding the scale and scope of land deals in Ghana, Land Matrix<sup>4</sup> remains the major source of data on land acquisitions, but some of the data on the status of the plantations do not reflect the present state of affairs. Nonetheless, it served more or less as a sampling frame from which prospective cases could be chosen. From the database, as at January 2017, 41 transnational agricultural land deals initiated between the year 2001 and 2014 are recorded as either ongoing, in the start-up phase or abandoned. Out of this number, about 12 land deals ranging between 40 to 10,000 hectares had been under operation since 2008. This database served as a point of entry into purposively selecting the Volta Red, which had an established presence in the area since 2008.

Since the investment is centred on oil palm, it helps to delve deep into a specific process of labour relations. Recently, there has been a rise in research on the spread of industrial scale oil palm cultivations that is considered a flex crop. That is, the material flexibility of oil palm — its multiple uses for food, feed, fuel and industrial material — makes it attractive to investors because even as a single crop, it supports the diversification of investment markets (Borras, et al 2016). The Ghanaian context adds to the dynamics even as oil palm in itself has high material flexibility for cultural and everyday domestic use<sup>5</sup>, and local small-scale businesses. Oil palm is already deeply embedded into the domestic, artisan and industrial sectors. This contrasts with Asian context where it does not have strong cultural significance in its raw/unrefined form thus suspicions about investor interests do not go unnoticed in such places (Fold & Whitfield, 2012). The societal embeddedness of oil palm in Ghana makes it an interesting case of enquiry — for exploring local people's perceptions and the role of the state. Oil palm has also been at the centre of several state policies in Ghana. As indicated in chapter one, the interests in oil palm can be traced to the post-independence compulsory land acquisitions, and to recent special initiatives to drive both export and local oil palm supply. The study provides evidence into the indirect and subtle ways in which the state is implicated in recent land deals. Further explained in chapters three and four, the birth and sustenance of SGSOG-Herakles-VR is strongly linked to agricultural and investment policies and projects, the promotion of market-led land tenure systems and the state's failure to deliver basic social services in rural areas. Also, the Volta Red plantation is a relatively

young agribusiness, and the largest scale oil palm plantation in the Volta region, which requires research attention. Numerous studies have investigated the older plantations: Amanor, (1999) situated in the global food and land restructuring; Gyasi (1994) explored the economic and environmental viability of the plantations; and Nolte & Vãth, (2015) have discussed its governance processes. The land-labour nexus remains under explored.

## 2.8 Data Processing and Analysis

In this study, data was collected from households, individuals and groups while at the same time, engaging with several concepts: land grabs, wage labour, peasantry, and rural livelihoods. To be able to collate, process, and interpret the data, careful and well-thought-through analytical processes were followed. I used SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) software to collate, organize and analyse the survey results. The study also benefitted from the process tracing method. Collier (2011 p. 823) defines process tracing as the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions. This requires a search for diagnostic evidence that sets the platform for detailed narratives and thick descriptive and causal inferences. It was useful for explanatory purposes, especially for bringing snapshots and pieces of evidence together (Gerringer, 2007). Aside from my field notes, I transcribed about 90 per cent of all the recorded interviews which also helped my analysis.

## 2.9 Ethical Consideration

A key area for ethical consideration is consent. Appropriate community entry strategies were employed. In many rural communities in Ghana, consultation with the relevant traditional councils, local government authorities, and sometimes even family heads are very important for a researcher to be accepted and for a supportive research experience. Appropriate entry consultations were made at the communities during the first and second phases of my fieldwork. The research purpose was disclosed to all participants prior to seeking their consents to the research. It was usually done verbally except in instances such as during institutional interviews, when upon request, documented proofs were added. Permissions were also sought for the recording of interviews. Participants were also informed

about how the data was to be analysed and reported, and anonymity assured. The study was approached from the angle of researching ‘with’ land-deal affected communities with the intention of producing socially meaningful results.

## **2.10 Strategizing around Limitations**

Prior to the fieldwork, I anticipated that language barriers could affect data collection. However, upon visiting the research communities, I realized I could communicate in the Akan language with the vast majority of the people. In the few instances of communication barriers, I sought the assistance of interpreters. Institutional interviews were mainly conducted in the English language.

Also, every academic research is time bound thus dictating what data collection methods are adopted. Field visits were planned around available resources and the agricultural seasons. To optimize the resources available for this study, follow-up communication continued even after field visits. As indicated earlier, field visits were also planned in phases, taking consideration of the different agricultural seasons that affect the availability of farmers and farmworkers, and the kind of data that can be collected. Gathering data in the form of long survey questionnaires and one-to-one interviews with piece-rate farmworkers was also very challenging. The farm workers spend eight hours of their day on the plantation, doing very tedious work and often get home late to their businesses, do house chores, spend time with their families, rest, or go to their own farms. Thus, in principle, no period or place was appropriate to engage them in long hours of conversations that do not bring tangible and immediate results to them. I therefore had to ensure a good balance of my own moral judgment, and the time constraints of the research in deciding when and where to engage the farmworkers. The survey team and myself often engaged them during the breaktimes, a one-hour window at the end of their work when they waited to be transported. When permitted by them and their supervisors, we also talked to them casually or at their own pace during their work hours. Through phone calls, we also scheduled the survey and interview appointments at their homes in the evenings and on weekends, particularly Sundays. Again, It also took a very long process of explanations for some of the land owning families and the farmworkers to understand the direction of the research — especially having to regularly convince them I am not an undercover investigator for the company or the government.

Building good relations takes time but it facilitated the research when people opened up and directed me to sources of data.

Still, having access to adequate and reliable information remains one of the most challenging issues I envisaged for this work. From my background of conducting many socio-economic and baseline surveys and interviews in rural Ghana over the past ten years, I came to realize there are many shortcomings in having access to good quality data. In Ghana, access to institutional data that is recent and comprehensive can be sometimes difficult. Other issues ranging from people being exhausted from frequent 'data extraction' without accompanying interventions, to poor record keeping, to reporting biases, to the seasonality of livelihood conditions, to the non-conformity of people's everyday livelihood patterns with many pre-determined data collection standards and indicators, among others, all affect the quality of data (Wuyt, 2011). Following the widespread media presence around the issues of land grabs, I anticipated reluctance from the company to provide ample and full information on their dealings. To my surprise, they provided considerable access to information although initially there were attempts to dissuade me from focusing my attention on the affected communities; the plantation is located the outskirts of the towns while the processing mill is another district, several kilometres away from the communities. Nonetheless, the management of the company had their own reservations about the potential damaging effects of my research and the potential impacts on awareness creation and political demands from the workers and families. As expected, there were also discrepancies in narratives and accounts between the company and the affected groups. These are real limitations that are often difficult to overcome, but as a way to minimise its potential impact on the outcome of the research, I did a lot of triangulation. For instance, due to my long presence in the community and on the plantation, I could identify many of the farmworkers by name and this enabled me to probe and compare the survey data with more directed one-to-one interviews. Again, individual interviews with all the representatives of the land deal affected families, enabled me to identify and assess the inconsistencies between them and the company for further probing. I took the necessary steps to build trust, engage in community activities, and other social gatherings to have a better understanding of the contexts of the information provided.

## 2.11 Positionality and Methodological Reflections

A vital aspect of any empirical studies and particularly on land grab research is that researchers need to 'reflect on the impacts of their own positionality and ideological biases on research questions, methods and the interpretation of the evidence (Oya, 2013a, p. 516). It is therefore important to make readers aware of one's positionality, but even more, that we do not hold on to them rigidly in ways that inhibit us from being open to other ideas and dimensions. Having had a first-hand experience of a remote rural life, (my father migrated after active service in the military and health sector work in the city to engage in farming and the provision of health care in my village) I grew up observing and sympathizing with rural people on issues of poverty and inequality. Growing up, I spent considerable time in my village in southern Ghana but I was relatively more privileged than many of my mates. My parents could afford private basic education in the city, and I had family support to live in the city. Many of my childhood colleagues resorted to early parenthood, others struggled to sail through school or look for jobs elsewhere but were not so successful, some have made it through small farming, petty commodity production and engagement in other services, while for many, everyday life is a constant struggle of making ends meet through any means possible. These are daily struggles that play out in different but also similar ways in many rural communities in Ghana, where access to basic needs continue to be a challenge. These continue to influence my perceptions around land deals as being sites of survival and diverse livelihood strategies that addresses some essential needs at least in the short term. Yet, at the same time, I am of the view that the terms of incorporation and power relations are determined by these conditions as well as other social structures, especially the deeply rooted patriarchal relations that penetrate almost every aspect of the Ghanaian society. These together, shape my thinking of land deals as sites of survival and exploitation.

However, as indicated by Oya, (2013, p. 516), doing an independent research implies that the more we recognize our own ideological standpoints, the more we should put in efforts to engage with evidence that could be contradictory or challenge our ideas. Following that my research and training is grounded in critical agrarian studies, there was also the tendency to incline towards a pessimistic view of issues right from the onset, and this is something I tried to minimize as much as possible by starting off very open minded and establishing very good relations with the



management of Volta red, who even supported my research in diverse ways: through community entry, accommodation, access to the plantation, and even organizing the farmworkers to introduce my work and for FGDs. Yet, sometimes good intentions can also lead to negative outcomes. One example was that, the more I related closely to the company to access information, the more distant I was perceived by the people affected by the land deal, leading to initial perceptions of my being affiliated to the company. This is coupled with the fact that in the initial phases, under the constraints of accommodation, commuting limited the planning of the data collection, especially in the evenings. Later on, I lived in the Brewaniase and it was a very humbling moment for me as many people appreciated and supported my research in diverse ways. This also had its own implications. To all the participants, I was still seen as a potential source of intervention to individual concerns and the competing interests. In fact, upon several requests, I did promise the family representatives, chiefs and some other key participants including the management, to provide copies of this dissertation — which also has its own implications on how I'm perceived — especially being a Ghanaian and a researcher who hopes to return to these communities in future for research and policy purposes. Having a good balance between sentiments and objectivity was necessary in both data collection and analysis. I was also aware of how both my 'outsider' and 'insider' statuses could influence this research. I am not an indigene, and it was this research that introduced me to those communities so my knowledge of their culture is not exhaustive. However, being a resident Ghanaian, I also assume an insider status. This creates a tendency of conflating known stereotypes, assumptions and ground realities. My analysis therefore benefited immensely from feedback from my field assistants, peers, and supervisors.

That said, the outcome of this dissertation is influenced by a constant process of reflexivity and my own positionality on the subject. I recall one of my days on field work during the off-peak season when I met a group of laid-off young men who were, in the interim, loading timber onto trucks for cash. Casually but meaningfully, they said it would be good for me to take over the management of the company so that the conditions of work would be improved. Early on, the daughter of one of the family heads, who, although she expressed some reservations about the land deal, said to me 'let's go and see what they have done to the land: it is nicely cleared and beautiful'. These two incidences caused me to think a lot about what

people want, what looks attractive, their reasons, their expectations of me and the need to be cautious about our own ideological biases and how we present the perspectives of the people we engage.

Another important methodological issue that came to my attention during fieldwork is that of 'consent'. There were several instances where participants stopped me in the middle of my interviews for clarification on my research, or their mannerism showed that they were uncomfortable with providing information even though they had consented to participate. There were three main factors that affected people's willingness to engage with the research. Some people expressed the fear that I could be affiliated to a prominent undercover Ghanaian journalist<sup>6</sup> who exposes corrupt individuals. An educated family head constantly asked me 'are u sure we will not be arrested; won't you write something that will make the police arrest me?' His perception changed during my follow-up field visits. Unlike southern and the northern regions of Ghana, this area has not been exposed to many researchers and so, it was a new experience for many people. I already mentioned how in Ghana, most rural people expect tangible and immediate intervention from researchers or from people like me who are asking about their problems. It was disappointing to many, and frustrating for me as well, that I could not make such promises, and this also sometimes affected participation and responses. I believe that as researchers, we have a duty of care and we need to be very observant in such situations, so we do not extort data from people who may formally agree to participate but might not understand the full picture and implications of their responses. It took me several rounds of explaining my research, follow-up visits and conversations, promises of anonymity, and sharing some of my own experiences and relating to theirs in order to build trust and actual consent.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> One of the six newly created regions of Ghana since December 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Herakles capital is an Africa-focused private investment firm involved in the telecommunications, energy, infrastructure, mining and agro-industrial sectors <https://www.forestpeoples.org>

<sup>3</sup> Lands held under the custody of traditional chiefs and kings.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.landmatrix.org/en/>

<sup>5</sup> Oil palm is the source of sweeping brooms, fuelwood, local soaps, mushrooms, palm oil, palm kernel oil, palm wine and other local alcoholic beverages.

<sup>6</sup> <https://anasaremeyawanas.org>

# 3

## Agricultural Policy, Farming Systems, and Food Politics in Ghana

### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter three sets the historical, social, economic and political context of the research. It looks at the social structures that shape land and labour institutions and how agricultural policies, past and present influence investment drive in Ghana, and their implications for rural livelihoods.

### 3.2 Plantations and Commercial Agriculture under Colonial Administration: Impacts on Land and Labour

Land holds a sacred significance in the diverse traditional beliefs in Ghana: as the property of an earth spirit among the northern ethnic groups; to the Ga people, it is connected to sacred lagoons; and to the Asante people, she is a supernatural female force for the sustenance of man. Concepts of land ownership were thus intricately linked to the practice of ancestral worship (Asante, 1965). Prior to the predominance of farming economies, people did not claim exclusive user and ownership rights, tribe members had equal rights to wander over and hunt upon the land which belonged to their group. Later, when people settled down to farming as the main economic activity, and stool subjects reduced portions of land into their possession for the purposes of cultivation, there developed the concept of the subject's usufructuary right to stool land, that is to say, the right to occupy, till, or otherwise enjoy an unappropriated portion of stool land and to appropriate the fruits of such use (Asante, 1965, p. 853).

Historically, Ghana's (and many other West African Countries) agricultural production system has been fashioned around family farming and small-scale peasant practices aimed at simple reproduction. Farmers resorted to shifting cultivation and land rotation, not only as established patterns of agricultural behaviour, but as a means of preserving the soil's

fertility (Asante, 1965). For instance, in the early nineteenth century, much of the agricultural activities in the Ghana remained largely undeveloped, subsistent and in closed system (Amanor, 1999). Even in the preceding century, oil palm trees were more or less wild crops (not cultivated in a planned order) that grew on family and communal owned stool lands<sup>1</sup> and therefore natives had conventional entitlements to harvesting mainly for subsistence and under certain conditions such as sharing proceeds with the chief (custodian of the land) for the maintenance of the stool (Gyasi, 1994; Maier, 2009). This does not deny the fact that market exchanges have always existed even in pre-colonial periods, however, with colonial influence and their extractive inclinations, there were efforts to expand capital into rural areas — through the introduction of export crop plantations and the development of commercial farming systems.

The plantation system was introduced to the coast of Ghana by the Dutch in the early eighteenth century and their establishment expanded from the late 1800s under the British colonial administration. For instance, in the aftermath of the slave trade, palm oil became one of the major crops integral to the economies of West Africa, serving the pressing demands of the chemical, cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries in Europe (Huddleston & Tonts, 2007). Following the British's plan to expand large-scale commercial farming, Tudhope, the Gold Coast Director of Agriculture from 1907-1924, is said to have suggested that

in European countries and America, one of the aims of an agricultural department is to experiment, to educate and to advise farmers, thus assisting them to produce large and good crops which for the most parts are grown for home consumption. The aims of a tropical agricultural department are similar with this difference, that to be economically successful those crops which produce articles for export receive most attention (in Graham page 39).

The plantation system, however, received resistances from some farmers, partly because of inter-ethnic conflicts and inter-colonial disputes over territorial expansion and acquisition (Huddleston & Tonts, 2007). As of the 1920s, when the world prices for oil palm were falling steadily, the British diverted interests in cocoa production, centred around smallholder systems. Indeed, the plan was not to entirely replace small-scale farms with plantations. As Carrere, (2010 p.47) has noted, under the British colonial administration, 'the peasant system was considered a tried and inexpensive method of producing tropical export crops' and the British dreaded the

negative implications of alienating peasants which could cause conflicts, and disrupt the export economy. An extract from a report of Commission on Economic Agriculture under the British rule, as recorded in Graham (1993 p33) further highlights this position

the discovery that pure clean [palm oil] pays better than bad and dirty oil will effect a revolution in oil making and that coconut cultivation should recommend itself to the natives ... as the capital required is small, and the labour of cultivating the trees and collecting the nuts need not interfere with the cultivation of his food crops.

Small-scale production persisted alongside the newly introduced plantation mode of production that was to feed into the export economy. The prevalence of cash crops including cocoa, oil palm, rubber, coffee, coconut, kola and shallot, grown for export, led to the commercialization of agriculture throughout the country. Plantations cause further changes to land access and use. Plantation-based cash crops are perennial trees which could produce income to land owners for decades. Permanent cultivation disrupted the classical usufruct access particularly among the Akans in the south, where rights to alienate farms gradually morphed into land alienation practices subject to formal reference to the stool (Asante, 1965). Coinciding with the British introduction of highly contested land bills intended to institutionalize private property and land acquisitions, the European concepts of freehold, and other individualized property relations began to take roots in the country. Again, the economic yields of commercial agriculture led to a high demand for land as a commodity of commerce — transforming land use, food and diets, and access to labour especially in a rapidly growing population (Austin, 2007).

This new economy required cheap labour flow to the forest zones from all parts (the southern colony and the northern territories) due to the unequal distribution of natural and economic resources (Yaro et al 217). Also, it attracted labour from the neighbouring French colonies. This contributed to institutional innovations among landed classes in the south in accessing labour and a plurality of land tenure regimes. For cocoa producers, especially the absentee land owners, sharecropping became an effective channel to mobilize land and labour for the new cash economy, with several variants of it evolving over the years (Capps, 2018). At the same time, different forms of wage labour relations emerged on plantations. A sketchy overview of some of these changes in farmland use and labour

before and during British colonial rule in Ghana is shown in Table 3.1 below.

*Table 3.1  
Land and Labour under British Colonial Administration*

	Some Key events	Impact on Land, farms and the export economy	Impact on farm labour relations
1800-1870	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British abolition</li> <li>• Slave trade persists in eastern Volta till 1850s</li> <li>• Gold rush</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abundant land</li> <li>• Valuable tree crops</li> <li>• Oil palm and gold export to Europe;</li> <li>• Kola nuts to Northern Nigeria</li> <li>• Pockets of land transactions (Akyem)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal trade in labour</li> </ul>
1870-1920	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anglo-Ashanti War</li> <li>• Colonization</li> <li>• Legal Abolition of slavery drives Akyem chiefs into debt</li> <li>• Internal market integration (e.g. common currency)</li> <li>• Frontiers and border tariffs</li> <li>• Deepened international commodity markets (cocoa)</li> <li>• Mechanized transport</li> <li>• Crowns bill 1894</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restraints to regional kola nuts exports</li> <li>• Rise in mining and tree cropping</li> <li>• Increased transport of farm products,</li> <li>• Head loading from farm to local markets</li> <li>• Internal scramble for land (Akyem)</li> <li>• Land rental)</li> <li>• Market in agricultural land rights (cocoa mortgage)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From coerced to 'free labour'</li> <li>• Increased paid labour relations (biannual. Annual wages)</li> <li>• Caretaking</li> <li>• Labour immigration from neighbouring French colonies</li> </ul>
1920-1950s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The great depression</li> <li>• A fall in cocoa price in the 1930s affect returns to land and labour</li> <li>• Surge in population density (esp. in southern Ghana)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded area cover and cocoa export</li> <li>• Increasing land scarcity in the older cocoa producing areas and the forest zone</li> <li>• Land alienation to migrants</li> <li>• Extended scope and coverage of land transactions through sales, long-term credit, and lease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal labour immigration (advancing frontier of cocoa cultivation)</li> <li>• Long-term managerial Sharecropping</li> <li>• Unfree labour-debt bondage</li> <li>• Innovations in labour relations</li> </ul>

Sources : Author's compilation from various sources Amanor, 2001; K. S. Amanor, (1999, 2012); Austin (2007); Wilson (1990).

### 3.3 Agricultural Policies at Independence: 1957-1999

Unlike elsewhere in the African continent where even after colonial rule agriculture was dominated by settler colonialists, in West Africa agricultural production was in the hands of indigenous peasants<sup>2</sup> (Jonah, 1985). Yet upon independence in 1957, Ghana had inherited an economy dependent on exports, yet, still not having the much-expected trickle down of benefits to local people's food security. There were food shortages and a growing reliance on food imports and basic consumables even as Nkrumah's government sought to transform the economic structure of the country. Strongly driven by a state-socialist ideological standpoint or as Oya, (2007) describes it, 'a compromise between technocratic "developmentalism" and rural Socialism' and modernization ideas, Nkrumah and the Conventional People's Party (CPP) governing body approached development from a socio-spatial equity, poverty alleviation and import substitution industrialization viewpoint. While many of these policies were designed to improve local food sufficiency mainly through boosting local production, the accompanying agricultural models, by and large, favoured large-scale production schemes, with the exception of the cocoa sector, historically a smallholder domain which continues to receive state support in subsidies, input supply and market, given its special contribution to Ghana's economy (Amanor, 2012). A central view expressed in the five-year development plan of the first republic (1951-1966), indicated that small-scale agriculture could not be easily modernized and adapted to the growing need for rapid economic development and industrialization (Dapaah, 1995). The government committed huge investments into agricultural research and innovation, all of which were inclined towards modernization — mainly experiments with large-scale production of alternative cash crops, the use of improved seedlings, and mechanization to promote economic growth and development (Akoto, 1987).

Towards the early 1970s when the global economic crises and increased debts affected many national economies, various governments also experienced social and political unrests associated with the not-so-successful interventionist policies. For instance, the period between 1966 and 1980 was a politically unstable period in Ghana. Several policies were introduced by different governments to revamp the agricultural sector yet many tended to be reactive and failed to address systemic issues in the sector. The National Redemption Council's (NRC) operation 'feed yourself' was,

for instance, a bold step towards local food production, yet relied on the promotion of large-scale farms through extensive access to land, credit and other inputs<sup>3</sup>. As emphasized by Jonah, (1985, p. 88)

In 1974 the N.R.C. introduced a Special Agriculture Scheme aimed at attracting foreign investors into Ghana's agricultural sector with the aid of a package of incentives. This scheme was designed to be the Third Phase of the famous Operation Feed Yourself Programme. The incentives consisted mainly of tax waivers, import duty exemptions, liberalized profit transfers and Government assistance in the acquisition of land in case of difficulties.

A critical review of the policy directions between the period of 1957 to the late 1970s suggest that the policy directions of the different regimes tended to prioritize large-scale, capital-intensive schemes over small-scale production systems. This is not to say that state policies have over the years sought to destroy completely the peasant system of production with large-scale schemes. Rather 'the innovations were expected to be taken up by richer progressive farmers and then diffused to the laggards [smallholder farmers] as they realized the benefits of new technology' (Amanor, 1999, p. 29). To date, most of the policy strategies have approached small-scale schemes from the intention of integrating them into competitive markets and the value chains of commercial systems, which have more often than not hindered their growth.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Ghana also had her share of economic crises. During this period, the average national growth rate was around 0.2 per cent, whilst that of GDP from agriculture was -1.2. Exacerbating these issues was the fact that at an annual growth rate of 2.6 per cent, Ghana's population rose from 8.6 million in 1970 to 12.2 million in 1980, partly contributing to a 28 per cent decline in food production (Dapaah, 1995). To intervene in the economic crisis, Ghana, with assistance from the World Bank Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) in 1983 and through the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the late 1980s, the agricultural sector became a target of liberalization policies. Guided by the need to get the prices right for state building (Bates 1983), emphasis was placed on the removal of subsidies and marketing boards, while export agriculture (with the introduction of non-traditional exports crops i.e. horticulture, fruits, and vegetables) got back on the list of policy priorities. This policy direction was also supported with market-oriented land administration reforms to facilitate private investments in agricultural lands



and international trade. Free trade affected the demand for local food produce, as Ghana opened up its markets to cheap food imports.

Although small-scale producers still dominated the food crop and cocoa sector, the introduction of non-traditional exports crops contributed to a rise in the number of medium-scale farmers and transnational investors who capitalised on the open land and agricultural market. The 1980s and 1990s marked a continuation of the structure of the 1970's plantation and out-grower models under private ownership (Yaro et al 2017). In the 1990s, several private sector partnerships and takeovers of the pre-existing state-owned plantations occurred, while an enabling policy environment was also created for new large-scale land acquisitions by private investors. Since then, Ghana has been inclined towards minimal administrative role of the state in agriculture. The role of the state has been to create an enabling environment for investments in agriculture through market-led land policies, supportive financial regulations, and attempts to incorporate small-scale farmers into value chains among others, thus expanding the landscape for land deals in Ghana.

### **3.4 Post-2000: Invest in, Industrialize, and Modernize Agriculture**

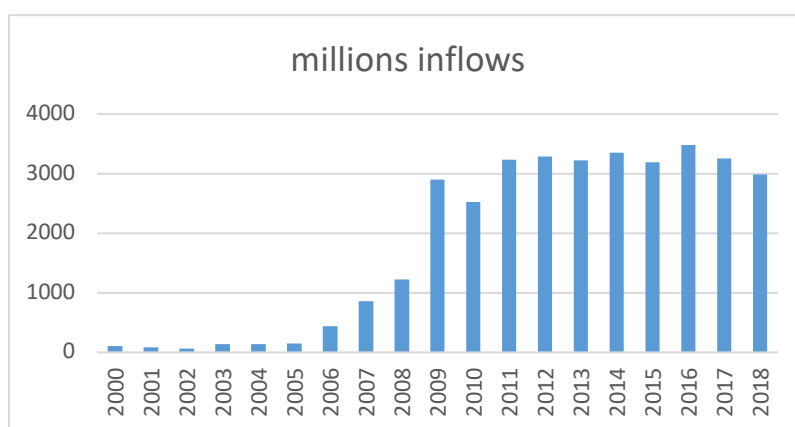
#### **3.4.1 Making Ghana an attractive investment destination in Africa**

In Ghana, the rise in transnational large-scale agricultural land acquisitions sits within a broad investment promotion agenda and regulatory reforms by successive governments. The role of external capital inflows, especially through private sector and Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in the economic growth and development in Africa has received strong attention in policy recommendations and academic research in the current neoliberal development paradigm. FDI is the largest source of external finance for developing countries. Since the 1990s, FDI to Africa has been on the rise, and particularly, the international community have been strong advocates for considerable investment for the financing of international development agendas. Making reference to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Addison & Mavrotas, (2006) cited the potential of FDIs in capital accumulation and revenue mobilization to host governments for MDG-based financing of infrastructure and service provision. The current era of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has also driven the so-

called Sustainable Development Investments (SDIs) aimed at steering ‘foreign direct investment towards the achievement of the Goals. Governments are therefore encouraged to create favourable investment environments and, where possible and relevant, provide appropriate levels of access to SDG-related sectors for private and international investors. In some sectors that are not yet open to foreign investment, a gradual opening could be achieved through, for example, services contracts and public–private partnerships’ (UNCTAD, 2017, p. 3).

In Ghana, the post 2008 period has seen the highest FDI to GDP ratio, with the highest of 9.52 per cent in 2008, and averaged at 7.23 per cent between 2008 and 2017; higher than the world average during that period. The 2019 World Investment Report (WIR) ranked Ghana as the largest FDI recipient in West Africa, and has in the past three years, been among the top five hosts of FDI in Africa. Although inflows decreased by 8 per cent in 2018, the trend shows an exponential growth from 2006 till date (see Figure 3.1). Most of these investments have been oriented towards the oil and gas industry but increasingly, the telecommunication, hospitality, food and agricultural sectors are also becoming attractive to foreign investors.

*Figure 3.1* Trend of FDI inflows to Ghana



Source: World Investment reports (2000-2018).

There have been shifts in regulatory and policy incentives in the past two decades to facilitate FDIs. Mirroring a global development paradigm of

privatization and liberal market reforms, Ghana, (similar to the cases of Senegal, Egypt, and South Africa) has been actively engaged in regulatory policies to attract investors through tax, customs and financial incentives. In the year 2000, when the New Patriotic Party (NPP) won power from a political party that was previously military inclined, the leadership of the party declared a golden age of business, created a Ministry for Private Sector Development with the hopes of radical economic transformation (Aryeetey & Owoo, 2015). President Kufuor, the leader of the NPP government, and many of his affiliates were known to be successful businessmen, thus the pro-market/business direction came as no surprise. In his pursuit of a private sector driven industrialization policy, the NPP government established the President's Special Initiative (PSI), a policy programme to build state-private sector relations for the mobilization of private initiative and the expansion of the industrial and export base (mostly agricultural produce) of the country (ibid). The PSI was confronted with implementation challenges on political and economic grounds, leading to its collapse after a few years. Nonetheless, successive governments have all pursued pro-market approaches to attract investments. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) government, after gaining back power in 2008 also pushed for private sector development and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and foreign investments. There have been several institutional establishments and the reorganization of the structures and mandates of existing ones to make them available to investors and also to ensure easy access to relevant business information.

Between 2003 and 2017, there has been a steady fall in the cost of business start-ups, radically falling from an index of 80.50 to 17.50. Even more significantly is the numerous tax reforms in the business sector (Osei & Quartey, 2005). Since 1989, Ghana has been in Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) with several countries. However, since 2006, Ghana has signed tax treaties with countries including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, South Africa and Switzerland on the avoidance of double taxation and several others yet to be ratified. The Income Tax Act 2015 (Act 896) allows corporate income tax reductions from the standard 25 per cent to 22 per cent for hotel businesses, to 8 per cent for non-traditional horticultural and agro-export businesses, to 1 per cent in agro-processing in the first five years, and to 20 per cent to financial institutions that provide loans to farming enterprises. Investments in tree crops including oil palm, have received a 10-year tax holiday while agribusinesses

in rural areas enjoy additional incentives (Bekoe, et al, 2016). Manufacturing business located in the special economic zones or free zone enclaves also enjoy an income tax holiday for a period of 10 years. Similarly, the state, through the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) has a mandate of identifying and promoting 'strategic investments' in priority sectors' agribusiness who get special import duty concessions, and special tax waivers.

Clearly, tax incentives do not necessarily guarantee investment interests. Other conditions such as fluctuating exchange rates, land tenure, political instability as well as policies that address poor access to infrastructure, information technology and energy etc. can influence the overall investment environment (Choi, 2003; Musila & Sigué, 2006). The impact of the remaining potential negativities to investors are likely to be counterbalanced by the natural resources, weak governance structures, and the hegemony of trade liberalization at the global scale which also influence the policy space of host governments. As firmly argued by Chang (2006), since the 1980s, the policy space of national governments has been shrinking due to macroeconomic conditionalities, and the role of the international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). A study of the pattern of investments promotion in Ghana by Dagbanja, (2014) suggests prior to SAPs, contribution to the national economy took centre stage in investment laws, but with the recent introduction of Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements (IPPAs), investment policies emphasize more on minimum capital requirements, than its impacts on the national economy. As such, although these incentives build the image of Ghana as an attractive location for foreign businesses, they do not necessarily translate into significant livelihood and development outcomes at the local level. Particularly, the net impact of mineral, oil and gas sectors dominated by foreign investors is very modest, and with an increasing public dissatisfaction. Chinese investors have gained strong holds of small-scale 'illicit' mining. The resultant effect is the resource conflicts between miners and farmers, not to mention the environmental and human dangers associated with such operations. The discovery of oil in Ghana in 2003, drove high job creation expectations which are yet to manifest among the ordinary people who are increasingly accusing the state of power imbalances between corporate and community interests (Ayee, et al 2011).

The FDI drive begs the question of how countries like Ghana, with relatively weak regulatory policies and policy implementation challenges enhance employment when the profitability of such foreign investments is also dependent on cheap labour and access to land resources? In the 2015 EXPO Milano Exhibition, the ministry of food and agriculture made available a list of public lands and priority crops earmarked for large-scale investments while inviting partnership opportunities from the Western countries. In a recent paper by Dzansi et al, (2018) purported to be a guide book to investors interested in the recent ‘one district one factory’ policy, instead of problematizing the employment situation in Ghana, they list the availability of cheap skilled and unskilled labour as an advantage to be harnessed. The ‘one district one factory’ is the flagship project of the current NPP government under president Akuffo Addo as part of his industrialization drive. The project aims to provide ‘direct financial support and incentives to investors. This includes securing ‘litigation free land’, access to utilities and support to transnational corporations (GIPC, pg. 41). Interviews conducted at the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) revealed the enormous efforts to which they go to support investors to acquire land for their projects, without corresponding assistance (e.g. to negotiate such deals) to local host communities. Whereas most of the support to investors is already institutionalized in the registration processes and incentives, the needs of communities are largely overlooked, or at best handled on ad hoc bases. For instance, per the mandate of GIPC, investors are supposed to meet some financial standards with an accompanying bank certification. However, land leases and information on acquisition processes are completely thrown to the background, especially when the investor indicates that the land has already been acquired. If the investor needs land, GIPC acting in the interests of the state, helps secure the land, without being commensurate with the models of production and the potential impacts on communities.

#### **3.4.2 Boosting National Food Self-sufficiency, Promoting Cash Crops, and Creating Jobs**

Like many other West African countries, agriculture plays a key role in the economy. Almost fifty percent of the national labour force is employed within the sector (FAO, 2015). Reports show a trend of growing opportunities for agricultural growth and developmental prospects, many of which have been associated with increased local and global demand for

food and improved policy environments (Hollinger and Staatz, 2015). The economy relies on food crops including cassava, yam, maize, plantains etc. and major cash crops including, cocoa, pineapples, cashew, and palm oil. As of 2019, agriculture contributed to 54 per cent of Ghana's GDP, accounted for over 40 per cent of export earnings while at the same time providing over 90 per cent of the food needs of the country (FAO, 2020). It is said that the country is fairly food secure as iterated by President Akufo Addo in 2018 when he unveiled the Ghana Zero Hunger strategic review report,

we were the first country on the African continent to attain the Millennium Development Goal No. 1 of halving poverty and hunger, for which the country received an award 'for reducing the level of its malnourished population from 7 million in the early 1990s to less than 1 million today'.

Yet the food security situation is far more complex than the assurance above. There are seasonal and geographical disparities. Also, Ghana's food security is still embedded in an import dependence economy (rice, tomatoes and poultry) — a system that negates the fundamentals of food self-sufficiency — a kind of food sovereignty which past governments sought to address. Whilst the national food production meets domestic demand for roots and tubers, just about 30 per cent of demand for rice is met locally. Over a billion dollars is spent on rice imports annually. In 2014, more than 67.48 per cent (an increase from 27.12 per cent in 1993) of consumed chicken meat was imported mainly from the USA, Brazil and the European Union. These production deficits have often been attributed, narrowly to the surge in urbanization and the demand for cheap food, population growth, high cost of production and processing, and low productivity. The NPP, since 2016, has rekindled policy discussions and programmes for national food self-sufficiency. By this the government, in 2017 launched a four-year programme, dubbed 'Planting for Food and Jobs' (PFJ). Similar to operation feed yourself, PFJ 'focuses on maize, rice, soybean, sorghum and vegetables and it is expected to benefit small farmers and the youth. The goal of the policy is to the address 'the twin-problem of the migration of youth to city centres in search of non-existent jobs, and reduce Ghana's importation of foodstuff'. The PFJ is expected to reach at least 1 million farmers, 5,000 nucleus farms and 2,000 Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs) that are engaged in production of the prioritized food crops by 2020 (Rep. of Ghana, 2017). In principle, this policy

challenges conventional notions of food security, and suggests alternatives that build the local economy as recognized in the PJF strategic plan:

...attaining food security through self-sufficiency has been a policy priority in Ghana. While self-sufficiency signifies that Ghana produces all its food needs, food security implies the availability and physical access to food by the population, irrespective of whether or not it is produced within the country.

At 34th National Farmers in December 2019, the vice president of Ghana also charged the agricultural ministry to ensure national sufficiency in poultry. Also, in response to a statement by the Minister of Agriculture declaring maize sufficiency under the PFJ, the Vice president said to him,

...you have announced that we've stopped importing maize this year, so very soon, in the next couple of years, I want you to announce that we've also stopped importing chicken. That is the challenge that I want to give you in the next couple of years. We have to pursue a very deliberate policy intervention to make sure that we can grow and eat our own chicken.

A year into the implementation of the PFJ, the Ministry of Agriculture suggest that the project had benefitted some 745,000 farmers. The programme is also expected to complement the Government's 'one district one factory' initiative to serve as forward linkage to the implementation of relevant national programmes and initiatives e.g. school feeding. The programme, for example, has a smallholder component that seeks to support farmers through subsidized fertilizer supply, extension services, improved seeds, access to markets and technology. Yet, its implementation does not adequately address structural inequalities of land access for the rural working poor.

Since 2000, policies to support food crops have also been accompanied by plans to boost cash and tree crops for local, regional and international markets. This is evident in the expansion of subsidies in the form of fertilizers and agro-chemicals in the cocoa and cotton sector, the construction of 'cocoa roads' to facilitate distribution and marketing and the recent tree crop policy. In 2003, the NPP Government, under the president John Kufuor, launched the President's Special Initiative (PSI) which targeted the textiles and garments, salt mining, oil palm, and cassava starch production sectors, to champion Ghana's drive to expand its markets to global levels of competitiveness (Asante, 2012). Oil palm, which is a staple in the Ghanaian food, soap and drinks industry was not only facing deficits of

about 240,000 tons per year in production for domestic consumption, but also its potential to compete with South East Asia in meeting the demands of the West was not being achieved. The project was implemented through oil palm research, and nursery plantations established through private operators. As such, nucleus farms, smallholder farms and out-grower schemes were established to feed oil mills in selected oil palm viable areas. Although the politics around the initiative could not lead to the materializing of an ambitious target of bringing 300 000 ha of land under oil palm cultivation, it certainly contributed to the expansion in investor and farmer interests in the sector, not only through the establishment of estates but also in other related businesses along the value chain (Gyapong, 2018).

In 2012, the Ghana Commercial Agricultural Project (GCAP) funded by USAID and the World Bank was launched. The 8-year project, has a goal of moving ‘farming from the present subsistence level to a commercial level that ensures wealth creation and food security in the country’ (Republic of Ghana, 2015a). In an interview with an official, she indicated the project has undergone restructuring to include irrigation and the supply of seeds to support the PFJ. However, a main component of it was the promotion of food crops such as rice to bring in cash to local communities. In some cases, there were indications that smallholders incorporated into the value chain as contract farmers may have experienced some forms of displacements but were apparently resettled and prioritized for the out-grower scheme of the project. The project has also come up with a ‘model lease agreement’ to guide large-scale investments in Ghana. Yet as in many cases, such models may not necessarily be consulted or binding on investors, who are not required as part of business registration processes to present lease documents.

### 3.5 Labour and the Organization of Family Farming in Ghana

Despite the influx of agribusinesses and large-scale investors, over seventy per cent of the total food produced in Ghana is still done by peasants and smallholders. There is no generally accepted characterization of what constitutes a large, medium or small-scale farm in Ghana. However, farm sizes are conventionally measured in small units i.e. in acreage or even lower, i.e. ‘ropes’ (one-ninth of an acre) all of which attest to the peasant nature of farming in Ghana. In rural agrarian settings, family farming is



predominant. Family farming covers a broad range of situations. Nonetheless, it is generally characterized by the particular connection between the structure and composition of the household, assets, farming activities, paid and unpaid family or wage labour (Toulmin, & Gueye, 2003). Farm households, which could transcend family ties constitute the domestic group or unit which works a common field. Not only in Ghana, but across West Africa, family farming makes up a significant share of rural people's way of life. The persistence of family have been linked to their adaptability (Gyasi, 1994), robustness (Bélières, et al 2002; van der Ploeg, 2010), and their embeddedness in strong family relations and cultural bonds or what Ngwainmbi, (2000) refers to as the 'economy of affection'. Contrary to the predictions of the demise of the peasantry, family farming persists even under unfavourable policies.

Nonetheless, over time family farming has gone through several transformations such as the growing fragmentation of large households, nucleation, individualization and seasonal variation in household dynamics (NEPAD, 2013; Touré & Seck, 2005). Also, as a farming system which functions both as a production unit and a complex social organization, family farmers have, and continue to experience changes in their modes of production and reproduction, particularly in the labour dynamics. The literature on family farms in Africa is scanty, but there is evidence of substantive and complex wage labour relations among family farmers (Amanor, 2010; Van Hear, 1984). Unlike the Russian peasant that Chayanov studied, peasant farming today is embedded in a 'new rurality', and not confined to a dependence on a free family labour (Kay, 2015).

While earlier research in Ghana by Van Hear (1984) attributed the viability of the family farm as being a fall-back haven for members, recent studies reveal otherwise. Many youths do not find farming attractive due to declining returns, inadequate government support and growing urbanization<sup>4</sup> that propel them to pursue non-existent off-farm and city jobs (Ariyo & Mortimore, 2012; Richards, 2005). There is also a declining moral economy, intergenerational struggles and control of youth by elders which are manifested on the one hand, in the increasing withdrawal of youth's labour services in family farms, and on the other hand, the increase in land sales and sharecropping (Amanor, 2010). When the youth choose to engage in farming, many would instead become labourers and sharecroppers outside their family lands where their remuneration is guaranteed and yields are individualized. In such cases, they also compete with migrant

farmworkers. Some of these family farms are also differentiated in assets and resources. Again, in some cases, wage labour needs may not necessarily emanate from a lack of family labour, rather from expanded reproduction for both consumption and marketing (Bernstein 2010). There are instances when family farm heads and other household members sell off their labour supply to other farms to supplement family income needs for social and economic purposes. Such practices usually arise from the challenging livelihood contexts related to land degradation and under unfavourable rural agricultural policy environments (Scoones, 2015; Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005).

As already highlighted in the preceding sections of this chapter, colonial trends of commodification began with the introduction of cash crops and the forced commercialization of crops, a means of consumption and production, which made wage labour supply necessary. Following the expansion of neoliberal policies, high population growth rates and urbanization since the late 1970s, the range of export commodities and those targeted at the domestic market have increased commodification, the demand for land, and has also affected labour relations significantly. Although sharecropping is common at frontier areas, wage labour relations and out-grower schemes have developed rather quickly (alongside out-grower schemes), eventually becoming the preferred arrangements for most farmers (rich and poor farmers), who can afford wages, and on government and private owned plantations. Generally, there is wide a range of different types of farm wage labour systems in Ghana that have still not received sufficient research attention; labour types differentiated by task, crops, seasons, location, and payments contracts. Alongside wage labour and sharecropping, mutual support schemes, locally known as ‘*nnoboa*’ among the Akans, also prevails in cocoa producing areas and in other food sectors like maize cropping.

In recent times, the pool of family labour available for family farms have been shrinking, many seek jobs in the urban areas and in agricultural wage employment to meet their cash and basic needs (Amanor, 2010; Bryceson, 2000). Yet, with a large army of labour reserves in both urban and rural areas, not only are urban jobs non-existent, employment opportunities available are often associated with precariousness and exploitation, even when these jobs address some specific livelihood needs. There is rising depeasantization and some degree of proletarianization as land-poor farmers who are affected by increasing commercialization, are often

expelled from the land or some are able to move into wage labour that are premised on inequitable power relations often along class, demographic, and livelihood lines (Bryceson, 2000).

### 3.6 Farmland Tenure Systems

Agricultural land tenure in Ghana has evolved significantly, but the influence of the colonial legacy lingers on. In recent times, customary tenure is still loosely interpreted in literature and policies as land under the control or custody of chiefs. Yet, as Nugent, 1996, (p. 204) firmly argued, ‘the trajectory of politics since independence has conferred its own peculiarities upon the relationship between the state and traditional authority’, and they are characterized by constant negotiation and struggles by different social groups over access and user rights (Peters, 2013; Yaro, 2012). For instance, the enactment of the Lands Act for public and vested lands gave the state executive control over naturally occurring land resources even though lands remained under the customary or private ownership. These land policies guided state-led large-scale land acquisitions in the 1960s and 1970s for oil palm plantations.

Since the 1980s, land has become even more commodified. The Land Title Registration Law of 1986, made it possible for formal registration of interest in land. The 2003-2018 World Bank-funded Land Administration Project (LAP), has also facilitated the development of land markets through programmes such as registration, titling, and boundary demarcations (Yaro & Torvikey, 2018). The Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) in 2015, developed the Large-Scale Land Transactions Guidelines to pre-empt and to address challenges with land investments. The ‘model lease agreement’ introduced under GCAP are meant to promote land security but could also expose communities to indiscriminate land transfers.

The existing land and investment regulations that are meant to protect the country and the locals also give leeway to investors to acquire uncapped amount of land under lease and business models that suit their business priorities at the expense of local development. For instance, in Ghana, the extent to which people can hold the state accountable on land deals depends on the land tenure guiding the acquisition. Ghana’s policy of ‘non-interference’ in customary and market-based land tenure (Amanor, 2008) promotes capital accumulation without profound

legitimation pressures while states receive its revenue. Although the state's limited role in customary land transactions empowers traditional land institutions, it also relieves the state from accountability, thereby complicating the balance of power in land transactions and the ability to mitigate negative livelihood implications for peasants and farmworkers.

Under these market-oriented policies, coupled with high population growth rates and urbanization, customary systems have not only been pressured to adapt to commercial agriculture but also deepens inequalities in the system of land access and use. There are numerous accounts of chiefs and families reinventing customs to facilitate land deals (Boamah, 2014a; Yaro, 2012). Apart from the changing nature of customary institutions that makes their 'traditionality' contested, it has also created a fairly 'suitable' environment (not without conflicts and tensions) for the individualization of communal lands and the privatization of family lands that become fertile grounds for land concentration and commercial-scale agriculture. The past years have seen increasing price values of land and diminishing access to land. It is not only perpetuating poverty and food insecurity but also instigating national insecurity in some places. Typical is the rising trend of land conflicts between pastoralists and sedentary farmers, between settlers and colonists on the agricultural frontiers, and seasonal food insecurity among farmers (Monsalve et al 2006).

Currently, about eighty percent of land in Ghana is held customarily under chieftaincy and family institutions, and the rest, vested in the state (Ubink & Amanor, 2008). While colonial rule had a huge impact on promoting chiefs in these areas to lay claims over land amidst conflicts, there are some ethnicities where pre-existing family land systems have persisted. Similarly, other customary land tenure institutions which are intrinsically linked to farming systems like share cropping, shifting cultivation, land rotation and other usufruct arrangements which are not always within the domains of chiefs' authority are often relegated to the category of 'lesser interests in land' and although acknowledged in statutory instruments, they don't attract any deeper policy outlook.

Broadly, in northern Ghana, earth priests are prominent in land matters, while chiefs and queen mothers control land in the South. In the North, land tenure litigations involving chieftaincy and earth priests have been the primary source of insecurity over the past few decades (Ubink & Amanor, 2008). In the parts of the Volta region, the eastern stretch, chiefs, but also families, control land. In Southern Ghana, there is also a general

distinction between the majority Akan group, who practice matrilineal inheritance and others including the Ewe, Ga, Dangme, and the Krobo ethnic groups who inherit land through the patrilineal side. As argued by Yaro et al., (2018), in the forest zones of the South, the matrilineal system evolved among the Akans so as to exclude Northern migrants from land control as they had become central to the production of emerging commercial crops like cocoa and oil palm through sharecropping arrangements. These broad generalizations along spatial boundaries do not presuppose some fixed geo-ethnic characterizations but it is important to keep in mind how migration and inter/intra ethnic relations affect these tenure systems.

### **3.7 The Scope of Contemporary Corporate Land Deals in Ghana**

Compared to the FDI stock in extractive industries (mining and gas), foreign investment in the agricultural sector is rather low - a situation that mirrors global trends despite the increasing global agricultural land rush. Nonetheless, in absolute terms, in the last decade, Ghana has attracted considerable foreign direct investment in the agribusiness sector covering many commodities including horticulture, fisheries, cereals, cocoa and oil palm — all of which reflect the broad investment promotion trends in the country, as explained earlier. Over 40 transnational plantation land contracts ranging between 50 to 400,000ha have been concluded since 2000. Western investors including those from Italy, The Netherlands, France, UK, USA and Norway are prominent players in farmland investments, especially the oil palm and non-traditional export sector (Amanor, 2012). Yet in recent years, the so-called 'rising powers' have also been playing new roles in agricultural investments, with almost one-fifth of land deals in West Africa involving China, Brazil and India. In 2011, China launched the West Africa regional office of the China-African Development Fund (CADFund) in Accra to facilitate and accelerate the industrialization and agricultural modernization in West Africa (Cousins et al., 2018). Other examples include Brazil's involvement in commercial rice production in Ghana for both domestic and international markets, and other ancillary investments from China in the form of irrigation services, agro-processing, agricultural technology and research (Amanor, 2013; Bräutigam & Xiaoyang, 2009). In all of these developments, the role of national elites cannot be overstated — the state, local agricultural entrepreneurs and traditional authorities who operate on their own and in diverse partnerships

with foreign elites to facilitate land deals (Keene, et al, 2015; Moreda & Spoor, 2015). Many of such partnerships for agricultural land investments tend to put control in the hands of landholding and capitalist elites (McKay, 2017), often to the disadvantage of peasant livelihoods — a condition which food sovereignty movements actively resist.

Currently, the Northern, Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti, Volta, and Central regions of Ghana have become a hub for large-scale cultivation of rice, maize, and other non-traditional exports crops including cashew; the central, western and Eastern regions are dominated by oil palm, fruits, and cereal production (Boamah, 2014b; Tsikata & Yaro, 2013). A large proportion of these investments are also targeted at the export market. In comparison to other country contexts, the size of acquisitions may not be among the largest and about 20 percent of such land deals have been abandoned<sup>5</sup>. Many of the abandoned deals were either intended or actual *jatropha* projects that failed to meet the expectations of investors and communities. The present findings seem to be consistent with what is happening in several other countries including Mexico, India, China, Ethiopia and Mozambique where *jatropha* failed to be the miracle crop that was going to provide alternative source of fuel and develop rural communities — a common reason being crop failure (Antwi-Bediako, et al, 2019). That said, over the past two decades, over one million ha of land have been acquired, transforming access, use, and control of land in rural communities that are already struggling with inequalities in land tenure systems and diverse livelihood challenges.

### 3.8 Civil Society and Land Grab Politics in Ghana

The global land rush has spurred small, modest and big anti-land grab mobilizations from various civil society groups including social movements, NGOs, producer organizations, transnational and local advocacy groups, activist researchers and critical research institutes. Examples include, the food sovereignty movement, Food First, Green Peace, Transnational Institute, among others. While some focus specifically on land-related issues, many of them do their campaign within the broader agrarian-environmental context to include land, food, water, and climate justice for peasants, small producers and other affected groups. The extent of influence of different civil society groups is shaped by the particular regional and local dynamics. For instance, compared to Latin America, the food sovereignty

movement has a less established base in Africa. Nonetheless, numerous organizations, networks and platforms at national, regional and continent levels are engaged in food sovereignty related campaigns and advocacy. Their campaigns are not mere replications of the La Via Campesina principles but are often shaped by their local or regional contexts and histories (Gyapong, 2017). For example, whereas land reform is central to food sovereignty campaigns in southern Africa due to their history of class and racial oppression (Wesso, 2009), the West African campaign is critical of free trade and thus, centres on equitable integration of smallholders into global markets. In Cameroon for example, other players such as Greenpeace and grassroots mobilizations have been very influential in resisting state-supported oil palm investments in forest lands by SG Sustainable Oils Cameroon (SGSOC).

The situation in Ghana is quite different. Arguably, there is not a strong national-based civil society mobilization against land grabs. Generally, a land investment discourse supersedes the land grab narrative. It was not surprising when people, curious about this research often asked me ‘is there land grabbing in Ghana?’ Due to the existing land tenure system, most of the recent transactions have not occurred on state lands but individual and community lands where chiefs, family heads, and development brokers have been the direct mediators of the process. Again, it appears that in many instances, the land deals have been administered by the ‘right legal’ procedures even if they do not benefit local communities. As explained in chapter one, affected communities often resort to everyday action and very low-level nascent mobilizations.

Nonetheless, there are a number of civil society groups that have played significant roles in the land grab debates and politics, although with varying class, identity, and ideological interests, which shape their demand framing. Among producer groups in Ghana, the Ghana Federation of Agricultural Producers (GFAP) serves as the umbrella unit for farmers’ collective action<sup>6</sup>. GFAP is a federation of four national farmer-based organizations which was established in October 2009 and launched under the theme of ‘enhancing agricultural development with a united voice’ (Nyamekye Hannah, 2015). Its constituent farmer-based organizations include Ghana National Association of Farmers and Fishermen (GNAFF), Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAG), Farmers’ Organization Network in Ghana (FONG), and Apex Farmers Organization of Ghana (APFOG). Its mission is to champion the cause of unifying all farmer

groups in Ghana and to advocate for favourable policies for Agricultural Producers in Ghana (Nyamekye, 2015). Most importantly here is that GFAP is the current national platform representing Ghana in the Network of Farmers' and Producers' Organizations in West Africa (ROPPA)<sup>7</sup>. ROPPA<sup>8</sup> has been the main voice in the anti-land grab demands in the sub region. The present formal<sup>9</sup> base of ROPPA, is made up of thirteen<sup>10</sup> national platforms from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. They comprise various rural farming groups: crops, horticulture, livestock, poultry, pastoralists, beekeepers, food processors and other farming professionals

The class base of the Ghana platform seems to be that of mainly middle-to-rich farmer groups who have different political tendencies on land grab governance. As Tarrow, (2004) indicated, collective action decisions often occur within a complex web of interests, incentives and traditions that influence the claims/demands that are prioritized. This is reflected in the differentiated interests of farmer associations. As such, even though ROPPA's regional campaigns against liberalized markets, and continuous demands that small-scale family farming systems are not taken over by large-scale industrialized schemes, its translation at the national level may be different. For instance, the president of GFAP who at one point coordinated an Alliance for Green Revolution Alliance (AGRA) project in Ghana is once said to have been driven by an admiration for commercial agriculture and therefore his interest is 'how small-scale farmers could one day be commercial farmers'<sup>11</sup>. Again, when some farmers are keen to engage with global markets to improve their livelihoods, some may not be averse to the intensive use of weedicides or experimenting with genetically modified seeds. In Ghana, seeds of contestation have erupted around a planned government introduction of GM cowpea (a staple legume in Ghana) seeds.

Food Sovereignty Ghana (FSG) remains the most influential non-producer radical campaign and activist group critical of land grabs, water privatization, environmental degradation and climate change, and particularly GM food technology that marginalize small-scale farmers and local food systems. In the past decade, they have particularly stood against GM policies and the Ghana plant breeders' bill that puts control over seeds in the hands of multi-national corporations but criminalises farmers. They have in the past filed law suits against the state, demanding a ban on GMOs



until adequate research into their long-term impacts are brought to light. Through legal procedures, FSG achieved a partial success in a temporary ban on GM crops in 2015.

Other progressive NGOs and non-producer advocacy groups engage in occasional and sometime reactive campaigns against land grabs. The Land Justice 4 West Africa has been campaigning for fair compensations for people affected by old state-led compulsory land acquisitions for oil palm. Faith-based organizations like the Catholic Caritas Ghana, and the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) have in the past, created land grab awareness in the Volta region, and particularly the case under study. Caritas perceives the moral role of the Church as an advocate for human rights and the care of the earth. This is in resonance with the world catholic Bishops support call for peoples' access to water and land for sustainable food systems as their input into the climate Conference of Partners (COP)21 in 2015. At the 2016 plenary session of the Ghana Catholic Bishops conference, they agreed to spearhead the course of just governance and to engage with relevant state institutions to promote development and prevent the destruction of lands. The case of AFJN's activism against land grabs is further elaborated in chapter six. It represents one of the few, if not the only civil society organization that has actually intervened in an ongoing land grab process in Ghana.

### **3.9 Chapter Conclusion**

Agricultural commercialization in Ghana has been historically influenced by the impact of colonial era policies that have evolved over the years to their current globalized form which are characterized by the increased demand for land and labour. Resonating with Yaro, et al (2018), while commercialization emerged over two centuries earlier, the fast rate of land concentration is rather recent and intricately linked to the country's modernization and investment drive. The snapshots of agricultural policies and accompanying projects illustrate their triple goal of food security, increasing incomes and jobs, and the expanding export base of the economy under enabling institutions. However, within the state apparatus, the predominant class is inclined towards a neoclassical modernization paradigm of promoting private property through market-led and administrative land and investment policies that contributes to the increasing rural farmland expropriation for capitalist projects. The rise in capitalist agriculture in Ghana is not akin to one in which smallholder systems have been

largely overtaken by plantations, because of the persistence of peasant farming even in cash crop production. The situation at hand is that the vast share of the policies have been targeted at the modernization of small holding systems, their integration, and often subordination into the markets of large-scale and out-grower schemes, and the creation of an enabling environment for private investments into large-scale agriculture. All of these occur amid the tensions that often exist in the autonomy and capacity of state and customary institutions to balance the double imperative of accumulation and legitimation to equitably benefit marginalized rural groups who are dependent on land development.

Driven by an investment rather than a land grab narrative, Ghana continues to promote FDI in capitalist agriculture in oil palm, rubber, mango among other tree and horticultural food crops mainly for the export sector. Borrowing the words of Amanor (2010), this overriding investment discourse ‘tends to present the story of those able to secure and alienate land in collusion with dominant political interests and policies, while it neglects the perspectives of the losers and their disillusionment with the contemporary world’. Unlike other countries with well-grounded agrarian justice movements, there is not a strong base of civil society resistance against land grabs in Ghana and the few existing ones are also diverse with different class interests, all of which affect the extent of national awareness of land grabs, as well as the outcomes of civil society action.

In effect, there are silent and increasingly large-scale farmland acquisitions in many rural communities that are sustained by investment and local economic discourses without substantial benefits to vulnerable and marginalized groups within affected families and communities. In the subsequent chapters four, five and six, I provide empirical evidence from the example of the SGSOG oil palm land deal in Ghana to discuss the ongoing impacts on land access, family and wage labour, as well as the differentiated political reactions from below.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The stool is an ancestrally consecrated stool that represents the source of authority of the chief or king of an ethnic group. Among the non-Akan ethnic groups of the Northern regions, the authority of a chief, king or a priest is symbolised by the consecrated skin of an animal. The skin or stool land is therefore land that is controlled by the occupant of the stool or skin i.e. chief, king or priest. He/she holds all the land in trust and on behalf of his people and has allocative and distributive rights over such lands (Danquah, 1928; Gyamera et al., 2018).

<sup>2</sup> The marketing of produce, however, was controlled by foreign monopolies.

<sup>3</sup> Three models of agriculture were promoted: the plantation model, and out-grower model which was largely influenced by the peasants resistance to displacement from the compulsory land acquisitions, and clusters of medium and large commercial farms (Yaro et al., 2018).

<sup>4</sup> In the case of Liberia and Sierra Leone, the civil wars of the 1990s influenced the urbanization of the youth.

<sup>5</sup> My estimation based on data from <http://www.landmatrix.org/en/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.fao.org>

<sup>7</sup> Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest.

<sup>8</sup> ROPPA was born out of an initiative from farmers' organizations and agricultural producers across West Africa. It was established to represent the interests of small-holder farmers and their national organizations to promote family farms – the dominant mode agricultural, forestry and pastoral production in West Africa (ROPPA, 2014a). ROPPA was formally constituted during a regional conference of peasant organizations in June/July 2000 at Cotonou (Johnson et al., 2008; ROPPA, 2014c). Prior to this conference, there had been on-going resistances and struggles by the Sahelian and Francophone West African Civil Society and peasant organizations against the ills of globalization and the adverse effects of the structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) – unfavourable agricultural policies, poor rural socio economic infrastructure and poverty (McKeon, 2009; McKeon, 2005). In addition to the acclaimed western manufactured plights, farmers' organizations saw the need for representation and participation in their own national level rural development policy making processes. To strengthen their political cause and to gather a greater super-national support, they began processes of exchange across the sub-region (McKeon, 2005). Thus, between 1998 and 2000, several consultative meetings were held on the way forward, of which one way was to develop a capacity building fund to support farmer organizations. The July 2000 assembly sought to decide on the sustenance of the capacity building fund and subsequently the creation of ROPPA. Although there is no clarity as to whether or not the formation of ROPPA was a preconceived mission or happened spontaneously at the Cotonou conference, undoubtedly these organizations identified with similar rural development and farming constraints, which they were driven to tackle together.

Existing Peasant organizations such as the National Committee for Rural Peoples' Dialogue (CNCR) of Senegal is generally acknowledged for playing a key role in the establishment of ROPPA (Hrabanski, 2010; McKeon, 2005). The earliest of ROPPA's joint activity with Vía Campesina found so far in the literature available is in May 2001, indicating approximately a year after its inception. ROPPA is not a member of Vía Campesina as Vía Campesina consists of national and local peasant organizations. As such, some of the national platforms including CNCR are rather members of Vía Campesina.

<sup>9</sup> Sourced from <http://roppa-afrique.org> after skimming through the composition of all the sub-local associations of the national platforms.

<sup>10</sup> From the ROPPA website, they have farmer organizations from Cape-Verde and Nigeria, but it is not known which particular organizations they are and the existing nature of engagement.

<sup>11</sup> From [http://www.mafs-africa.org/king\\_david\\_amoah](http://www.mafs-africa.org/king_david_amoah)

# 4

## Class, Gender and the Politics of Land Access and Exclusion

### 4.1 Introduction

This is an empirical chapter that focuses on the land question (who gets what) within the context of the land grab<sup>1</sup>. It presents an analysis of the intersecting role of state and customary institutions in the making of the land deal; an illustration of the class and generational dynamics of impacts; access to and exclusion from rents and compensations and the modifications of the existing social relations of production and access to food. The first three subsections provide a thick description of how farming is organized in the affected communities. The remaining subsections (4.4–4.8) unpack the land deal process and how it has modified power relations within the family and farming systems and the implications for women, youth, sharecroppers, migrants and ethnic minorities.

### 4.2 Chapter Conclusions

This chapter examined the micro politics of dispossession, and the contestations around land rights and entitlements to rents within the intersecting spheres of the family, land tenure and farming practices. While chiefs continue to seek opportunities from land deals to redefine or consolidate their authority over land, claims to land in the domains of families are also being restructured by powerful actors — a process which influences land access and farming practices. At the local level, the demarcation and formalization of boundaries reduces the complex patrilineal system of land access to a narrow version of land ‘ownership’ held mostly by a few second-generation men who control rents. Indeed rural farm households in many areas of Sub Saharan Africa, especially West Africa, do not organize the distribution of resources and incomes on the basis of norms of

sharing and pooling (Whitehead, 2009) and this is reflected in the fact that customary institutions are not necessarily sites of equity; a situation that is exacerbated when they are further integrated into capitalist markets. The evidence of the exclusion of women and the youth from the rent benefits challenges idealistic notions that existing kinship based entitlements to land do not involve not only land-based production, but even secures 'rightful share' of cash among members (Ferguson, 2015). The dynamics among the affected Ntrubos shows that not only are existing inequalities between men and women being reinforced, but are breeding new forms of control within the customary setting. Though the political dynamics may differ in customary land tenure contexts with different degrees of family and chieftaincy authority, smallholders who are women, youth, and sharecroppers without sufficient control over land resources are the worst affected groups (Kuusaana, 2017).

In many rural settings, land remains an important asset. Regardless of the changing rural economies often characterised by occupations in off-farm jobs, petty trading and services, access to land is still central to the security of rural livelihoods and social reproduction. The dynamics of dispossession as shown in this chapter does not only constitute a structural violence of the appropriation of land and resources, but also the depletion of capacities due to gendered and differential experiences embedded within the realm of social reproduction (Fernandez, 2018, p. 158). Whereas the relative land availability seems to slow the pace of a breakdown in the processes of social reproduction especially regarding subsistence, the reducing farm sizes, limited access to fertile and proximate lands, changes in the social relations of both intra-clan land access as well as access for migrant sharecroppers, raising concerns about the stability and sustainability of the present and future generation. Yet, market-based land investment policies hardly address the inherent inequalities associated with land transactions. Whether or not the dispossessed or affected communities benefit from such land transactions largely depends on the models of such investments and the organization of labour as presented in the next chapter.

## Notes

# 5

## Labour Incorporation and Implications for Family Farming

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter five is an empirical chapter on the labour question (who does what). At the core of this chapter is the assessment of natural inclusion into the plantation work, looking at class, identity (gender, ethnicity and migrant status and generational dynamics of (non) incorporation (from land paper). It also provides some evidence on the impacts on small-scale farming in terms of family, wage, and unpaid labour supply and access to mutual support labour schemes.

### 5.2 The Peasant Farmworkers and their Attachment to Land

In order to provide a better understanding of the ways in which land deals affect rural communities, the character of the nature of rural is key. Fluid inter- and intra-country migration plays a huge role in the making of peasants in West Africa even though most of the debates on migration tend to focus mainly on rural-urban flows. Nine out of ten of all the farmworkers are small-scale farmers or peasants, and from the survey, a little over a quarter (28.5 per cent) of farmworkers migrated specifically to work on the plantation. Yet, there are many others (farmworkers, land owners, chiefs and other community members), who during my interviews either through life history accounts or through fluid conversations made it a point to explain to me how and why they have become farmers in the countryside, sometimes challenging the identity that they thought I had imposed on them; some proud of their relation to land, others not, and also pushing me to re-think the way I perceive their fragile relation to land as well as their work on the plantation. From the survey and interviews, I encountered diverse groups of peasants<sup>1</sup> plantation farmworkers not emphasizing their modes of production, but their mobility and shifting

connections to land. From their own descriptions of themselves and their perceptions of farming they can be classified into three main groups.

First, is the category of *'real peasant farmworkers'*. This includes small-scale family/petty commodity producers, often middle-aged or elderly men who may or may not have had rural-(peri)urban-rural migration experiences, and sometimes also engaged in small non-farm side activities (e.g. trade), yet show strong affirmation of their peasant identity. There were cases of people returning from 'hustling' in the city to find permanent jobs on the plantation, usually as security, but also used the opportunity to invest in their farms as they would have wished beforehand and therefore have no intentions of going back to the city. In the case of one particular worker, since 1991 he has been on the move from his own village in the Northern Region of Ghana to several other places until finally settling in the region since 2004 to work on both plantations. Although aside from his own farming, he is currently enjoying the 'luxury' and a somewhat long service reward as a night security at the residence of the British directors, he always boasted about his farming skills, and his passion for agriculture during our conversations. This however does not pre-suppose a romanticising of the current state of a not-so-supportive policy environment which he constantly criticised especially when it came to access to markets and inputs. Narrating his story, a harvester on the plantation, who since 2001 migrated from a nearby town and used to rent land for yam cultivation on the now enclosed land stated,

When I was on my own farm, I was my own boss... I was a 'real farmer', nothing compared to this meagre work we are doing here. I could load 2 trucks full of yam per year. I could get 50 bags of maize. We are just managing now. I am share cropping 2 acres of cocoa for 4 years now. Farmers have become farm labourers, but I can earn about 1,800 cedis per month (gross) in peak seasons, but trust me you can't earn this much, if you are not a 'real farmer' (07 June, 2018, Fankyenekor).

The second category is the *'adapting peasant farmworkers'*. The vast majority of these peasants may or may not have been born into peasant families in these communities, and at some point, migrated to other (peri) urban areas to engage in industry, commerce, and other urban jobs but had to return to their villages due to social and family demands such as taking care of the aged or sick, and marriages etc. In a rural context built around family care and support rather than hospices for the aged, several farmworkers gave accounts of having been compelled to leave their jobs in the



city to cater for their sick parents or siblings depending on the generational dynamics and other domestic relations of care. In the case of caring for parents, it is often times gendered, in most instances elderly sons expected to take care of sick and aged fathers, and likewise daughters and their mothers. For instance, the daughter of the only female family head among the 15 landlords, indicated that she used to work in a restaurant in the capital city but has returned because of her mother's illness. Others, by the request of their aged and dying fathers, had to return to continue the work on family farms, especially when the family size is small, lands are not highly fragmented and when it involves cash crops. A young male farmworker narrated,

I was born in Brewaniase and schooled there before going to Accra [the capital city] to work in a candle and soap factory for three years. I returned to the village after my mother died. I had to come back to the village at my father's request. Later my father passed on and I had to stay and take care of the farm as the eldest son. I have been in the village since 2014 and have no plans of returning to Accra. I went to Accra for greener pastures to swerve farming but I am now satisfied here, doing farming (23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2019, Abrubruwa).

There are also women peasants often originally traders in the peri-urban communities who had to follow their husbands (some teachers, and produce buyers) into these villages upon transfer. Over the years, this group has taken up peasant identities and consolidated their 'rurality' through marriages, and investing in their own and family farms, and to different degrees, has adjusted to peasant living.

Distinct from the two groups above, are the '*one foot out peasant farmworkers*'. These farmworkers are different from the few, especially semi-skilled urban-rural migrants who do not engage in any own farming activities at all, as in the case of the truck operator<sup>2</sup> who expressed 'I don't like farming, I see myself as a fine gentleman. I used to run away from farm work when I was a child'. Rather, the one foot out peasant farmworkers, include mostly educated and/or entrepreneurial minded male youth farmworkers who consider their work on the plantation only as a stepping stone to a 'bigger dream'. Most of them are currently engaged on their own farms, while working on the plantation, and have plans towards higher education, and/or with aspirations in the teaching, nursing, police, other 'reputable' professions or trades. Others, including a few young

women are also saving income to enrol in hairdressing and cloth making apprenticeships, preferably in the city.

### 5.3 Class and Demographic Characteristics of Farmworkers

From the survey done in this study, 93 per cent of the 200 farmworkers who participated have access to farmlands in their communities or in neighbouring locations, while 88 per cent are engaged in small-scale farming with farm sizes ranging from 0.1 of an acre to approximately 11 acres. Resonating with the literature on intra-household gender inequalities (Razavi, 2009; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003), men tend to have access to multiple and scattered farm plots (up to three different farmlands) and bigger farm sizes than women. Table 5.1 shows the approximate farmland sizes (up to three different farm plots) among the farmworkers.

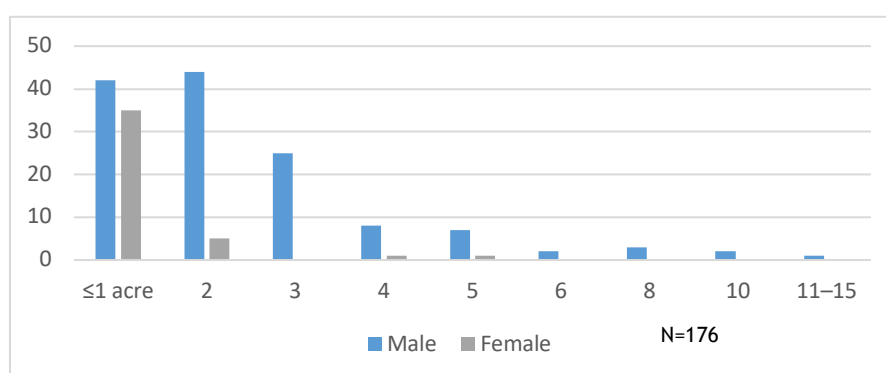
Nonetheless, interviews conducted with most of the women suggest their ability to cultivate and benefit from their own small plots of farmlands independent of their family/husbands' lands. Figure 5.1 shows the gendered differences in land sizes of a total of 176 farmworkers who provided information on the first recorded plots). Being a settler society, sharecropping remains the most common form of land access (see Table 5.2). For the minority (7 per cent) of workers who had no access to farmlands, the vast majority were urban-rural migrants who were either not interested in own farming, or were actively searching for a suitable land; and a few aging women who could not combine farming with their current jobs.

*Table 5.1  
Farmlands and Farm Sizes of Farmworkers*

Farm-land	Male	Female	Total	≤1 acre	2-3 acres	4-5 acres	6-8 acres	9-10 acres	11-15 acres
Farm 1	134	42	176	44%	42%	9.6%	2.8%	1%	0.6%
Farm 2	35	3	38	48.6%	46%	5.4%	-	-	-
Farm 3	5	-	5	40%	40%	20%	-	-	-

Source: Author's survey, 2018.

**Figure 5.1**  
*Farmworkers' Farm Sizes (Farm 1) by Gender*



Source: Author's survey, 2018.

**Table 5.2**  
*Farmworkers' Forms of Land Access (Farm 1)*

Access Type	Percentage (%)
Family land	45
Tenancy	54
Free Occupancy	2
Total	100
N=176	

Source: Author's field survey.

Indeed, among almost all the farmworkers surveyed whose lands were affected, have had access to farmlands, yet with varying levels of access and control, and often described by those who lost all their family lands as being less desirable. Labour on the plantation is therefore characterised by a complex mix of landed, less landed, sharecroppers, dispossessed proletariats and even some farmworkers (eight of them) who have their own sharecroppers. Although access to farmland is an important aspect of the people's daily reproduction, the relative land availability means that the

vast majority of the farmworkers are not driven into labour due to landlessness. Access to suitable farmlands, however, remains critical for the dispossessed proletariats who lost the entire family and share cropped lands.

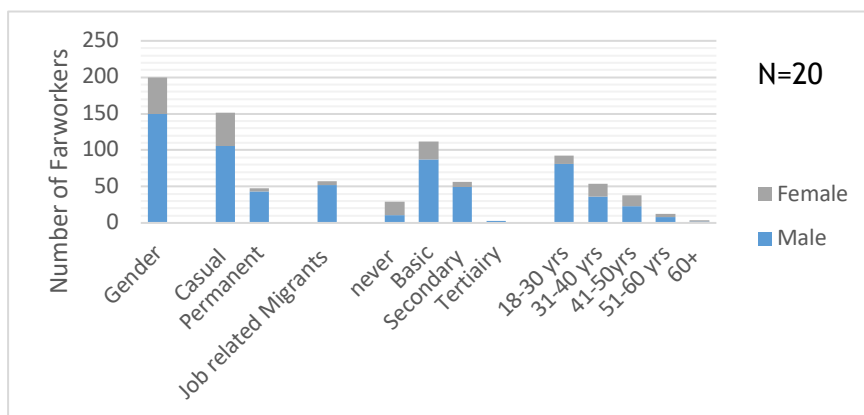
Many male adult farmworkers also depend on wages to invest and expand their own farms. However, as shown in Table 5.1, even if they are indeed able to materialize such expectations, the potential for a shift towards a 'middle class' is unlikely. If we consider their farm sizes as the basis for classification it can be argued that the vast majority of the farmworkers are still peasants or small-scale farmers. More than 80 per cent farm less than 3 acres on their first plots, and under 6 acres in the case of those with second plots. Yet, it is important to note that the figures in Table 5.1 are exaggerated estimates, given that farmlands are rarely demarcated formally. Besides, farmers and share croppers often find it difficult to distinguish between accessible farm lands and actual farm sizes because of the broader continuum of their seasonal farming practices of crop and land rotation, not to mention the intercropping of vegetables by women and sometimes the not-so-neat divisions between independently controlled farms and family farms on co-shared lands particularly among sharecropping families. With the exception of cash crops, most people farm in the measure of ropes (subdivisions of one acre) at a particular point in time. In fact, what constitutes large, medium or small in land size classification in many rural contexts in Africa defies any rigid standards. In an interview with the chief, he considered two acres as a large farm. This is certainly not the case in the forest zones in southern Ghana where farm sizes are relatively larger. Meanwhile in some studies such as the one by Jayne et al., (2016) where they argue for a rising medium size farm in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia, they used 0–5 hectares (up to 12 acres) as the range for small-scale farms, and 500 hectares for medium farms; raising several methodological questions<sup>3</sup>.

Preliminary indications from the survey and the interviews point to six main aspects of the rural life that intersect with land/farm size-based factors. These include their (a) identity: for example, among the farmworkers who are non-indigenes, the Konkomba people are the poorest as compared to other migrants from southern Ghana or neighbouring Togo, alongside other gender differences; (b) household characteristics (c) patterns of access and use of land and labour (d) degree of insertion into capitalist markets (e) type of housing: between mud and cement blocks,

thatch and aluminium roofing sheets and (f) education. For many of the workers, education is an important reason for working on the plantation — the youth (males) who are temporarily out of school depend on wages to pursue higher education; and wage labour is the primary source of income for most women who are burdened with the responsibilities of their children’s educational needs. From the survey, only 5.5 per cent of farmworkers indicated that they left off-farm occupations including apprenticeships, petty trade, factory and mechanic work, and transport service whereas 11 per cent were high school students prior to their work on the plantation.

Figure 5.2 shows the demographic differences among the farm workers in terms of gender, level of education and age. As shown in Table 5.3, one-third of the female workers are either divorced, separated, or widowed as compared to men where the proportion is just 9 per cent. These results corroborate with the workers’ age distribution where approximately half of the male population falls between 18 and 30 years old and approximately one-third have never been married. For women, about one-fifth are below 30 years and only 10 per cent are single or have never been married. The survey showed that 66 per cent of the women are between the ages of 31–50, and this is a child bearing and care giving period where rural women’s chances of education are very limited as compared to men, and because many of these women already missed basic education.

Figure 5.2  
Demographic Characteristics of Farmworkers.



Source: Author’s fieldwork 2018.

*Table 5.3*  
*Marital Statuses of Farmworkers*

Status	Male	Percentage (%)	Female	Percentage(%)
Never married	41	27.3	5	10
Consensual Union	6	4	2	4
Married	90	60	28	56
Separated	3	2	4	8
Divorced	9	6	5	10
Widowed	1	0.7	6	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's fieldwork 2018.

#### 5.4 A Gendered Division of Labour

Labour on the plantation is divided by tasks carried out based on physical attribution, seasonality, and sometimes through discretionary decisions at the supervision level. The tasks are also gendered, with men having more opportunities to take up specific tasks. The core labourers engage in work that directly affect production: crop and soil maintenance, weed control and harvest-related activities. These include pruning, slashing, round weeding, spraying of weedicides, fertilizer application, irrigation, harvesting, and loose picking. They are deployed through the gang system often consisting of 25 workers. Tasks reserved for men include harvesting, pruning, spraying, fire control and loading (they load and transport the palm fruits to the processing site). During peak season, harvesters employ their own workers to be head porters or what they call 'carriers' to transport the harvested palm bunches to specific locations on the farm. They often consist of women who could have social ties or not, with the harvesters. Slashing is done by both men and women, while loose picking, which is a woman's task, except occasionally when it becomes necessary for men to join.

Another group of workers is the farm service workers, who are mostly skilled men engaged in technical operations. Their tasks have a close interaction between production and processing. They include mechanical engineers and fitters, carpenters, plumbers, vulcanizers, heavy-duty truck operators and drivers.

The third group of workers are the support workers consisting mainly of security workers who also supervise fire control in the dry seasons. There are no women represented in management, administration and supervision. Table 5.4 gives an overview of how labour is organized on the plantation.

*Table 5.4  
Gendered Tasks and Targets on the Plantation.*

Tasks	Gender	Target (Standard)	Target (Off Peak/ Poor Condition)	Lucrativeness of Targets
Harvesting	Men	86 Bunches	40-50 Bunches	High
Pruning	Men	30-35	20-25	Above Average
Loose Picking	Women	4 bags	Daily Wage	Average
Round Weeding	Both	30 Palms (2m around tree)	same	Below Average
Fertiliser Application	Women	200 palms (1 kg of fertilizer per tree)	Same	Average
Slashing	Both	9 m <sup>2</sup> × 15 trees	Same	Low
Security	Men *	NA	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable (fixed) Wages</li> <li>• No lucrative Targets</li> <li>• Compensated with little bonuses</li> </ul>
Technical Support	Men	Undefined	Undefined	
Operations	Men *	Undefined	Undefined	
Loading	Men	2 return trips daily (for a team of 4-6 people)	Flexible	
Spraying	Men	10 fillings (15l knapsack)	Same	
Irrigation	Men	Undefined	Undefined	
Carrying	Women	Per palm bunches harvested	(Laid off by Harvesters)	Flat wage (low)

\* Including one woman employed in the task.

Source: Author's Interviews 2018.

## 5.5 Precarious Labour and the 'Weakening' Bodies

### 5.5.1 Casualization

Labour casualization is often associated with insecurity and low income (Yaro, et al 2017). However, for those who consider it as a potential livelihood opportunity, they emphasize the benefits of flexibility in allowing workers to engage in more than one productive sector and even the possibilities of technology transfer to small-scale farms (Deininger & Xia, 2016). At the same time, it could enable investors to hire and fire workers

with ease, make more elastic use of skills, introduce non-conventional work arrangements and lower wages according to their business needs and performance in ways that may not necessarily benefit workers (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013, p. 6).

Job, income and health insecurity characterize the nature of work on the plantation. Compared to the initial phase of the oil palm establishment — when clearing, nursery and planting took place, employment opportunities have reduced considerably. The workers' estimations put the figure at 500-plus, and official records indicate that at least 392 people have previously worked, or are currently employed on the plantation<sup>4</sup>.

With the exception of the 53 permanent workers (excluding 8 supervisors), the rest (70 per cent of the labour force), and 9 out of every 10 women, are casual workers with six-month renewable contracts or no contracts. For casual workers, their job security window is opened only during the peak seasons (from April to August). Outside this period, especially between November and March, many of them are laid off, and their fates lie in the hopes of early rains and field conditions, their gender, and their relations with supervisors. Unlike reports from similar studies in Mozambique, both casual and permanent workers could apply to a social security/pension scheme (O'Laughlin, 2017). Nonetheless, casual workers who seek progression to permanent contracts are usually the less landed, women, and those with limited alternative livelihoods, who want to benefit from job security, paid leave and particularly, access to loans, which are privileges preserved for only permanent workers. Interviews with the workers and management confirmed that, in the post 2013 transition to Volta Red, there has not been significant progression from casual to permanent contracts — a situation which the management justifies to be part of a cost-cutting strategy and also dependent on worker's commitment, a claim that many long-serving workers could not agree with. Box 5.1 shows the differential preferences between two pioneer female workers of different social and livelihood backgrounds and strategies.

Not so different from mainstream optimism in the employment potentials of large-scale agricultural investments, the families and communities were under the illusions of massive job opportunities, with salaried, formal and permanent employment contracts. The casual system affects different groups and classes differently and so is their everyday ways of dealing with it. The differentiation comes with age, generational dynamics within



households, domestic norms, years of service, task, migrant status, education, skill, gender and class.

### **Box 5.1 Two Female Workers and their Contract Preferences**

#### ***Case 1: Actively seeking a permanent contract***

Gariwa 52 years, has five children and in a polygamous household. She has no formal education. She has worked for about seven years, and even received an award for hard work and dedication but is still a casual worker. She is also a peasant who has been sharecropping corn, cocoyam and cassava since 2015 on a farm size of about half an acre belonging to a native, while at same time assisting her husband on their 'family farm'. They are northern migrants. She needs a permanent contract for security of job and income, and also to enjoy some paid leave, and retirement benefits, she is tired and weakened. This is also important given the household reproduction dynamics: i) She is responsible for feeding her children and husband 'I have to provide soup i.e. meat/fish, mill the corn, and cook food'. She does not receive house-keeping money; ii) She needs income to pay wage labour on her own farm because family labour is not constant; iii) She is not entitled to income from the family farm, she has to fight for a share; iv) She has used up her savings to sponsor her daughter to travel abroad to do domestic work; v) A big chunk of income goes into school related expenses; her husband is investing in a house in their hometown. She does not see herself quitting anytime soon, unless she is physically incapable. She hopes for progression to a permanent contract, but in the meantime she has very little options. She takes some days off when she is tired, but usually seeks permission from the supervisors.

#### ***Case 2: It's too late to be a permanent worker***

Yaa is 51 years, has four children and has worked for eight years. She has primary education, and is married to a teacher/farmer in a monogamy. She used to be a trader before she followed her husband on transfer from the south to Brewaniase. She has been sharecropping corn and sweet potatoes (under one acre) for nine years. Her landowner who doubles as her residential landlord is aged, and she only gives her a fair share of the food to subsist. She farms mainly for subsistence. She provides food for her children, but with her husband's support. She is tired of the plantation work, and now she is still working there only to save up to pay some debts and invest in her trade, she hopes quit in the next three years. She does not need a permanent contract any more as it will only restrict her. As of now, she takes her own annual leave from November 15th until the end of year, a period when she is also liable to being laid off. She uses the time to trade in second hand clothes, and also work as a seamstress. Occasionally, she also takes some days off with or without permission, and (sometimes with false excuses) for her own farming activities because she cannot use the petty income to buy staple foods. They are sometimes threatened about being fired for extended absenteeism, but she also knows that her experience cannot be easily replaced, 'people come and go all the time'.

Job insecurity is manifested not only in the employment contracts but also, in the rate and frequency of labour mobility and informality in production. In principle, recruited workers are to be employed in their preferred tasks, but that often depends on vacancies and their physical attributes. This is, however, particular to men, as they have much more flexibility and options to choose from the many male tasks. While workers often commence employment in their preferred tasks, their retention is characterized by mobility between tasks as determined by their supervisors. A pruner iterated:

There are ranks in the job. Pruning is difficult, so during the peak seasons, they move some of us to harvesting in order to make more money. It depends on one's relations with the supervisor (03 June 2018, Dodo Tamale).

For some committed and pioneer casual workers of up to eight years of service, they all consider this as an unfair treatment and one akin to peasant farm labourers who are often looked down upon. Yet, while some still seek this progression, others actually do not want it any more.

There are, however, some particular tasks such as spraying (weed control), where intake is largely by worker preference. The changes occur both within and outside related tasks, e.g., switches between harvesting and pruning, but also from machine operation to slashing. This practice is also the company's way of managing the small numbers. For instance, a supervisor mentioned that they do not lay off most of the harvesters: they are rather moved to pruning because they are hard to come by and their task requires a lot of training. Whereas workers switching between the above tasks may still find it lucrative, for others, it affects their productivity and income. Switching between tasks also affects workers' ability to organize around task-specific issues. One worker expressed,

My work is undefined. I am a casual worker, an operator and a driver. Sometimes they move me to join the oil palm processing mill workers; sometimes I transport firewood. If I am on the farm and there is a problem with the truck, my supervisors ask me to join the loading gang or do slashing (21 May 2018, Dodi Papase)

### 5.5.2 Income insecurity and Disparities

Regarding wages, workers struggle with consistent delays, low income and wage differentiation. The remuneration scheme of the workers is premised

on a time productivity-skill based piece rates system. The baseline daily wage of GHC14.04<sup>5</sup> applies to work in the core labour and support service for both casual and permanent workers. It is used as the yardstick for calculating the piece rate or daily targets. This piece rate daily wage is about 45 per cent higher than the national minimum wage of GHC9.68.

The casual workers in the skilled service such as operators receive a higher daily wage of GHC19.5, while the remuneration of permanent skilled staff ranges between GHC19.5 and GHC25 plus allowances. This includes gender, age, skill, experience, contract, engagement in other occupations, and the lucrativeness of tasks. Slashing is not lucrative and their average monthly income ranges from GHC200 to GHC450 as compared to harvesters and pruners who indicated that their average monthly incomes ranged between GHC500 and GHC1000. Harvesters can realize eight times more their daily targets during peak seasons as shown in Figure 5.3<sup>6</sup>

The attendance sheet of the harvesters corroborates their claims that during peak seasons, many earn a net income of over GHC1500 per month (after paying their carriers). Several factors influence the monthly income brackets of the workers. The harvesters who employ seasonal carriers have also been instructed by their supervisors not to pay them below the base wage daily wage, a situation that practically means that GHC15 has become a flat wage even though these women carriers are compelled to function alongside the productivity of their harvesters. Meanwhile, women remain in the lowest income brackets, with a vast majority taking a monthly wage range between GHC200 and GHC350 below the expected monthly wage provided they are regular workers. During the May 2018 peak season, the best most of women could do was to double their daily targets of 4 bags while the male harvesters could achieve 8 times their daily targets (see Figures 5.3<sup>7</sup> and 5.4)

Other tasks in the core labour such spraying and irrigation are not accompanied with lucrative targets. Local perceptions around chemical spraying connotes a major health risk and therefore workers are not even interested in overworking for extra income. Workers in the support services and farm service labour have relatively stable wages and are compensated with some bonuses. Compared to the conventional local farm labour rates, the plantation wages are far lower. For instance, sprayers earn half of their local rates yet they prefer to be on the plantation due to the relative availability of employment and income if compared to doing 'by day' small-scale farm jobs. In effect, attractiveness to the plantation work is a



landlessness, joblessness, migrants and other minority groups, it is sometimes even derogatory. Under such unfavourable conditions, it remains the task with the least labour supply.

Figure 5.4  
Women Loose Pickers' Output in a Peak Season (May- June 2018)

Source: Author's fieldwork, 2018.

### 5.5.3 Health Care and Wellbeing Insecurity

The more labour is embodied in its reproduction, the less it costs the employer (Picchio, 1992, p. 97) and in this case, casual labour makes it is easy to evade the responsibility of protecting the occupational health of workers. By transferring such risks and responsibilities onto workers, they do not simply construct a flexible labour force, but one that normalizes precarious work (Burgmann, 2016). Most large-scale production schemes in

Ghana rely heavily on chemicals that are manually applied by farmworkers. All the workers are susceptible to various forms of injuries associated with poor field conditions and inadequate supply of protective clothing. The reality is that, although many of these farmworkers double as own-farmers, the plantation-style of production requires continuous learning which sometimes takes a while to master. Although they have regular access to boots, other supplies such as protective clothing and nose masks for sprayers, gloves for pruners and loose pickers, and rain coats are either under-supplied or of poor quality as per the workers expectations. Workers often raise these concerns at their weekly meetings with authorities, but the responses are rather persuasive, requiring them to be patient in waiting. Workers, especially those in the tasks of spraying, harvesting and pruning, are very much aware of the health implications of their work, and therefore seek some preferential treatment in accessing health services, e.g., the reinstatement of biannual health screenings. In a study in sugar cane plantations in Mozambique, O’Laughlin, (2017), found similar incidences whereby the intensification of work exposed farmworkers to severe dehydration, eye infections and respiratory difficulties and long-term respiratory conditions like chronic kidney disease associated with dehydration.

Again, most of the drivers, truck and heavy equipment operators are not licensed to operate<sup>8</sup>, so they are not insured against accidents. Their financial struggles around not having access to licenses are further complicated on the one hand by their casual statuses, which deny them access to loans, and on the other hand, by the company’s unwillingness to commit to the responsibility of facilitating access to the license. For many of these operators, they believe that the company’s position is linked to the fear that they would go and seek better job opportunities elsewhere when they obtain their licenses — a situation that is very likely, according to the operators. In addition, they have to work with faulty machineries, to which over time, they have learned to adapt. Demonstrating this, a driver said,

You see, this truck has no starter and no brake. The steering wheel is poorly aligned and you can see that manifest in the front wheels. I have to start it in third gear and bring it to a halt in fourth gear. Experience is the best teacher over here (13 July 2018, Volta Red, Fankyenekor).

This puts not only truck operators and drivers, but all workers who are also transported in these trucks at risk of accidents and injuries. Per their work regulations, the company takes responsibility for any work-related health issues, especially for injuries and minor illness but other indirect

and long-term health threats and sicknesses are often ignored or inadequately addressed. Even though almost 70 per cent of the workers are already subscribed to the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), workers also want to caution against the extra costs that are sometimes associated with the NHIS scheme. During my second visit<sup>9</sup>, the rules had changed — having NHIS is a prerequisite for employment retention. It became almost like a chorus whenever I spoke to the workers, particularly women, about the intensity of their work — ‘*adwuma yi, eweaken yen*<sup>10</sup>’ (we are weakened by this job). They looked frail and older than their ages, especially the pioneer workers who have worked for at least eight years and are still on casual contracts. Besides the tedious nature of the job, the distant location of the farm and their limited access to transport facilities put a heavy toll on their health. A woman farmworker complained,

they don’t take us home on time, why won't we have malaria? However, when you get malaria, they say that it is not a farm work-related disease, so you do not get a medical cover (07 June, 2018, Brewaniase).

Closely linked are the stresses and pressure on women’s ability to deliver their household responsibilities. A normal routine for off-farm residents begins from 5:00 a.m. until about 5:00 p.m., although the productive hours are effectively eight hours. Women have to start their day at least two hours earlier (by 3:30 a.m.), sometimes forced to wake and prepare their school going children. Their evening duties, including meals, also extend into the night. Even though the impacts depend largely on the household characteristics, in general, committed female workers do not get enough rest and end up being those within the lowest income brackets. The labour conditions on the plantation can be summed, by a former worker (see Box 5.2 for more on the perceptions of former male workers) who said,

every employee wants to see progress in their lives, but this is not the case on the plantation. The conditions are not good, and they sometimes do not respect our views because we are uneducated and casually employed. We worked hard on the plantation because we were sensitized about the positive effects on our communities, but if they could not cater for the welfare of workers, how much more entire communities? For most of the people who remain farmworkers to date, they are there out of desperation (FGD, 14 July 2018, Brewaniase).

**Box 5.2 Former Male Workers' Experiences**

'I went to work with the company because I needed money for my cocoa farm business. The job on the plantation is not the kind of work to do for a long time..., I will only return to Volta Red when I need money urgently. Now I have 3 acres of cocoa farm on my father's land under Abusa share terms. I have four labourers who work with me from time to time'. JJ

'I worked with the company at several units right from the beginning — since the time of Herakles. I have been laid off for about 5 times since I joined the company; sometimes, I get angry but maybe they wanted me to rest. I wanted to contribute to the growth of the company. I do not intend to return to work with Volta Red; my brother, a former farmworker died after complaining of headache. I am the only son left to care for the family. Now I have about 2 acres of land for cocoa, cassava and maize cultivation which I want to concentrate and expand in the near future'. Kofi.

'I joined the plantation in 2013, because I needed some money to support the family and to live a better life. It was difficult to combine the plantation work with my own farm but I managed to do so. I stopped the work because of delay in payment of wages, no significant pay raise and the taxes. I now work on two and half acres of cocoa under a sharecrop arrangement [Abunu] and cultivate some maize. I am willing to work with the company when the salary issue is addressed'. Manu

'The plantation work is the only work available for the people in the community but I have stopped working there since 2011. I have been going to Sefwi [western region] since 2011 to work as a caretaker of cocoa plantations over there. The landowners also give me land to subsist on until I am paid at the end of the season, or annually. I think the work at Sefwi pays better than Volta Red work, and it is less tedious, I don't work every day, cocoa provides shade so I don't work in the sun. It is favourable to young men who are single, and want to save money for higher education. Many young men are maintaining cocoa farms in Sefwi'. Yaw

'I stopped working there because it is not the kind of employment I foresaw. It is farm work, why not do my own farm then instead of farming for someone and having to buy food? I am a chainsaw operator, in the early days, I felled the timber and did all the logging-related jobs for Herakles, but the contract they offered afterwards was not as good as finding my own day-jobs'. KK



## 5.6 Labour Competition Between Plantation and Family Farms

In a context where a subsistence ethic prevails, many farmworkers find ways and means to obtain labour for their own small farms by sacrificing their own time on the plantation, with family and wage support for the continuance of their family farms.

### 5.6.1 The seasonality and Task-Specificity of Own Labour Demands

To iterate, even among the farmworkers, small-scale family farming is still predominant and co-exists with the large-scale plantation. Most Farmworkers, determined to maintain at least their subsistence, are compelled to divide their time and energy between peasant farming and labouring on the plantation. Gender, household demographics, class, and the nature of incorporation into the plantation, farm proximity and crop type determine farmworkers' strategies, trade-offs and outcomes of the competing demands for labour.

Given that small-scale farming and even the survival of the partially irrigated plantation rely on not taking chances on the weather, crop and task-specific seasonal self-labour demand is very crucial. From the workers' own approximations as recorded in the survey (see Table 5.5), many could commit three days a week to their own farms, a situation made possible by their widespread shunning of Saturday work on the plantation and Sunday sacrifices, in addition to the fact that many of them are casual workers. In general, casual workers on average can commit to 23 out of the 27 working days per month.

*Table 5.5  
Farmworkers' Labour Commitment to Own Farms and Plantations*

Labour Commitments	Mean	25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	75 <sup>th</sup> percentile
<i>Days per month</i>	12	5	10	18
<i>Hours per farm visit</i>	5	4	5	6
On Plantation				
<i>Days per month</i>	23	21	24	26

Source: Author's survey, 2018.

However, as shown in Table 5.6 the dynamics of self-labour needs change in the oil palm peak and off-peak seasons, and especially during planting and harvesting seasons of the particular crops cultivated by farmworkers; maize being one of such important crops cultivated biannually by most of the workers.

*Table 5.6:*

*The Dynamics of Seasonal Labour Demands on Own Farms*

Key Food Crops	Planting Seasons	Harvesting Season
Maize	March-April, July-September	September- October November-December
Cassava	May-August	December (onwards)
Rice	July-August	November- December
Yams & potatoes	July-August	November- December
Groundnuts	July-August	November-December

Source: Author's interviews, 2018.

By the time the oil palm peak season starts in April, many farmers who may have been laid off during the dry season (between Nov-March) may have already planted their maize for the major season. The minor planting season also starts towards the end of oil palm peak season, thus around August-September, farmworkers' attendance to work decline even as they divert their attention to their own farms. The most lucrative months for farmworkers on the plantation are May and June, and fortunately for them, they do not coincide with the planting or harvest seasons of their major crops; cassava planting may be affected but it has a wider window for planting and appears to be a very robust tuber which does not require as much attention as others like maize and rice. In any case, planting and harvesting are tasks that a farmer would always prefer to commit his/her own time to, even if other sources of labour are employed. A young farmer's account of how he manages his time between plantation and his rice farm illustrates the dynamics,

During the oil palm peak season, he puts his efforts into the farm work, but in lean season, he spends half of the week on the plantation and half on his own farm. During lean season, sometimes just about 10 out of the 25 people in the harvesting gang are regularly at work. Sometimes, the supervisors are not happy with that. But if you do that during the peak season, you might get into problems. Now that it's peak, he has already sprayed his rice farm,

and when he gets paid and it's time for planting, he will hire in labourers to slash and till the land. Last year, slashers charged him 15 cedis per one rope, they were high school students, who came during the weekends. Sometimes, he is not able to yield as much rice as expected had he not divided his strength. Sometimes rodents affect the farm in his absence. Before Volta Red, he was still taking labourers to slash, but he always plants his own rice (07 June, 2018, Volta Red, Fankyenekor).

### 5.6.2 The Family Labour Dynamics

Constant access to free family labour for production in modern day rural Ghana is no more the norm, coupled with the fact that women strive hard to educate their children for a future of life outside the farm. Access to family labour depends on three main factors. First, are the characteristics of the farmworkers' household. Unlike in the past, when having children meant access to family labour, in recent times farmers themselves encourage their children to focus on their education although during holiday seasons and weekends, young children are obliged to support production on their family farms. A divorced female farmworker narrated that,

She does her own farming on land given her by an uncle. It is about 2 ropes [about 1/5<sup>th</sup> of an acre], and she farms cassava and corn for subsistence — she does not use family labour. Her first son has finished Senior High School and is working in Accra. He is hustling for income to further his education, and working with his aunt in trade. The rest of her children are also in school (07 June, 2018, Brewaniase).

Many a time, access to family labour depends on the occupation of one's spouse. Several migrant farmworkers indicated that their wives monitored their farms and their labourers in their absence. It was not necessarily the case for a majority of the resident farmworkers that were interviewed. For instance, men whose wives are traders may be able to gain occasional support on the farm, but not to rely on them for day-to-day maintenance of their farms. One of the pioneer farmworkers also expressed similar concerns that he neither depends on hired in labour nor his family because his children are females, in school, and his wife is a migrant from Niger who is not a farmer, and moreover he does not want his children's lives to be centred on farming. The general trend among adult farmworkers with young household populations and with very high hopes in education

is that, they either self-exploit, or employ wage labour more than they depend family labour. Tasks such as weeding or slashing is often done by wage labourers, or paid family labour.

Access to family labour is also usually task specific. Family bonding farm labour tasks like planting and harvesting are very common family tasks even when they attract some tokens and food gifts. Harvesting in particular usually requires the presence of the farmer and with trusted household labour support for monitoring purposes. Of course, harvesting cash crops like cocoa for example, attracts family labour, also because of the conventional monetary expectations, although they may not be standard remunerations per se. Some farmworkers could even get migrant family members to return temporarily to support them during the cocoa harvest season. In many instances, where women have their own small farms, husbands and male adults/youth also take up the responsibility of chemical application for weed and pest control, but not necessarily the purchase of such inputs for the women. At the same time, others also worried about the over reliance on weedicides, and their inability to maintain their own farms as expected.

The third major factor is the location of the farm and its proximity to the farms of other household or family members. In such instances, there is a difference in the experiences of farmworkers who were displaced from their farms as a result of the land acquisition and those who were not directly affected. Farmworkers who share farm boundaries with their family or farm separately on the same land with their households are most likely to get help on their farms, particularly in oversight duties, and also during weekends when many attend to their own farms. In the words of a female farmworker,

I go to my farm on Saturdays. My husband and I work sharecrop for different landowners, but we share a boundary... I do not have issues with my farm in terms of time, all I have to do is to buy the weedicides and my husband does the spraying for me (05 June 2018, Volta Red Fankyenekor).

As earlier explained in chapter four, many families who have acquired alternative lands following the land grab, are now farming on separate and distant areas which reduces the ease with which they used to support each other. In fact, the situation is even more difficult for young settler farmworkers, who were displaced, have distant farms but still bear the responsibility of supporting their ageing parents' sharecrop farms. In an interview with a displaced settler farmworker, he narrated that,

Prior to the land deal, they [he and his siblings] had their own farms even though they farmed the same crops. At the same time, they also worked on their family farms, more or less their father's and subsisted from it, but after some time he complained about being cheated because they were of age. So, they began to subsist mainly from their individual plots but still helped their father on his farm. Before the land was taken over, he had three other siblings who helped his father work on the 8 acres of land, but now there are only two available, including himself. After their land was taken, it took them one year to get another land. All their yams became rotten, the workers had harvested all their cassava in the plantation. Now everyone has gone to find their own plot to farm, it is not vastly available anymore. It is not easy but he still has to support his father's new yam farm, which is smaller than the previous. Sometimes he and his brother, also a farmworker, absent themselves from the plantation to help their father. As for him and his brother, they can afford wage labourers, but their father cannot do so.

Yet generally, casual, women, less landed and sharecropping farmworkers have seen reductions in the farming of their food crops and difficulties in monitoring their farms due to the imbalance in the family farm-plantation time and labour allocation. These labour implications are a reminder of how and why capital needs to maintain its own economic viability or reproduction does not cohere with the presumed social contributions often associated with such investments.

### **5.6.3 Wage Labour: 'I Will Farm with Money'<sup>11</sup>**

A significant number of people who clearly indicated that they worked on the plantation in order to invest in their own small to medium sized farm plots which implied inputs including fertilizers, weed control chemicals as well as labour. Such farmers are usually men with access to multiple farm plots, who cultivated perennial cash crops like cocoa and oil palm and other food crops. Many are permanent workers, skilled or semi-skilled operators and security men, headmen (lower level supervisors) and migrant farmworkers who have to maintain their farms in their places of origin. When I asked a security man (middle age) how he was able to combine the several farms with the company work he said,

It is all about labour. If it weren't for this work where would I have had money from to invest in labour in my farm? All I have to do is carry my

cutlass, go walk through my farm, sweat a bit, and come back home (01 June 2018, Dodi Papase).

Migrant farmworkers who are able to maintain their farmlands also do so with paid labour especially when they have at least one key family support, usually their wives to play oversight roles. If their farms are nearby, then they are able to visit during weekends and in the leave periods or in the case of casual workers, during the off-peak and laying-off periods. There are also different dynamics among women and casual farmworkers with relatively smaller food crop farm plots. Most women's *raison d'être* for the plantation job is not primarily to scale up their farms as already explained in the preceding sections of this chapter. Women's 'investment poverty' is linked to the smallness of their farms, which inhibits excess surplus for reinvestment while their cultural responsibility of care and food provisioning compels them to prioritize their welfare of their families over accumulation (see Reardon & Vosti, 1995). However, due to the intense nature of the plantation work, and in the case of those who as a result of the dispossession are separated from their family farms, they still divide their time between the two spheres of farming and farm work. They reserve the weekends, forgoing the Saturday plantation work, to cater for their farms. Yet depending on the crop type and the stage of the farms, they employ wage labour regularly to undertake tedious tasks often related to land preparation and ploughing, weed clearance and making of holes and mounds for planting. The plantation work amplifies the demand for wage labour, but even prior to it, women still employed hired labour for weeding/slashing and the making of mounds. Another dimension to the accessibility to paid labourers is its cost, which is also task based and dependent of existing social relations as explained in chapter four. A female casual farmworker narrated,

After I have harvested corn and made dough for sale, I save some of the money to pay the labourers. I cook for them, and pay them to work. The wage varies sometimes, depending on the relations. When I have received my salary from Volta Red, I can pay them within three days, otherwise it can be up to one week (03 June, 2018, Dodo Tamale).

Women farmworkers also juggle between their own small farms and their family farms (often managed by their husbands or adult sons) as explained by a woman,

she helps her husband during planting of corn and cassava, and rice harvesting. She goes to her own farm on Saturdays, and hires labour in the weekdays if needed, but seasonally, she takes days off from the plantation to spend some nights on her the farm when there is a lot of work to do, because it is too far from home (26 June 2018, Fankyenekor).

#### 5.6.4 Changing Access to Mutual Support Schemes

Some farmworkers expressed their difficulties in maintaining their affiliation to mutual support farm groups. Their commitment and community perceptions are contributing factors as narrated by a male farmworker, who doubles as a ginger farmer,

I hire labour. I won't have time to combine both. Ginger is tedious, you need labour for every stage. The farmers are able to do 'nnoboa' but we [most of the farmworkers] are not part of the groups because of Volta Red...we cannot be committed (19 May, 2018, Dodi Papase).

*Table 5.7*  
*Farmworkers' Sources of Farm Labour (Farm 1)*

Source of Labour	Percentage (yes)
Self	69.8%
Wage labour	54.7%
Family labour	53.9%
Mutual Support	9.4%

Source: Authors survey, 2018.

Some of the dispossessed land owners, sharecroppers and farmworkers who had to search for suitable lands but have become dispersed and distant from their former household farm units and neighbouring hamlets also had similar concerns. Also expressing it impacts on farming, a farmer said,

prior to our displacement, I could farm up to 2.5 acres ...because together with the people living on the land, we could do nnoboa [mutual labour support]. Now we farm on my wife's family land, but I farm only 1 acre (11 July 2018, Brewaniase).

Table 5.7 shows the number and percentage of farmworkers who responded 'yes' to particular sources of labour for their own farm work on their first indicated farm plots. It was therefore not surprising that mutual

support schemes were the least reported sources of farm labour. However, more youth, than elderly people, still found some means to support one another when necessary.

### 5.7 Women's Work, (Re)production and Livelihoods

In this chapter, I have provided empirical evidence on what appears as a coexistence of peasants and small-scale family farming with the capitalist oil palm production in the study area. As already highlighted in chapter four, because the land deal didn't lead to a complete displacement or dispossession, a strong subsistence ethic prevails in these rural communities primarily through sharecropping and own small-scale farming alongside the farm work no matter how small their farm sizes. Even some migrants with farms in their places of origin are able to depend on family support for their maintenance of their farms. Besides the organization of labour on the plantation is also such that the casualization of labour provides a favourable condition for semi-proletarianization so that workers do not depend entirely on wages for their social reproduction. More or less small-scale farming and the low wages subsidizes the cost of production on the plantation and capital accumulation (Luxemburg, 1951; Wallerstein, 1983). It reinforces the arguments of feminist agrarian political economist who have in the past few decades raised concerns about the role of women in social and capitalist (re)production and why women continue to be adversely impacted (Elson, 1998; Fraser, 2017; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003). The challenges that women face transcend simplistic notions of gender or sex discrimination in terms of employer preferences or in wages, as recognized even in many mainstream economic narratives. They are rooted deeply in the fabric of society. In other words, the existing relations of production represents what Fraser, (2014, p. 66) refers to as the 'institutionalized social order' of capitalists societies such that those who carry out most of the work in the reproductive economy-women, are the most disadvantaged (Elson, 1999).

Labour market remains a key point of intersection of the reproductive and productive economies. Yet, as demonstrated in this chapter, men and women have differentiated resource and material endowments, and the latter have limited ability to benefit fully from the new economic 'opportunities'. Men have more farm plots than women (see Table 5.1) and on their first reordered plots, 70 per cent of the women farm under an acre



as compared to 28 per cent among men (see Figure 5.1). Men can therefore have high expectations to expand their farms and grow cash crops based on their relatively higher earnings, even though so far there is no convincing evidence of significant increases in farm sizes. The situation would have been different if women had strong claims to male-controlled family farms in terms of income and food but this is not the norm in these societies where the responsibility of household staple starches like corn and cassava, as well as educational costs continue to put great burdens on women. Men, who are producing on relatively larger lands, can afford to sell the bulk of their foodstuffs (by virtue of the trading skills of women) while the social norm for women is to produce enough grains and vegetables to sustain their households. In some instances where women resist this social order it often leads to marital breakdowns and if there are affected dependents, even the entire responsibility of care may shift to the woman, thereby making it seemingly more reasonable to maintain the status quo rather than resist.

The correlation between demographic distribution of the workers in terms of gender, age and marital statuses (Table 5.3 and Figure 5.2) foregrounds the inter-relationship between production and social reproduction. Unlike other crop sectors such horticulture where labour is highly feminized (Kay, 2015), oil palm remains a male dominated sector. Yet, the vast majority of men have better guaranteed access to the household support of care than the few women engaged in both wage labour and social reproductive activities (small-scale production, domestic labour and care). Women, primarily as wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters and nieces play a key role in domestic work to support the large share of youthful, unmarried and married men (see Table 5.3) working on the plantation. In fact, even among the migrants who reside on farm including the male supervisors, there were instances where I observed that some women who to whom they have no kinship ties are still vital to their dinner preparation. Not to mention the migrants whose wives oversee their small farms or their labourers, wives are often regarded as more reliable than other kinship ties in such duties. Meanwhile, 30 per cent of the women farmworkers are divorced, separated or widowed; although such situations would not necessarily render them landless as explained in chapter four, they are forced to pursue their reproduction through insecure, oppressive wage employment (Bernstein, 2010) and under relatively weak bargaining power. As Picchio, (1992, p. 97) notes,

The paradox of the value of labour is the fact that the more labour is embodied in its reproduction, the less it costs the employer... [particularly] tragic for women as the system's contradictions and conflicts materialize in their personal lives.

In an interview with a carrier in her mid-forties (see section 5.4 about carriers) when I asked about her marital status, she responded '*m'aware nso maye okunani*' i.e. she is a 'married widow'. Her story below characterizes her reaction.

She has been carrying for more than two years. She does not have any formal education and caters for nine children, one of whom is in senior high school [cost subsidized by the state]. She followed her husband to their current community in search of fertile land [her husband abandoned their cocoa farm in their hometown because of ongoing family disputes]. Her husband has been working as a harvester but she does not work with him during the peak season; she regularly carries for another man whom she has no kinship relations. Her husband is not seriously engaged in farming that can support their family. Prior to work on the plantation, she was a head porter for cassava farmers. Usually she would mill the cassava into dough, and then she is entitled to one-third of it. However, the farmer would first buy her share of the dough and make payments to her only after the dough has been sold [by the farmer]. This was her main source of cash while she and her children subsisted on their two acres sharecrop maize and cassava farm. The nature of the cassava dough transaction did not give her secure access to cash, so she found the seasonal access to wage labour a relatively better option; she hopes to be incorporated formally as a casual worker even if as a cleaner. She exclaimed 'that is called '*obia bone*' – 'cruel poverty'. She is under the impression that her boss [the harvester] pays her one-third of the value of their daily output- just like sharecropping [her actual wage is far less than that] (03 June 2018, Dodo Tamale).

Several Marxist scholars emphasize the contradictory nature of such relationship and their crises tendencies i.e. to destabilize the necessary background conditions for capital accumulation by jeopardizing social reproduction, ecology and political power (Fraser, 2014, p. 71). In some exceptional settings, as noted by Cousins et al., (2018, p. 1081), growth and social provision could be complementary. The story above, as well as the several other examples from fieldwork and those shown in this chapter, illustrates the complex interaction between capitalist production and social reproduction the differentiated rural settings. First, the large extent

of semi-proletarianization among farmworkers, the vast majority whose livelihoods are barely diversified beyond family farming, reiterates the significance of land access and productive autonomy; with women and migrants being immensely impacted both by the establishment of the plantation and pre-existing social norms and institutions. Domestic or household economy (centred on women and children labour) is vital to the balance between own farming and the plantation work, thus allowing such co-existence, but it does not only serve an enabling function for capitalist production. Indeed, the situation appears much more complex as evidenced in a company that is still struggling to efficiently maintain the plantation and its workers; the poor retention/commitment of labour while at the same time most women have seen a reduction in their own farm sizes and crop diversity; women's attraction to the exploitative wage job as a means to slow down labour reproduction through investments in their children's education (complemented by the state's subsidized cost of senior high schooling and the national health insurance programme) yet their husbands controlling family planning decisions; and the youth workers also saving up to further their education or to enrol into apprenticeships outside farming. In effect, the implications of such 'co-existence' on social reproduction is differentiated along the lines of both social and land-based classifications, socially constructed gender roles, and the extent of their livelihood diversification and political strategies.

## 5.8 Chapter Conclusions

The evidence from this section contributes to studies that have cautioned about the limited employment prospects from plantations, and the gender disparities in the few opportunities created. Mezzadri, (2016, p. 1881) maintains that 'groups subject to harsh forms of social oppression, like women, already enter Marx's "abode of production" with a lower "price-tag" stuck to their body, and this sets the basis for higher exploitation rates'. What we see in this study, is that the exploitation of women is necessarily linked to gendered wage rates, gendered job opportunities, and tasks that leave women in the lowest income brackets. The interrelationship between organization of labour on the plantation/production and that of subsistence farming is also not unidirectional. The evidence reinforces arguments that are critical of optimistic narratives about the employment creation prospects of large-scale land investments. Even when jobs have been promised under 'consultative' agreements, it may be

difficult to realize the expectations of decent jobs, especially when the institutions that are expected to protect workers are either non-existent, inadequate and even repressive.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the thesis I use peasants interchangeably with small-scale farmers, family farmers and petty commodity producers. It does not represent an analytical category of farmers with no linkages to markets.

<sup>2</sup> Occasionally works as a farm labourer too.

<sup>3</sup> See Carlos Oya, (2004) on rural class formation in groundnut producing areas of Senegal where he adopts contextualised and stylised methods in the attempts to classify farmers.

<sup>4</sup> The official numbers could be lower than the actual numbers because some have worked without contracts, such as the use of students in the past, occasional task sharing by family members, the carriers who work unofficially with harvesters, and others who are temporally hired when there is urgent need for workers- e.g for fire control.

<sup>5</sup> Approx. 2.9 USD as of September 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Divide their daily output by 86, i.e. the target for a daily wage.

<sup>7</sup> The numbers represent the number of bags of loose palm nuts collected (the daily task for a full wage is 4 bags). DP is daily pay and can represent several situations whereby the supervisor allows a worker the daily wage even when they have not actually worked (sick leave, or when a worker is given temporary oversight duties) or when the field conditions did not enable them to meet their daily targets among others.

<sup>8</sup> Most of them also do not have licences for operations because they trained on the farm and do not have the financial resources to apply for one.

<sup>9</sup> As of January, 2019, two major truck accidents had occurred between August and December, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> A popular discourse used by the farmworkers especially women to describe their physical health as a result of intensity of labour.

<sup>11</sup> The words of a female casual farmworker about her future plans for her own farm- she wishes to accumulate enough savings and retire from the plantation work.

# 6

## The Political Fronts of Dispossession and Exploitation

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I assess the political reactions from the perspectives of the dispossessed families and the farmworkers as well as the relations between their demands<sup>1</sup>. It is grouped into three main sections. Section 6.2 explores the various forms of political agency employed by the affected land-owning families vis-à-vis the strategies of the investors and middlemen. I analyse how and why their political reactions and demands have changed over time, highlighting the role of the state, class and family politics and advocacy. Section 6.3 examines the everyday politics of farmworkers against exploitation and for better terms of incorporation and the constraints of organized action and unionization among the workers. The third major section, 6.4, looks at a broad range of relational issues including the differences in class and generational interests, and between farmworkers and the affected families.

### 6.2 Land Dispossession, Investor Strategy and Local Responses

#### 6.2.1 Mobilizing Support and Containing Conflicts

In chapter one, I have explained how and why it is important to look at the state-society interactions to examine land grab resistance. The answer to the question ‘why some land grabs breed strong resistance, while others appear to be received in more benevolent ways’ often suggests that it depends on several factors. Different theoretical perspectives from classical collective action paradigms, Marxist and social movements theories emphasize different factors (see Hall et al., 2015). Peasants may or may not act, collectively organize, confront or oscillate from organized electoral activity to violent confrontations (Scott, 1985). To analyse peasants’ actions, Fox reminds us to look at how and why different actors are able to pursue their goals, and how it changes through conflicts and convergence. The question then remains, how did the investors win support from the

many family heads, and why was there no strong collective resistance? It is very crucial to understand how the underlying politics across the intersecting spheres of state institutions, traditional authority, and class relations influenced investor strategy in the acquisition of the land.

*i. Legitimizing the Project*

To mobilize support and acceptance of the project, two major strategies were adopted by the investors through, and with support from middlemen. First, the project was legitimized right from the onset. In chapters three and four, I illustrated the enabling role of the state through investment regulations and the PSI as well as the NGO discourse of the development brokers. To reiterate, that these affected communities per their geographical proximity to the northernmost half of Ghana and their remoteness from the capital city, they bear the existing vertical inequality that compounds the ethnoreligious north-south divide in terms of infrastructure, basic social services and income. As such, it is not surprising that they showed enthusiasm about a company that was going to be the first of a kind to make their communities visible and create jobs for the youth. Narrating how the project was conveyed by the family heads to their members, a family member said,

My uncle is the one who gave his land. He informed us that an NGO has come looking for land to work. His personal land was not sufficient so he told people who might be interested. The people brought a surveyor and demarcated the land.... So, they formed a committee, and they took them to a hotel to sign an agreement. When they heard they will be paid in dollars, they were happy (11 July 2018, Brewaniase).

With a long-term goal of becoming an NGO, they agreed to the four-year moratorium put on rent payments ‘they said they cannot pay rent if they have not harvested any fruits<sup>2</sup>, it would be the landowners’ contribution to their own development.

*ii. Strategic Consent*

Through the middlemen and some supportive family heads, they advanced a strategy of ‘assumed consent’ to win support for the project. Even though the project had been packaged in a very appealing way, one does not expect a unanimous agreement from all the families, particularly because of the different class relations. However, after a middleman

convinced a few of the family heads, especially those with their land on the edges to agree, they spread the news as though everyone had already consented to it, thus compelling the others with lands in the centre to conform. In the end, the investors, with support from middlemen, arranged a meeting in the capital city where they signed an already written lease agreement by the company's lawyers without any opportunity to review it. In fact, the leadership of the land owners association and a few other educated members requested that they be allowed some time (about three months) to review the deed of document, but this was denied by the middleman, who projected the urgency of allowing the project to commence. Once all the landowners had blindly endorsed the lease document — accompanied with some money enticement, the final approval had to be from the chief — who in this area, is not necessarily the custodian of their land as explained earlier in chapter four. One of the family representatives iterated,

He [the middleman] brought the lease agreement in the night for the Chief to sign it. How could he get time to read? He is educated, he could have reviewed it. The chief got very angry but he signed it because we had already endorsed it. Ghanaian politicians, you cannot trust them (14 July, 2018 Brewaniase).

*iii. The Fear of Food Insecurity, Confrontation, Confusion and Calm*

Despite the strategic approach by the investors to win support from the people, the class dynamics within the families spurred resistance and conflicts in the initial phase (within the first four years) of the transaction. All the fifteen extended families interviewed indicated that portions of the land were either family farmed, farmed by sharecroppers and/or both. Nonetheless, vast portions were fallow lands, or unfarmed by the owners due to its distance from the settlements, the incidences of bushfires, access to other nearby family lands and of course they always farm small sizes at a time. Out of the fifteen family groupings, at least three of them had family members losing all their available lands and thus could not conceive the reality of being downgraded to a landless class associated with settlers or foreigners. For two interrelated reasons, they began to confront the middlemen and company. First, is the loss of their 'dodi' or subsistence lands, and second is the complete inaccessibility to the acquired land to

hunt or as path to other farms. While many of the family representatives/heads interviewed have had alternative farm lands from their maternal and paternal lineages, or even from their spouses, for those who lost all these forms of access, it meant they now had to look for a sharecrop arrangements. Farmers, who had property and tenants have now become sharecroppers themselves. Unfortunately, as already explained in chapter four, the rent factor broke down the moral economy of permitting usufruct land use among members the Ntrubo clan. Besides, others just hesitated to rent out their lands to those who 'chose' to sell theirs. In a move by the company, apparently meant to address their food related concerns, they promised to a hire a piece of land in a neighbouring village for those completely dispossessed to subsistence. Yet, as at the time of the research, there was still a stalemate on the provision of the land. According to the management of the Volta Red, the families refused the proposed offer and disagreements ensued among the family heads regarding who should be entitled to access the 'promise land'. However, those family members who have completely lost their lands are not satisfied about the location, size and the fertility of the proposed land. Most of them are either sharecropping or farming on their spouses' family lands.

Also concerning food, most of the families interviewed assumed that they could have some access rights to the plantation, yet this was far from reality. Partly, this assumption is premised on the existing local system of sharecropping and land rental, whereby tenants' use of land, does not prevent land owners from accessing own their land for herbs, hunting, or timber. The company gave them a short period of time to uproot all their food crops prior to the establishment, and this was chaotic for several reasons. Some crops had not reached their maturity stages; some could not be transplanted; transplantable ones required immediate access to new lands; there were no guaranteed markets for the surplus during the rushed harvest, that meant crops like cassava that are only harvested when needed either had to go waste, or abandoned in the concession. Given that cassava is a staple food, those who could not harvest theirs in the given period, became furious about the restriction that followed, when even farmworkers had access to the remnants. The situation was the same for people who had timber on the land. Also, the completely dispossessed families requested to be allowed to plant some corn, in the unmaintained portions or just before the oil palm seedlings are transplanted from the nursery, all of which were denied. Traditionally, the area acquired has also been the



source of sand for construction, and 'bush meat' for the families. In an interview with a dispossessed female farmworker, she iterated, 'now if you do not have money you cannot eat meat'. These issues sparked confrontations, mainly from the dispossessed landowners. A key informant who played a major role in the process, mentioned that they received threats from the people for deceiving them. He added, that in 2009,

when they were creating tracts, one of the landowners, on two occasions confronted them with a gun [a sporadic incident], so the manager asked me to take stock of damaged tree and cash crops so they could be compensated [eventually two years after the land deal.] (11 July 2018, Dodo Tamale).

Nonetheless, the payment of the compensation was also perceived by some farmers as rent. A landowner will say, 'it was a deliberate act of the investors to confuse them' only to understand it later. In the immediate aftermath of the transfer, some landlords also demanded their lands back, but could not pursue it further due to the lease agreement. Besides they were inhibited by the committee leaders and the chieftaincy institutions from articulating positions that may result in conflict. In the same way, many of the youth agitated when they heard about the details of the lease. Even within the families, it is apparent that the family heads, mostly adult men did not consult the women and the youth. This is quite a norm in these patriarchal communities where generational relation plays a big role in decision making (Park, & White, 2017). A young man whose father's land was affected stated 'we were angry about this land acquisition but we could not do anything because our fathers are still alive'.

They planned to evict the company, but the elders and chiefs controlled the situation. Although the chief did not play a significant role in the initial process, after realizing the bad deal, the land family heads ran back to him to intervene in the pending issues as a traditional leader with the responsibility of maintaining social peace. A family head expressed,

When we realized our mistake, it was already too late, so we went back to the chief to plead with him, and recognize that no matter what, he is our father and that we needed his assistance in addressing the issues (12 July. 2018, Dodo Tamale)..

In 2013, when Volta Red took over the company, they also inherited a lawsuit by the families against SGSOG, asking for changes to some clauses in the lease agreement. The Paramount chief, as an arbitrator in land conflicts, mediated both the ongoing court suits by the families against

SGSOG for the case to be settled traditionally. He also facilitated a new memorandum of understanding for the amendment of some sections of the lease ‘agreement’, after which his involvement, once again waned.

Moreover, four to five years after the land grab, when the land owners had not yet received any rents from the company, the somewhat shady character of the deal became apparent. It was also then that they realized there was even a clause in the deed of lease that stated that disputes concerning the lease could only be settled in a court in Paris. At this point, there were no divided interests on the need to take some form of legal action against the company. Yet, even by 2013, in the public eye, the plantation had undergone three faces of ownership or at least name changes — from SGSOG to Herakles Farms, and then to Volta Red Farms (discussed earlier in chapter four). This made it difficult for family heads to know with whom they were dealing. In fact, during the fieldwork, there were many instances when discussions were inclined towards comparing which of these three ‘companies’ operated best or worst. While, it is almost certain that SGSOG and Herakles are more or less the same company, the Volta Red factor remains unclear. There is still a grey area with regard to the ownership or affiliations of Volta Red. On several occasions during group interviews and discussion, I witnessed debates between participants about the ownership of the company — whether it is Ghanaian or foreign owned, or the differences between the three companies. As of February 2016, the Director of Volta Red doubled as the Chief Operating Officer of SG Sustainable Oil Cameroun (SGSOC)<sup>3</sup> and some of the company documents still bear affiliation to SGSOG. This finding supports previous research by Clapp, et al (2017) and Visser, (2015) that asserts that the diversity of actors, and the complexity of financial instruments are factors that hinder the crafting of effective governance mechanisms to check the externalities associated with such land investments — as in this case, certainly influencing the potential and impacts of the political reactions from the affected groups.

### 6.2.2 ‘Our Eyes Opened’: The Role of Advocacy Politics

Contemporary land grabs have reinvigorated the actions and influence of domestic and transnational agrarian movements (Edelman & Borras, 2016). Yet, the study area, and more broadly in Ghana, are not strongholds of social movements. Within the first six years of the land acquisition and

the establishment of the plantation, the company faced no civil society pressures and none of the people I interviewed had been familiar with the land grab phenomenon.

A major event that helped shape the local politics around the land deal was the emergence of a transnational advocacy group, the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN). AFJN is based in the USA, their organizational members are mainly Christian missionaries, and they have networks and numerous coalitions in Africa. They describe who they are as ‘a community of advocates for responsible U.S. relations with Africa’.<sup>4</sup> Prior to their presence in the study area, they had already joined forces with Green Peace and other international NGOs, campaigning against SGSOC. However, as an advocacy group, their focus transcends land grabbing to broader international issues concerning food systems, toxic dumping, just governance and women's empowerment. A closer look at their press releases and communiqués shows their ability to mobilize information on ongoing injustices in particular places to persuade states or powerful organizations for policy changes<sup>5</sup>.

They consciously framed the issues around the oil palm investment in a way that attracted attention and related to the ongoing struggles of the dispossessed families. Between 2014 and 2016, AFJN followed up on, and conducted an action research on the oil palm investment — a period where the land grab discourse emerged among the landowners' committee and their families. Using the tactics of information politics (Keck & Sikkink, 1999), AFJN networked with a Catholic Parish in the district, conducted several community awareness forums, FM radio presentations, held discussions in the Volta Region, and guided the family heads on how to engage with Volta Red to pursue their demands. They also shared the experiences of farmers affected by the project in Cameroon to create awareness, educate and empower communities, and advocate for policies that ensure responsible investments. In an interview with the Ntrubo paramount Chief, he maintained that the landowners' committee realized the gravity of the issues at stake concerning the land deal when AFJN came into the picture. A local AFJN group was formed constituting an Assemblyman (local government official), the paramount chief, two sub chiefs, secretary to the landowners' committee, and two landowners to continue the mission of AFJN within the district and the Volta region.

In contrast to radical social movements such as La Via Campesina that oppose large-scale investments and therefore call for regulation to stop

land grabbing, AFJN's framing was situated within the B regulatory tendency (as discussed earlier in chapter one). Such a direction is not surprising, given the compromises within which advocacy networks operate and the fact that they are political spaces characterised by constant negotiations (Keck & Sikkink, 1999; Lerche, 2008). AFJN has to lend itself to the values of its member organizations, but also the affected families and communities did not oppose the establishment of the plantation *per se*, instead were looking for fair terms of incorporation. As such, it was explicit in their demand framing and campaigns that large-scale investments be not outrightly rejected, rather they should be done responsibly i.e. to reduce negative impacts on communities. Following the middle ground ideology of AFJN, some of the families even saw possibilities of co-production with the company. That is, they proposed that they be allowed to produce oil palm on the unmaintained portions and sell to the company under agreed terms on in a system similar to sharecropping. Other family members and even the unaffected community members also suggested that the company allows parts of the land for cocoa or corn production all of which suggest their desire to be integrated into the project rather than completely denouncing it ( see Larder, 2015 on a rice investment in Mali ). One of the community elders interviewed emphasized the main message in the years of AFJN, 'investments involve capital, land and labour and thus should be premised on a joint agreement and equal benefits'<sup>6</sup>. In a 2014 report by AFJN (AFJN, 2014, p. 6), under a short section titled 'Development and Business', it reads

AFJN is not against business or economic development in Africa, and in our community meetings we were very clear: 'It's your land, if you want to lease it, go ahead. But, be sure you 1) clearly understand the terms of the contract and 2) are getting what you want in exchange for 2-3 generations without your land.' We are not interested in causing problems between local and foreign entities, nor are we dissuading Ghanaians from undergoing business ventures with global and/or foreign companies.

Although to some extent Volta Red seemed to have been threatened by the presence of AFJN, the company capitalized on the latter's accommodating tactic which eventually reinforced their so-called 'friendly' approach to addressing the pending court issues. Field interviews suggest that between 2014 and 2015, the chief, the investors and middlemen persuaded the family heads to pull the case out of court to be settled amicably with the hopes of win-win possibilities. In any case, given the circumstance of

the signed lease document, one could not be optimistic about the potential outcome of the legal action, but neither would settling the case outside court guarantee positive outcomes. In the end, they settled on an addendum to the lease agreement to change the Paris clause, provide scholarships (still very limited) to one child each of the land owners children, and take up some social responsibilities, all of which were efforts to calm nerves. The landholders' inability to modify their most pressing issues regarding the annual rent of 5 dollar per ha, the 4-year 'rent holiday' and their concerns about employment, reveal not only the impacts of ideology in civil society politics, but also, the power relations that still persisted.

### **6.3 Labour Politics: Class Consciousness and Everyday Action**

As discussed in chapter one, in rural peasant economies such as that described above, characterized by exploitation and subordination — agrarian political theorists provide competing explanations of the nature of political reactions that emerge i.e., revolt (radical and overt politics) and non-revolt, which are essentially linked to class relations, traditional community structures, or individual incentives (Paige, 1975; Scott, 1985). Since 2008 when work started on the acquired land, the farmworkers have not engaged significantly in overt politics to demand changes in unfavourable terms of incorporation. However, there is an increasing level of class-consciousness among the workers, although sometimes contentious. A laid-off and dispossessed semi-proletariat, expressed, 'We have become surplus<sup>7</sup> to them, if you die the job will continue'. Knowing this, how do they translate their claims and assertions into action against exploitation, and action for better terms of incorporation? Adopting some tenets of ethnography, particularly observations, informal conversations and interviews, I illustrate their everyday politics in dealing with the precarious nature of work on the plantation.

#### **6.3.1 Deception, and Non-Compliance**

During fieldwork, my Sundays were precious moments. This is the official resting day for permanent workers. Casual workers who worked on their farms on Saturdays also take rest on Sundays, and of course with 89 per cent of the workers being Christians, the hours between 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 pm were a precious window of opportunity to talk to most of the workers who were then closed from church. It was one of these Sunday

afternoons in July 2018 that I visited two relatives, Kofi and Kwame in their home at Brewaniase. They are displaced sharecroppers working on the plantation. Kwame is a permanent worker and has worked with the company since its establishment. Kofi, on the other hand, is a casual worker. After they lost their land, he worked on the plantation for a while and decided to travel to the city to work for some years. In 2016, he returned so he could farm, and also help in catering for his aging and widowed father. He has since returned to the plantation working in pruning and harvesting. He described how risky it is, and what he does to ‘address it’,

We do not have hand gloves for pruning, so sometimes, I also do shoddy work. My supervisors expect me to collect the branches and pack them at specified locations so that they do not hamper the work of slashers. Yet without gloves, I cannot work fast and I often finish work with injuries to my palms. So sometimes I do not collect the branches. They cannot monitor everyone, they cannot tell who did it, unfortunately, this affects the slashers too (15 July 2018, Fankyenekor).

The most contested piece-rate targets have to do with slashing. Currently, slashers have to weed a total land area of about one third of an acre (9m<sup>2</sup>×15 palms) regardless of the field condition. However, this reflects a lower adjustment (from 9m<sup>2</sup>×25 palms) upon the introduction of women into this task since 2016 but also a response from management to the complaints of the slashers. Nonetheless, it still appears a big challenge for both men and women: men who seek further reduction in the target, and women who want a gendered consideration. While the women have had some success in requesting the support of men in fertilizer application — to carry the fertilisers to the locations of use, they are not satisfied with the conditions of slashing. A female farmworker complained that

all the targets are demanding, but slashing is really tough. They said they cannot loosen up the targets for women — because we all are the same. ...they say what men can do, women can also do...what can we say? (07 June, 2018, Brewaniase)

While some have acquiesced to this situation, others who are relatively better off in terms of having alternative livelihoods or other household support systems often evade the slashing season. In a conversation with a female worker who is also a part-time seamstress, she expressed,

tomorrow I won't go to work. I have told my supervisor that I'm not well and I might stay home for about three days. But honestly, it is because I know that the loose-picking season is ended and we are about to start slashing. Slashing is tedious and we hardly meet our targets (07 June 2018, Brewaniase).

Sprayers in particular are very conscious about the health implications of their tasks even though their claims are often premised on health hearsays. They capitalize on those perceived dangers and often break their working time rules by justifying the need to go home to wash off the chemicals. Like many other workers, Kofi also iterated the importance of his tasks within the entire production chain, thus his role in the functioning of the plantation. Based on the way he values his position within the plantation system, he expected that he be allowed to work under favourable conditions, particularly, the flexibility to do a real piece rate i.e., get paid for what he can do in a day and not be forced to spend the whole day on the farm. In his words,

If you work below your target and do nothing the rest of your time, they [supervisors] won't say anything, but they won't allow you to leave before 2:00 p.m. even in the off-peak seasons. If you do so, you will not be marked for a wage (15 July 2018, Fankyenekor).

He argued that his father had trained them in farming, and now the company is benefiting from it. Thus, he could not accept why they won't allow them to work on their own farms. Sometimes, he secretly informs the headman or makes up a story that he is sick in order to avoid getting into trouble with authorities. Open deception is very common among the workers and depending on their relations with superiors, and the occupational history of the superiors themselves — whether or not they have been in their shoes before. This is confirmed in the words of a headman who said,

A worker will call to inform you of their inability to come to work because of ill health — when you know very well he is telling lies, but you can't do anything about it. After the 20<sup>th</sup> [day of the month]<sup>8</sup>, you can confer that, in our attendance sheets, many people absent themselves to do 'jobs'. Such attitudes affect us very much. For example, it reduces productivity especially when they do not inform us in time because of their anger (19 May 2018, Dodi Papase).

For casual workers, not being entitled to annual paid leave means they have to take their own breaks as and when necessary; sometimes they rest during the lay-off periods. Furthermore, the intensity of labour also breaks them down occasionally. However, not being able to justify requests for sick leave when they are not tangible work-related injuries leads to ‘new discoveries’ on ways and means around them. A young, literate and male farmworker narrated,

sometimes when I’m sick of feverishness, I do not report that. I know the clinics in our communities do not have adequate capacity to detect all illness, so I complain of severe chest or neck pain that is directly related to harvesting. When I do that, I can get medical cover and also convince the medical officer to get me an excuse duty note for about 3 days. During this period, I can rest, and also receive my daily wage (10 July 2018, Brewaniase).

### 6.3.2 Acquiescence?

Structural differentiation plays a key role in shaping political reaction. The location of land, its fertility, and access to inputs are important in determining the extent to which farm workers benefit from their land and consequently, the extent to which they depend on the income from the plantation work (Paige, 1975). Going back to the data on the class positions of women, they are often the ones with narrow choices as many of them depend largely on the wage income. The situation is not so different for dispossessed proletariats, and migrants, especially urban-rural migrants, who may also be skilled, educated and not so interested in farming for extra income. Ouma, (2018, p. 120) in her study of a rice field in Kenya, asserted that ‘there is great incentive for such workers to conform to the idea of a “subservient worker”, for the benefits that such repute may bring’. This is certainly not a case of false consciousness as one operator stated, ‘we are just hustling for them, I don’t want to become an enemy so I have stopped complaining’.

In addition, given the discretionary mode of labour management, frequent indebtedness to superiors, and other existing top-down patronage relations, it is always important to maintain some level of compliance to safeguard one’s ‘future’ in the job. It may also not necessarily be about being in the good books of supervisors, but the need to secure wage



income to maintain their households. Below, is the story of Adwoa, which illustrates the context of acquiescence on the plantation.

Adwoa is a 51-year-old woman who has worked for nine years on the plantation. She is migrant, landless and has been divorced for seven years. She and her former husband had a lot of farmland in their hometown. They even had eight acres of oil palm and she intercropped vegetables. In the early 2000s when they heard of the PSI, they moved to a village in the Eastern Region to work at the nurseries. In the meantime, they left their crops in the hands of family members and that did not work out well. At the same time, her husband had refused to cater for their five daughters under the perception that girls will not bring any wealth to him in future, but rather to their husbands: a reason for their divorce. She has been working all these years to take care of the children's education. Although she has been a permanent worker upon recruitment, she complains 'the work is tedious, but if you are not educated do not have any other tradeable skill, what do you do? Now I can see that I'm tired and very weakened but what can I do?' She does not envision working until pension, but her goal is to clear the educational costs, move to the capital city to stay with her children, and perhaps start a trade. Now, she comports herself to safeguard her employment and permanent contract status (10 July 2018, Volta Red, Fankyenekor).

### 6.3.3 Absenteeism: Production and Action

Everyday resistance also resides in the multitude of alterations or actively constructed responses that are continued and/or created anew in order to confront the modes of ordering that currently dominate our societies (van der Ploeg, 2010). One of the key findings in relation to how the workers respond to casualization and low income is their consciousness about the need to continue with their own farming regardless of the time competition and trade-offs associated with it. Historically, these settler communities emerged out of a '*dodi*' system, literally meaning 'cultivate to eat', whereby natives gave out portions of land freely to settlers to cater for their food needs. Following the fast spread of commodification of the rural, and with cocoa becoming a major cash crop in these areas, the gifting of agricultural lands has become rare, and the system replaced with tenancy agreements. However, farming for subsistence remains an important feature of the people's social reproduction. As was evident in the survey conducted, almost everyone cultivated some corn or cassava, and even cash-crop sharecroppers are often allowed by their landlords to intercrop

some foods for their own subsistence. In addition, in times when they are laid off, some casual workers search for short-term farm labour opportunities such as rice harvesting where the remuneration is paid in bags of rice rather than cash.

Although occasional or seasonal purchases of food items are normal, there is a societal expectation of being able to produce one's own staple foods or at least to get food crops from one's land through tenants. In a conversation with a young operator who is also a migrant, he said,

I have just acquired a piece of land from my landlord (residential) to plant corn and cassava. My friends have been teasing me and I also realized that I can't be buying food all the time. They have agreed to support me with their labour to start the farm this year so that I don't waste my money on food (08 July 2018, Brewaniase).

Given this background, the farmworkers' cash needs are not directly targeted at food even though many depend on the income from the plantation to support their own farms — semi-proletarianism that sustains capital accumulation (Fraser, 2014). Apparently, many of the workers use their wages for household needs like educational costs and shelter. Indeed, in 2017, the farm management heeded the request of the farm residents, many of whom are less-landed migrants and allowed them to farm portions of the land that were not maintained — of course, this was also a management strategy to control weed and fire in the unmaintained portions. Nonetheless, the scheme had its shortfalls regarding labour competition and conflicts of interests whereby supervisors were also implicated, thus leading to its annulment after a year. The workers have also been permitted to collect foodstuff<sup>9</sup> from the farm, although they are sometimes restricted when it competes with their transport space. In addition, for many casual workers, they could not risk being laid off and being food insufficient at the same time. This consciousness is a major driver for the continuance of their small-scale farming alongside the plantation work. The competition that exists between the plantation work and own farming is real, but most of them will not compromise on their own farms to the extent of being short of staple foods. For instance, September is both a major harvest season and minor planting season for maize, as well as being an off-peak but not necessarily a very lean period for oil palm. During this period, as shown in Figures 6.1<sup>10</sup> and 6.2<sup>11</sup>, women's attendance to the plantation is very low (shown in the number of '0s') compared to their June commitment in the peak season.

Yet, even in peak seasons, most casual workers will not report on Saturdays<sup>12</sup>. In general, their physical presence on their own farms is reduced and often replaced with hired labour and chemical inputs, but in the farming seasons i.e., during planting and harvesting, they spend ample time on their own farms as compared to the plantation work. In an interview with a supervisor, he confirmed that

people have been working with us for a very long time, but their attitude towards work is bad. At the time that we need workers for our work, that is when they have left the job to go to their own farms. Sometimes it takes two to three months, especially when it is corn season. Imagine if you engage such a person as a permanent worker. Sometimes when you make them permanent, their mentalities change and then you realize that the casual workers even work harder (08 June, 2018 Volta Red, Fankyenekor).

Occasionally, some casual farmworkers whose farms are adjacent to the plantation, exploit the transport service to work on their farms, without reporting to work. The average number of working days for most of the workers ranges between 18 and 20 days out of the expected 26–27 days or even lower during the farming seasons. Workers have been seeking the elimination of Saturday work, but since that has not been granted, more than half of them do not turn up on Saturdays. Interestingly, they do not face sanctions either — a situation which management has come to terms with, given the societal context of their operation. A worker explained,

getting people to work on the farm is difficult. They have to search for a new person, train him or her and hope that he or she stays on. What I can do in 30 min on this farm, a new entrant might take over 2 hours to do and this will affect the company (16 May 2018, Dodi Papase).

Figure 6.1  
Women's Attendance to Work on the Plantation in June 2017

Source Author, 2018.

Indeed, although the company lays off workers seasonally, and also, is unable to recruit workers to maintain the entire plantation, the narrative above is a true reflection of the daily labour supply challenges. In the classic literature on capitalist development in the countryside as well as the contemporary debates on land grabs (Li, 2011; Marx, 1977), a major concern has been the issue of surplus population whose labour is not needed on the farm. In this case, although labour appears to be abundant, they may, on some occasions, not be readily available because of the unfavourable working conditions, the need to subsist, and, of course, their relative access to (tenant) lands to do their own farming, and, in some cases, access to other livelihoods' opportunities. During my visit in the off-peak season, I had several encounters with laid-off workers in multiple activities. Whereas some, particularly the women, were anxiously waiting to be called

back to work, there were also several instances of workers who had been asked to return to work but were not ready. Some were engaged in farming, others were labouring on small-scale farms, others had taken up construction contracts, others prioritized their health conditions after previous accidents, while a few young men were considering migrating to cocoa producing regions down south to work as tenant labour<sup>13</sup>.

Figure 6.2  
Women's Attendance to Work on the Plantation in September, 2017

Source Author, 2018.

### 6.3.4 Farmworkers' Actions and the Constraints of Organizing

Several factors account for the emergence of everyday politics as the main form of contention by workers in this case — as we see in their demands for minor reforms in the organization and conditions of labour. Of course, the findings re-affirm Scott's (1985) argument that so far as the subsistence ethic of the peasantry is not threatened, revolts are unlikely. In some ways, the maintenance of the moral economy persists as evident in the nature of tenancy agreements that exists between foreigners/settlers and natives. However, when one pulls away from the confines of singular teleological assumptions, then we find several other practical reasons that affect their politics — why everyday actions appear to be the most viable means to expressing their agency and what inhibits their incipient efforts to undertake collective action.

Indeed, everyone on the plantation is there for regular access to cash income, but it is in the unpacking of the purpose of this cash income that we can understand their politics. For instance, a parent's cash needs for children's education normally depends on ages and stages of their dependents, and even the financial demands from the type of educational institutions. The farmworkers who are currently enrolled in secondary or tertiary education or savings towards higher education do not have the incentives to engage in any overt/organized resistance because they will not stay for long. Similarly, the cash needs for investments in one's own farm is also a function of the available land size, the form of ownership, access to family labour, the maturity of the farm, types of crops grown, etc. In such instances, their political reactions occur at the conjuncture of self-interest (Popkin, 1979) and other structural conditions.

Again, the ways in which labour is structured in a plantation allows permanent workers more organizational opportunities than casual workers. Some permanent workers sometimes schedule their annual leave during their farming season to allow them time on their own farm — of course, worker-supervisor relations play a major role in such decisions. Security workers, who are all permanent staff, have informally re-organized their formal working hours from 12 hours a day to a continuous 48 hours so that they can have two full days every week in order to have ample time for their farm activities and other businesses like motorbike transport services. The situation is however different for casual workers who find it difficult to unite on common issues. In addition, there are always tensions that emerge in their incipient attempts to mobilize. Lower level overseers

and headmen are often left in a competing dilemma of whose interest to represent — workers or management? Most of the headmen have been core labourers before, or usually shift between labouring and overseeing, thus many can identify with the challenges faced by workers, yet there is a constant sensitization from management on the need to protect, and explain the company's position to the workers, so as to prevent any outburst of violence. In the words of one long-serving worker,

We have attempted a strike before. It landed the headmen in trouble because some workers informed management that the leaders spearheaded it. They [the headmen] were rebuked for that (18 May 2018, Dodi Papase).

There are several instances of workers doubling as unpaid or paid labourers of their supervisors or other high-ranking authorities in return for favours, small loans, income or gifts, etc., which brings in emotions, fear, and subtle control in their political reactions. 'Fatherly' relations between those in authority and workers, is not only typical of many rural settings where paternalistic and patronage relations dominate, but also it is embedded in the existing societal contexts, which is akin to the kind of intergenerational, and top-down relations between the elderly and the young, fathers and sons, chiefs and subjects, teachers and students, etc., characterized by the societal expectation of high regard to authority which often expresses itself openly or/and subtly as subordination and control (Amanor, 2010).

Transcending the local begs the question, what is the role of the state? Mainstream optimism in large-scale agricultural investments have always been linked to labour opportunities for host communities (UNCTAD, et al 2010). However, the growing power and reach of global capital have exceeded the ability of nations and labour movements to regulate them. The existing regulatory institutions for agricultural labour management in Ghana are non-applicable, inadequate and repressive as I explain further in chapter seven. It is therefore not surprising that some workers consider delays as normal, or even better than their previous workplaces. Again, how does one confront a company about low wages when they adhere to labour laws of the country and pay almost 50 percent higher than the minimum wage?

The workers' eagerness to mobilize is constrained on three fronts: not knowing what their rights are, and how to pursue them, thus the fear of possible violation of state laws; their remoteness (location-wise) from the south<sup>14</sup> which makes it difficult for alliance building with labour unions;

and third, and often the norm, the company has been hostile to the idea of strikes and trade unionism, specifically the idea of joining the Ghana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU)<sup>15</sup>. Despite the constitutional safeguarding of workers' rights to unionization, as at the time of my visit, management had not given approval for security and casual workers to join the union on the grounds of the company's internal security and the fluidity of casual workers. While the leaders continue to fight this decision, it is being met with a covert process of false conscientization about unions being violent. It appears the aim is to inhibit voluntary participation in the union even if management is later compelled to comply with the law. This is often interpreted by the workers as 'if unions are violent, then it is all about protests and strikes, then there is a likelihood of police arrest'. As such, workers who need to keep their jobs would rather stay away and/or resort to the everyday individualized actions. Permanent workers agitated about the lack of an enabling environment to unionize. Casual workers and those in security were also puzzled about being prevented by management to join the Ghana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) under the rhetoric of the 'company's internal security'. Although the law allows even casual workers to form unions, it is apparent that these provisions need to be accompanied by the necessary institutional support for such marginalized groups. Officials at GAWU registered logistical and human resource constraints in their efforts to mobilize the workers (Field notes, 11 Jan. 2019). At the same time, prioritizing uncommitted semi-proletariat casual workers who are geographically distant from the capital and other oil palm plantations in the south, presents practical challenges for GAWU, which is under-resourced (Field notes, 04 March, 2019). The farmworkers, therefore, resort to everyday individual forms of political reactions to deal with the unfavourable working conditions.

#### **6.4 Land-Labour Politics: Class and Intergenerational Tensions**

As of 2015, the lawsuit against the company had been taken from court and the company has been operating peacefully. Since 2016, the AFJN left the scene, and the local group formed to keep an eye on the investment is no longer functional<sup>16</sup>. Given these contexts issues, how do the affected families perceive the present situation of the land grab and how have their perceptions changed over time? What kind of political actions could be envisaged between now and 2060 when the lease is expired? Among the family heads/representative, there is an almost unanimous sense of regret



for agreeing to the land deal. This perception is even more widespread among the individual families who were not consulted in the acquisition process. This regret is associated with the loss of trust on different levels.

At the family level, the youth, women and other members continue to accuse their family heads for not involving them and for not doing due diligence before agreement. Moreover, because they only started receiving rent post-2013, the affected families have now come to fully comprehend the real value of the rent, and this is particularly troubling for those with small plots. Following the ongoing perceptions of unjust disbursement of rents by family representatives, other affected family members seek to collect their rents individually, a situation that is not viable for those small plots since the cost of transport alone may consume almost all their income. There are also perceptions from the youth and affected family members that some key leaders in the landowners' committee have alliances with the management of the company, thus diluting their efforts to effect changes. There were complaints from the youth about the reluctance of the committee to forward their written grievances to the company. A key informant stated,

When the committee calls for a meeting with the company, they always give excuses for the meetings to be called off. They only meet the company when it's time to take the yearly rent to the families. The landowners and committee do not meet until there is a delay in their annual rent payment (11 Feb. 2019, Abrubruwa).

Antagonism between the family heads, families and even the general community on the one hand, and middlemen and the investors on the other hand, has been centred around the issue of the company's inability to deliver on its promises. Apart from the provision of a few boreholes and some educational support to basic schools, many other social responsibilities have not met the expectations of the people. Yet for the most people, they could even manage without these social facilities if the promised extent of employment was upheld. From the time of SGSOG to Volta Red, the numbers of jobs created have been declining. It is not encouraging that a 3750ha of land employs less than 250 workers, with an average attendance even lower, sometimes under 100 workers reporting to work in a day. Only 1000ha was being maintained as of 2018, but also the precarious working conditions deter retention. A family head interviewed in 2018 emphasized,

The last time we went for a meeting, they asked us to pray for them to get labourers — they are not getting workers. We want the company to do well. The work being done is a quarter. It is left in the bush. They cannot employ workers. They cannot provide jobs (10 July 2018, Brewaniase).

The lack of clarity on the ownership of the current company, implies that the people continue to compare the employment situation under SGSOC-Herakles to Volta Red, often reproaching the latter. A family head stated,

This company is weak. Volta Red is weak. The first company employed almost 1,000<sup>17</sup> workers, they also employed high school students on vacation — 2 buses — to get some money. Volta Red is weak. Herakles was better. Today workers are not up to 200. There were women selling food at the canteen, today you do not find anything there. Volta Red is weak (14 July, 2018, Brewaniase).

This is was a common perception among the farmworkers. Most of the existing permanent contracts were given under Herakles, they used to have annual end-of-year parties for them and the catchment communities, and they received a 13<sup>th</sup> month payment, all of which have been scrapped under Volta Red. Closely linked, is the community-wide disappointment with the siting of the oil mill processing in the adjoining district, thus blocking employment opportunities for the people in the Brewaniase environs. The lack of electricity on the plantation is the popular discourse around the distancing of the mill, yet the people's obliviousness about the company blurs their ability to understand the politics behind the scenes. The current manager, is also a native and political figure in the adjoining district where the oil mill is situated and thus could also be a strategy to strengthen his influence.

In the midst of all of these pressing issues, there hasn't been any fierce confrontation or resistance from the families. There have been reports of one-time protest at the entrance of the plantation when their rents were delayed. I witnessed a five-month delay in the payment of rent during my fieldwork, yet their anger seemed to be contained. Unlike the period in the first four years, where the land-food question generated fears and thus was central to the completely dispossessed who strongly opposed it, it appears that their discourses in this recent past are more inclined towards the labour question. Although the land grab has reduced their access to, and control over alternative and new lands, and thus their food supply, it did not completely destroy their subsistent ethic due to relative land

availability. Almost every landowner who lost land has found a new place to farm. They complained about poor soil fertility, size of land, sharecropping and the distances to their new farms, yet that does not deter them from producing food, at least for household use, thus the large extent of semi-proletarianism and the 'dodi' practice.

One cannot ignore the stark generational differences in perception around the land deal. When asked the seemingly simple question 'would you take your land back after the 50 years, or renew the lease agreement?', the responses (from the majority of family heads who have ample alternative lands) fell on the continuum of indifference (leaving the decision to their children), to that suggesting a renewal of the agreement under better terms and conditions. Most of these adult family members still take consolation in the impression that, if the terms of employment and rent are improved, then the youth and the whole community will benefit in the long term (see Box 6.1 for the differing views within the affected families). Additionally, the management and supervisors also constantly sensitize workers about the company being young, and the need for some time to reap the actual employment benefits.

Nonetheless from many of the affected youth interviewed, it is more than clear that their generation is doomed by the actions of their parents and grandparents. One common characteristic was that many of this dispossessed youth are former workers on the plantation who stopped due to the working conditions. Their perceptions were more inclined to getting their land back even before the 50-years term. While their fathers caution against the future suitability of the land for production and the likely tensions on the reinstatement of old boundaries that have been erased, they seemed more optimistic about the future. The nephew of a family representative expressed that after 50 years, its [the land] quality will change but they will plant some other crops; if cassava and maize, it could be teak.

Some members of the traditional authority iterated the generational tensions caused by the deal. The land transfer and acquisition has brought up covert conflicts within families because the youth want to take their land back while their fathers are benefiting from the token rents. Many youths do not benefit from the land since they neither work it nor are entitled to rents. If there be any significant resistance in the future, the youth are likely to play a bigger role. Currently there is a lack of clarity among the people on the duration of the lease agreement — a treasured document, under lock and key, with only one copy for all the affected

families. Most people have confused the 25-year period for replanting to be the actual termination period, subject to another 25 years upon renewed negotiations. As such, their point of reference for further action is between now and the next 15 years which could also create serious tensions between families and the company. There has been a lot of awareness among the youth. A key informant revealed that recently one young man living in the city wrote a letter to the manager, prompting the company about the illegal transfer of his father's land to the company by his uncle without his consultation. There are also incipient attempts to mobilize. Particularly, the male children of the landowners want to form a legally recognized association to register their concerns. During an FGD in Dodo Tamale, one youth expressed,

The issues are compiling anger among the youth, 'eboboba' [there is pressure building up] — we will take action one day. We are contemplating what can be done. We want to form an association of youth of the landlord families. We feel that Volta Red tricked us by making our fathers take the matter away from court. Maybe the state could have intervened. We are scheming, because of the generational impacts. Even the climate has changed. The rain pattern has changed, we used to get some rains even in December, and the dry season usually didn't last for 3 months, ...and the rains do not fall because of the destruction of the forest. Now we cannot even get wood to build, and they have collected all as firewood to be used at the processing mill. Our fathers have played us wicked. It may appear that we are not serious, but one day the tension will build up into a big issue!

The nature of political reactions between the dispossessed and farmworkers, and those who fall in both categories shows overlapping, competing and parallel claims and demands to land and labour related issues. The demands for better work conditions and increased job opportunities are typical examples of areas where the interests of the dispossessed families, farmworkers and the community overlap. These demands are based on their assumptions that the company is 'weak' but its growth would automatically translate into better livelihoods via improved employment conditions. As expected, issues regarding rents and compensations remain the 'problem' of the dispossessed Ntrubo families, sharecroppers, and settlers who are struggling to maintain their previous claims to the land. When it comes to the question of access to the plantation, some tensions exist between farmworkers whose lands were not affected and the families who lost all their lands but are not employed on the plantation.

**Box 6.1: Family Perceptions of the Plantation and the Future**

We are not happy about the rent. If we give the land out after 50 years, the negotiations will be tougher. But I don't have a lot of my land affected. *Family head, 60–70 years, and with alternative family land.*

I am not too affected by the land grabs. It has created employment. My children are in the city, I want them to go school, ...we have suffered because of illiteracy. *Family head, 80 years plus, and with alternative family land.*

All of my father's land have been affected by the plantation. I am now sharecropping. I stopped working with Volta Red four year ago because the salary was not good. I cannot refute the decisions of our elders, but we will have the right effect changes that benefit us, the younger ones, when our fathers are gone. *The son of a family representative, 25-30 years*

They have already signed it: the elders have not said it is bad, what can I say? People are poor, and food crop farming is not yielding anything, so they need jobs. Let's go and see what they have done to the land: it is nicely cleared and beautiful ...[but] the company cannot farm the land. If this company was doing well, you would not meet people in the town. If they had even used the unfarmed portion for corn or cocoa, it would have been more useful. *The daughter of a family head, 40-45 years, a returnee from the city.*

I know that there are issues. To err is human, of course there is delay in payment of rent, but the rent is good. To someone, a rag may be as a new cloth. I hope with the expansion of the mill capacity, production will increase. *Family head, 60–70 years, and with alternative family land.*

I boast of it that such a big plantation is on our land. It has become a landmark for us. Even this research is making the community visible. Yet, the catchment communities are not benefiting, and the job is not attractive. After 25 years, when they want to uproot and replant, something will happen. There will be fire. *Family head, 50–60 years, and with alternative family land.*

We, the children have decided not to allow this to happen again. We will not let them re-plant after the first 25 years. *Young man, 22years, now a sharecropper.*

For instance, some dispossessed family members with limited land access complain about the injustices of the land deal when they refer to farmworkers' harvesting their [landowners] food remnants like cassava and co-yams and the hunting opportunities (even if illegal) for the farmworkers due to their access to the plantation, while they, the owners of the land are banned from entry for similar purposes.

Another case in point is when the ambitious demands from some of the totally dispossessed landowners to either cultivate corn seasonally, or co-produce the oil palm under agreed conditions were denied by the company. Whereas, resident farmworkers were allowed access to portions of the land to farm corn, although this access was short lived. For possible reasons of encroachment, both unaffected farmworkers and the dispossessed farmworkers whose farms are adjacent to the plantation have easier access through the plantation to their farms than the dispossessed who are not employed as farmworkers.

## 6.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided evidence on the nature and dynamics of political reactions from the affected families and farmworkers in response to the land grabs. It is evident that responses from the affected groups are shaped by the socio-economic and political contexts within which land grabs emerge. Regarding the land question, traditional family and chieftaincy institutions, investor strategy, and advocacy politics played key roles in containing any likely overt confrontations. However, this case is a typical example of when land grabs do not lead to total dispossession or a near complete displacement of a community. In such circumstances, where the relative land availability helps maintain food production on small-scale farms, adaptation has become more prevalent than resistance.

Regarding labour, farmworkers mainly unorganized, have resorted to everyday actions to express agency on the plantation. In a context where organized action and unions are either non-existent or limited, everyday politics that the workers engage in as described in this chapter, appears to be the most viable means to expressing their agency in the struggles for better terms of incorporation (see appendix three for more on their differentiated demands and politics). However, a question that cannot be escaped is: to what effect are these everyday reactions? Do we risk romanticizing their individualized politics or could it indeed have substantial

benefits for peasant farmworkers? They do so to ensure access to food, extra income, rest and wellbeing. While the general conditions of work are not favourable, the extent of impacts, and their diverse individualized politics are influenced not only by class relations, but also the relations in the organization of labour which is also embedded in, and reinforced by existing social structures of inequality. Conscious of how they have been adversely incorporated into the plantation work, farmworkers strive to gain some benefits through everyday actions of deception and production. In so doing, labour expresses its autonomy and presents itself as a social subject rather than mere object of exploitation through a process of 'self-valorization', to understand the creative of reactions (Burgmann, 2016; Negri, 2005).

Unfortunately, these everyday forms of agency could also keep them stuck in the very casual system they despise, especially when 'good behaviour' and commitment are often deemed as the pre-condition for progression. Interestingly but not surprising, a critical look at the demands from farmworkers, land owners and even the community wide perceptions suggest that corporate 'investment' discourse still override a land grab narrative especially as demands from family heads are directed more towards rents, improvement in employment conditions, and co-production than land reclamation. Also, the farmworkers' multiple and individualized everyday politics do not necessarily change the structure of social relations associated with capitalist agriculture; all of which attest to the difficult and fragile rural livelihood conditions that underlie and shape peasant politics in the midst of land grabs. Employment and subsistence food production are important and connecting nodes in the farmers' and farmworkers' responses, but unfavourable transformation of the latter can change the cause of the existing land grab politics. As the future implications of land access become imminent, organized action from the dispossessed youth and the younger generation against the company may unfold sooner than later. In as much as employment is important for their everyday cash needs especially for education and housing, the significance of land access for both farmers and farm workers cannot be overstated.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Part of this chapter has been published by the author (Gyapong, 2019).
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with a dispossessed young adult.
- <sup>3</sup> Indicated in a letter by Greenpeace which was addressed to Jonathan Johnson Watts, and also from key informants.
- <sup>4</sup> <https://afjn.org/about-afjn/who-we-are/>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://afjn.org/focus-campaigns/>
- <sup>6</sup> An untranslated quote Field Interview, 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> Not translated — the original word used by the farmworker.
- <sup>8</sup> The first working day of the month starts from 15th.
- <sup>9</sup> Remnants from farms of the dispossessed tenants and landowners, usually cassava.
- <sup>10</sup> 0 represents absence. The numbers represent the number of bags of loose palm nuts that the worker collected — four being the daily target for a full wage.
- <sup>11</sup> In September, it appears the system of recording had slightly changed, whereby the tally marks indicates that daily target of four bags of loose nuts that were picked.
- <sup>12</sup> See for example 3rd, 10th and 17th June.
- <sup>13</sup> Particularly, rural areas in the Western Region of Ghana, where they can maintain large cocoa farms under negotiated terms, and often with less control. Engaging in large-scale cocoa production in their own communities is risky because of the rampant bushfires in the dry seasons, and many of them claim that the best lands have been taken by the land deal.
- <sup>14</sup> Due to the geo-politics, much of the political and economic activities are centralized in the southern belt of the country where the capital and the biggest cities are located.
- <sup>15</sup> From key informant interviews and interviews with some farmworkers.
- <sup>16</sup> Some members of the group linked it to organizational and financial challenges.
- <sup>17</sup> The number appears exaggerated, likely to be 300-500 workers. At the time there were job opportunities for land clearance, building of housing units and nursery and planting, and women also sold food at canteens.



# 7

## Farmworkers: At the Edge of Regulatory and Advocacy Strategies for and against Large-scale Farm Investments

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the empirical evidence on the impacts of the land deal on farmworkers to critically evaluate the relevance, benefits, and shortcomings of the competing land grab regulatory tendencies<sup>1</sup>. Sub sections 7.2 to 7.4 present a critique of Ghana's enabling environment for agricultural land investments vis-à-vis the existing labour policies and the underlying exploitation of farmworkers as detailed out in chapters five and six. Given that Ghana is not a strong base for civil society mobilization against land grabs, Section 7.5 examines a broader picture of land grab resistance within the West African context. Centring on the anti-land grab demands and discourses of the West African food sovereignty movement, I unpack the gaps and other issues in their demand-framing in relation to the evidence of farmworkers' experiences.

### 7.2 Institutions Governing Land Investments and Agricultural Labour in Ghana

Several institutions govern labour in Ghana. The Constitution serves as the main legal umbrella for employment which safeguards the right to work, the health, safety and welfare of all persons in employment and sets some fundamental working conditions including equal pay, limited working hours and holidays. The constitution guarantees workers' rights to unionization and prohibits forced labour. Specifically, the Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651), and the Labour Regulations, 2007 (LI 1833) stipulate the legal framework for employment in line with the constitution of Ghana. It

addresses the scope for the protection, conditions of employment, and unionization while dedicating sections to women, youth and persons with disabilities. Part (X) of the labour Act, 2003 focuses on casual and temporary workers (Republic of Ghana, 2003). Here, the act emphasizes the 'fair' and non-discriminatory practices of remuneration. There are other complementary laws such as the Persons with Disability Act 2006 (Act 715), the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1987 (PNDCL 187), The National Pensions Act, 2008 (Act 766) and the Internal Revenue Act, 2000 (Act 592), all of which should in principle enhance the administration the labour markets.

The Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations serves as the overarching body for governing labour. In 2015, it formulated the national employment policy (Republic of Ghana, 2015b) in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) standards. The policy addresses four core issues of increasing employment generation, quality of employment, labour productivity, and enhancing governance of labour markets. It has decentralized and devolved departments and commissions responsible for the day-to-day administration of labour at the local level. In 2015, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture also designed the Community/Investor Guidelines for Large-Scale Land Transactions. The guideline sets a framework for cooperation among investors, communities, and government and suggest their roles in the five stages of investment: preparation, initial engagement of stakeholders, impact assessment, negotiation and consent, and monitoring and enforcement of agreements (Republic of Ghana, 2015a). In principle, labour governance of the agricultural workforce draws on the above regulatory and institutional frameworks, yet to what extent are they able to adequately secure agricultural wagedworkers rights?

Li's (2017) findings from an empirical study on the impacts of oil palm plantations in Indonesia, is even more pessimistic about regulations as her findings suggested that regulations, government, and livelihoods end up being subordinated to logics of capitalist development, eventually giving no way out for anyone. In Ghana's case, mention can also be made of the shrinking policy space of the state, alongside domestic politics associated with the hierarchical nature of existing land tenure system, the prevalence of patriarchal domestic institutions, unequal system of labour regulations and even corruption.

In Africa, where there is high unemployment rates, and diverse livelihood struggles, the labour question, i.e. employment opportunities within

plantations, terms of incorporation and the absorption or not of those displaced into other sectors of the economy, remains pertinent if land deals should have any developmental potentials.

### **7.2.1 Job Creation Rhetoric and a Laissez-faire Investment Environment**

I have indicated earlier that one of the key assumptions for the promotion of land investments in Africa and other developing regions is the employment generation potentials. By this, policymakers put faith in institutions to ensure that agribusinesses provide jobs in the localities within which they operate. There are, however, several challenges with this assumption, especially within the Ghanaian context.

First, there are no hard laws or national regulations that specifically enforce employment creation on large-scale transnational farms. During my fieldwork, the failed promises of employment were the biggest disappointment for the affected families and communities. This situation reflects the non-concurrence between verbal promises of investors and the actual content of the lease agreement<sup>2</sup> and bore the stamp of the land registry. Based on the lease document, the survey, and interviews with families, the company is upholding its stated obligations of employing at least one family member each of the original landowners provided they have the requisite skills and qualifications. 'In the past, agriculture officers were trained without necessarily needing higher education'; an elderly family head made this sentiment to show the ways in which education has been re-invoked to side-line their youth from benefiting from the jobs. The 35 workers who identified as direct proletariats, represent a very low percentage of the hundreds of resident families that constitute the fifteen extended families affected by the land deal. Likewise, most of the clauses in the lease document are vague and non-binding on the company. An example is one that ties their social responsibility to a condition of being able to acquire and plant about 10,000 more hectares of oil palm in the Volta region of Ghana. However, even at the time of the study (10 years after concession), the company was operating below its capacity — so in principle, the community cannot hold them accountable. It appeared to be struggling to stay in business, and some workers confirmed that in the previous years, it was at the verge of collapse — some pointed to political-ecological reasons similar to the incidences of failed farm projects in Ghana (Ahmed, Campion,

& Gasparatos, 2017; Tsikata & Yaro, 2013). Thus, not only have expectations of wage employment been unmet, but also the hopes of indirect jobs.

Besides, the existing regulatory institutions in Ghana do not have the autonomy and capacity to dictate the business model of investors — while at the same time, the Free Zone Act (1995) provided extensive and generous financial incentives to foreign investors<sup>3</sup>. Although certain regulations such as that regarding environmental impact assessments and land registration/certification could be guaranteed, it falls outside the priorities or jurisdiction of state institutions to determine and monitor how they run their businesses, be it labour-intensive, mechanized, out-grower schemes or even the types of crop to be cultivated. Hall et al. (2017), provide rich insights into the emerging patterns and trends of the labour implications of different models, highlighting the diverse opportunities and risks for different social groups. For instance, the extent of mechanization or labour intensity may depend on several factors, but primarily, investors would not compromise on what makes economic sense to their business. Promoters of oil palm plantations often emphasize the job creation, yet oil palm requires an average of one worker per five hectares which is lower than other crop types such rubber (World Bank & International Finance Corporation, 2011).

Although large-scale farms could have potentials for extensive job creation, economic viability and ‘social sustainability’ do not necessarily cohere, but no one seems to be responsible for this gap in logic. Critics of land deals often emphasize the perils of surplus labour resulting from redundancy. However, this case shows an even more complicated situation: the plantation work is labour intensive and needs workers to be able to maintain the remaining 2,500ha, yet management is compelled to cut down cost to remain in business; people (especially men) want jobs, but the poor conditions deter them; women have minimal job opportunities; there are high rates of absenteeism from casual workers, yet without commensurate sanctions due to labour supply constraints; management seems to be planning towards increased mechanization in the long term, which could further reduce labour opportunities.

The voluntary guidelines are well intended to address or pre-empt irresponsible investments, but unfortunately, in many cases, such soft laws are already too late and not binding. Most communities have already become victims to contentious land acquisition processes that may require extreme and specialized interventions to revert their process or their

implications. In the Herakles-Volta Red land deal, the initial processes of consultation, and the content of the lease agreement—e.g. a four-year moratorium on the payment of rents, and absence of binding clauses on employment creation raises many questions. Yet, the general expression from the original landowners is that akin to spilt milk: they are bound to the existing lease agreement prepared by lawyers of the company, and family heads are waiting for its 50-year expiration date to take necessary actions — a situation which the youth hope to change sooner rather than later, through organized action.

Moreover, the guidelines are vague, issues on labour are less discussed as compared to land tenure, and their recommendations pay more attention to participatory consultations rather than the everyday power dynamics that put the interests of investors over community needs (see Otsuki, et al 2017 on similar experiences in Mozambique). For instance, the Community/Investor Guidelines for Large-Scale Land Transactions in Ghana (hereafter the Ghana Guideline) treats communities, investors and the government as though they are stakeholders with equal interests and power. In the guideline,

a proposed best practice is for investors to create a sequential plan for business development, clearly identifying the timing of the sequential phases, the amounts and types of land needed in each phase, as well as the expected crops, returns, and employment projected in each phase... Doing so should help create win-win possibilities for both investors and communities. That is, communities can then ascertain the long-term demand for land in order to avoid initial acquisitions that are larger than necessary (Republic of Ghana, 2015a, p. 8).

As indicated in chapter six, almost all of the affected families expressed regret in agreeing to the land transfer, but their major worry has not been primarily because of dispossession<sup>4</sup> but rather, the failed promises of decent jobs. Although the Ghana guideline recommends employment creation as a component of every large-scale agricultural investment, it is discussed from the angle of compensation and non-monetary benefits that should accompany land deals, rather than being pursued as an 'obligation' of the investors' or a 'right' to the affected communities. Such propositions do not necessarily guarantee that recommendations are upheld by investors nor may they even be feasible in the context of many developing countries characterized by political, social and economic instabilities. Indeed, there are differences among investors depending on the scale, extent

and duration of establishment, the models of production and tenure agreements. However, these individualized processes leave the livelihood needs of marginalized communities to the 'goodwill' of investors.

### 7.2.2 Institutional Bypasses, Incomplete and Overlapping Mandates

Transcending the soft guidelines to the well-institutionalized laws and regulations that guide employment relations, where is the place of wage farm-workers? A critical gap in the existing labour institutions in Ghana is that they do not have binding responsibilities in the agricultural sector. For instance, the Department of Factories Inspectorates Division obtains its mandate from the Factories, Offices and Shops Act, 1979 (Act 328), obviously excluding agricultural work. The National Labour Commission, which was birthed by the enactment of the Labour Act, 651 of 2003, has as its mission,

To develop and sustain a peaceful and harmonious industrial relations environment through the use of effective dispute resolution practices within the context of the law, promotion of cooperation among the labour market players and mutual respect.

Hence, in the event of employer-employee disputes on plantations, parties cannot rely on the labour commission to perform its core function of addressing complaints and disputes. Although per the mandate of the labour department, general enforcement of labour standards apply to the agriculture sector, their scope of operation is too broad and all-encompassing (Akorsu, 2013). Thus, it came as no surprise when after interviews at the local government institutions, it became evident that they knew very little about the operations on the plantation, except the company's tax commitments.

The national labour laws and regulations have also been designed to be primarily applicable to industries and services. The 2003 Labour Act (Act 651) emphatically eliminates agricultural workers from the coverage of the law even though they happen to be among the most marginalized groups in the country. Under the section on 'special provisions relating to temporary workers and casual workers', the Act does not only prioritize investors over workers, emphasizing that 'an employer may hire a worker on terms that suit the operations of the enterprise', but also states that the 'section

does not apply to pieceworkers, part-time workers, sharecroppers, sea-going personnel in the fishing industry who are wage earners’.

More than 80 per cent of the workers were engaged in what they considered as equally important activities such as petty commodity trading, farming and transport services. Many of them do these additional jobs not because casual work is inherently favourable to them — it is far below their knowledge of decent employment.

Again, in Ghana, occupational health and safety of workers are under the Workmen's Compensation Law 1987 (PNDC 187), and the Factories, Offices and Shops Act, 1979 (Act 328) but these also fall short in addressing farmworkers issues. The former is a discretionary directive that is also more favourable to employers than workers. Meanwhile, plantation farmworkers are often exposed to diverse forms of injuries, accidents and health risks (see chapter five) that go unaccounted for in these laws. In the few policy circles where labour regulations and institutions apply to farmworkers, institutions struggle with fragmented and overlapping functions and mandates. Since 1985, when the Department of Factories Inspectorate was removed from the Labour Department, there has not been any clear distinction in their responsibilities. Regarding issues of occupational health and safety, other government institutions such as the Ministry of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, and Fire Service have several overlapping mandates in terms of monitoring (Akorsu, 2010). Under such circumstances, there could be either duplication of efforts, or no job done. Other practical and technical challenges hinder the ability of labour institutions to function effectively. The various labour organizations are inadequately staffed and do not have the necessary logistical support to carry out inspections and enforcement of standards and labour market research (Akorsu, 2010; Oya, 2013). In a study of the Indonesia Palm Oil sector Li, (2017) also indicates how sometimes companies can evade unfavourable reports through their alliances with politicians and other bureaucrats; a situation that resonates in the Ghanaian context. It is for such reasons that de Schutter, (2011) cautions against any overestimation of the capacity of the governance structures to facilitate land deals for local development.

### **7.2.3 Legitimation of Status Quo and Repression**

De Schutter, (2011, p. 258) argued that research that investigates whether land investments represent an improvement from the status quo ante do not provide a holistic understanding of impacts. Policymakers and

researchers need to go beyond here-and-now narratives to ask if rural lands could not be used more productively, equitably and sustainably under structural, institutional and agrarian reforms that distribute land to smallholders. Akram-Lodhi, (2007) and Whitehead & Tsikata, (2003), have also questioned 'win-win' assumptions in the promulgation of formal land administration programmes such as titling, certifications and land registries and how these regulations usually perpetuate existing inequalities in land access and control. In a similar regard, the issue of labour also calls for attention, yet is mostly under-represented in these debates. The agrarian question of labour: who does what, and who gets what, in relation to the social divisions of labour and the distribution of income are fundamental issues for understanding capitalist development in the countryside (Bernstein, 2010). Asking these questions helps unpack how people are integrated and how dynamics produce social forces with different political possibilities (Bernstein & Pitt, 1974, p. 522; Bernstein, 2010).

Farmworkers' income is guided by the minimum wage regulations in Ghana<sup>5</sup>. The introduction of minimum wage dates back to the 1950s when Ghana became independent from British Colonial rule. Since the enactment of the Labour Act 2003 (Act 651), the payment of a minimum wage is binding on employers even though in practice not many uphold it, especially in the private and informal sectors (Kumah, 2017). In the period between the 1970s and 1990s, minimum wage policies became unfavourable in the light of the world economic crises that were accompanied by cost-cutting structural adjustment programmes and the rise in debates on the distortion effects of minimum wage on otherwise efficient labour markets. Once again, the minimum wage has grabbed policy attention as an effective measure to address poverty and as a means of social protection for vulnerable groups. The assumption is that it provides a guarantee for low-wage-low-skill workers to earn "decent" wages and sustain at least a subsistence standard of living. All the same, others are sceptical about its effects on real income and employment in many developing country contexts (Obeng, 2015, p. 86). In the past three years, the minimum wage in Ghana increased annually by 10 per cent, yet this represents a rise from just GHC8 to GHC10.6 per day (approx. 1.5 to 2 USD<sup>6</sup>), which is woefully low to even maintain a subsistence living as compared to many developed countries where households can afford decent living with minimum wage earnings.



In chapter five, I have shown that even though the farmworkers were being paid almost fifty per cent higher (GH¢14.04) than the 2018 national minimum wage of GH¢ 9.68, it was still challenging to maintain a decent living for themselves and their households. Of course, per the organization of labour (piece rate) and tasks on the plantation, the impacts are differentiated among the working groups: men, women, the ageing, landed and the less landed. Nonetheless, even for those who are better positioned to work long hours or engage in lucrative labouring tasks on the plantation, high incomes are accompanied by negative trade-offs, especially on their healthcare. These centralized wage regulations do not reflect the social and cultural dynamics of rural spaces with large household sizes, extended family responsibilities and educational aspirations that force farmers into becoming semi-proletariats.

### **7.3 Finding Labour in the Peasant/Food Sovereignty Way: Some Silences in the ‘Stop/roll Back’ Narratives**

If the enabling policy environment for land deals in Ghana does not necessarily support rural livelihoods and long-term employment benefits, do anti-land grab debates effectively capture the struggles of farmworkers? In chapter three I have argued that there is not a strong organized land grab resistance force in Ghana and so I look at the broader West African context of anti-land grab narratives, while reflecting on some of the experiences of farmworkers in this case and other reported studies. This also to critique the place of labour and farmworkers’ struggles, even in the demands that are meant to represent farmworkers’ interests, as well as those that are critical of transnational large-scale farmland investments in Africa.

One of the main arguments by anti-land grab movements, particularly the ROPPA and the west African food sovereignty movements is that land grabs threaten the history, recognition and the valorization of family farms. As such, mainstream discourses and programmes that promote uncontrolled large-scale agricultural land investments tend to shove family farming to a subculture that is under-valued and poorly recognized (ROPPA, 2014). As further explained by Nora McKeon in a ROPPA newsletter,

Africa’s food security is without any shadow of a doubt based on the diversified production models adopted by its millions of family farmers and their

links to those who consume their products. There is a severe disconnect between this reality and the model that is being proposed by these corporate-led programmes and, alas, enthusiastically accepted by many African governments and the leadership of the AU/NEPAD/CAADP. There is a severe disconnect between rhetorical recognition of the key role played by Africa's smallholder family farmers and the fact that family farming is portrayed as an archaic model which is incapable of evolution (ROPPA, 2014c, p. 43).

In comparison to large-scale commercial production schemes that have emerged since the advance of capitalism, family farms have proven to be relatively more resilient than previously predicted. Van der Ploeg (2010) reiterates the persistence of new peasantries with more diversified and resilient strategies in their livelihoods. Thus, arguments that simplistically assume and aim for their liquidation or replacement by large-scale production systems have become increasingly less convincing.

Second, peasant or small-scale farmers bear the brunt of land and resource grabs through dispossession and loss of livelihoods (La Via Campesina, 2015; ROPPA, 2006a). This dominant claim is often projected in contrast to mainstream perspectives that show optimism about the development potentials of regulated land deals (see Deininger et al., 2011). The dispossession narrative does not only emerge from the discourses of (West African) food sovereignty movements but also resonates with several theoretical postulations and empirical research on the impacts of historical enclosures and contemporary large-scale land acquisitions (Hall, 2013; Levien, 2013; Fonjong, Sama-Lang, Fombe, & Abonge, 2016; Nyantakyi-Frimpong & Bezner Kerr, 2017). In 2012, the leadership of ROPPA played vital roles in the Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) committee for food security to reject and suggest alternatives to the World Bank's principles for responsible investments for legitimatizing land grabs instead of protecting the needs of family farmers<sup>7</sup> (ROPPA, 2014c).

Third, small-scale farming is often more productive and sustainable than large-scale models. This counter-narrative falls in line with the widely observed phenomenon and the theoretical debate on the inverse relationship between farm size and farm productivity (Lipton, 2006). After Sen's (1962) farm management surveys in India, the relationship between size and yield became central to debates on agrarian development. Critics of the smallholder farming systems often question their productivity,

efficiency and competitiveness. Given the low agricultural productivity in Sub-Saharan Africa, Collier & Dercon, (2014, p. 94) caution against the celebration of smallholder farms as a superior model of production. Collier and Dercon do not necessarily disregard the growing evidence of the efficiency of smallholder farms. Nonetheless, from a methodological standpoint, they challenge such efficiency claims, arguing that in Africa, it is usually more of a celebration of the relative successes within small farms than actual comparison with large farms. However, van der Ploeg (2014, p. 1004) argues that 'when looking at land productivity — the most important lens from the perspective of environmental sustainability — peasant farms generally achieve higher levels of production per unit of land than capitalist or entrepreneurial farms'. This perspective underlies much of the economic justification for the food sovereignty movements' opposition to land grabs. Resonating with van der Ploeg (2014) is the movement's defence of the capability of family farms to produce (more than) sufficient good food for the households of family farmers and the growing world population. This translates into the 'Africa can feed itself' campaign in West Africa. ROPPA maintains that family farms can feed Africa's growing population, create jobs, and wealth if they are not perceived as backward or as only capable of subsistence and therefore should be supported with inclusive and bottom-up research and policies (ROPPA, 2014b). Already, about 80 per cent of the food grown in Africa is done by small-scale family farmers (GRAIN, 2014), so with the adequate support, the continent will not have to rely on large-scale agricultural models.

### **7.3.1 Farmworkers: In the Countryside and in Food Sovereignty Movements' Anti-Land Grab Discourses**

As it has already been established, the promotion of family farms stands tall in the agenda for food sovereignty and in anti-land grab discourses in West Africa. What seems to be lacking in the narrative on the valorization of family farms is a linkage to its diversity and the changes that have occurred over time, especially concerning the labour question. In West Africa, farmworkers most often appear among the list of rural folks or 'people of the land', however, in the movement's demand framings, they are generally conflated with farmers. In the Niamey call for West Africa food sovereignty, the demand for 'fair remuneration of the labour of family farms' shows the movement's interests in beneficial trade (ROPPA, 2006b), but at the same time, it emanates from the 'unpaid', 'small-scale'

'family labour — family farms analogy'. A critical look into the class base of ROPPA also provides further pointers to their emphasis on family farmers. The dominance of the interests of a crop farming class traces back to the origin of ROPPA. ROPPA was primarily an initiative of the Senegalese National Committee for Rural Peoples' Dialogue (CNCR)<sup>8</sup> established in 1993 to give farmers a unified voice in agricultural policies that affect them (Hrabanski, 2010; McKeon, 2005). The advent of cash cropping of groundnuts by the French colonial administration disrupted pre-existing sustainable family farming systems, degraded the fertility of soils, and subverted the complementary activities of cultivation and livestock farming (McKeon et al 2004). Later, farmers (groundnut farmers mainly) had also become victims of structural adjustment programmes, falling prices of products, low demand for products, and a lack of access to inputs (McKeon et al, 2004). Cash cropping is based on profitability and expanded reproduction as well as the petty commodity producers inserted in local markets. It is therefore not sufficient to say their capitalist intentions are just a matter of a small degree. The institution of ROPPA was therefore primarily to ensure that small-scale (crop) producers' interests are reflected in policies at the regional level and also give a greater platform for dialogue. It is therefore not surprising that upon its inception ROPPA's prime goal was to influence regional policy for the promotion of family farming and fair trade reflected in its early anti-liberalization struggles<sup>9</sup> against the cotton sector and subsequently other base products such as cocoa and soybeans etc. (Grossman et al, 2006) which gave it a strong international recognition.

Following this background, it does not appear too surprising that farmer, trade, and land related concerns have been central to ROPPA's campaigns. Dispossession-focused framings however tend to push issues of rural wage and contract labourers (their food security, access to land and labour conditions) to the margins of land grab debates. 'Local-global' and 'capitalist-peasants' narratives of inequality happen to take precedence over other localised issues. All the same, in Ghana, and many other West African countries, traditional cash crops like cocoa may be owned mainly by not-so-poor family farmers even though their cultivation are often done by hired labour, caretakers and sharecroppers who may be landless or have limited access to land. As shown in this case, some young men, mostly migrants or settlers who neither find the wage labour conditions on the plantation nor sharecropping unattractive, are forced to seasonally

migrate to work as caretakers on cocoa farms in South Western Ghana. While many find such work more flexible and relatively more lucrative than the opportunities at home, the background conditions cannot be overlooked as well as the impacts on their families.

Similarly, in out-grower schemes where family farmers are themselves exploited by large corporations, their farmworkers become the final ‘consumers’ of the costs in such contracts through low wages and tedious working conditions (Baglioni, 2015). In many rural economies with informal labour systems, when a farmer or landless person falls into the labouring class, their power and autonomy plummet. All the same, farmworkers also defy homogenous descriptions and, as shown in chapter five, almost all the farmworkers double as petty commodity producers (Gyapong, 2019). For food sovereignty movements in West Africa to adequately address food insecurity and the agrarian struggles of the working poor, the everyday relations between (family) farmers and farmworkers have to be empirically assessed to illuminate the contradictions and intricacies that arise on the ground in efforts to protect labourers and food sovereignty (Bowles, 2013). As Kay (2015, p.80) argues, ‘the problems of peasant farming and rural wage labour are not unconnected, but rural wage workers raise particular issues that have not yet been fully discussed’.

### **7.3.2 Dispossession, but also Exploitation: Differentiated Impacts and Responses**

Empirical evidence has been growing on the political economy of land grabs, revealing the differentiated implications on land relations and land use changes in rural agrarian societies (Borras & Franco, 2012; Hall et al., 2015). For instance, a study in Ghana by Boamah (2014) showed the significant role of chiefs in determining the impacts of land deals. In one case, migrant farmers who had defaulted the payment of ground rents to chiefs had their lands affected, whereas in another case, migrant charcoal producers who often paid their tributes were protected from dispossession (Boamah, 2014a, p. 419). For farmers who may not necessarily be evicted, they also have to deal with declining farm-gate prices and increasing competition from large-scale investors who are inserted into logistical chains and economies of scale which capture production and displace struggling smallholders (Amanor, 2012). In chapters four and five, I have illustrated such discriminations against women in their claims to land and entitlements to rents as well as their subordination into the wage labour

economy. Land grabs exacerbate the predicaments of women when land transfers deny them of their usufruct entitlements; when land use changes and reclassification reduces their land rights, and when land formalization and the compensation packages transform the rules of access to favour men (Behrman et al, 2012; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003). Nevertheless, the situation could be even more complicated. For instance, in some settings, women's advocacy groups show optimism in market-led land policies even when they recognize that the power relations that structure demands tend to favour men. This is because they perceive it as an opportunity for women to circumvent discriminatory customs that limit their access and control over land (Tsikata, 2003).

When land grabs transform land ownership and use, the agrarian question of labour becomes inevitable yet often underexplored in anti-land grab demands of movements. There is a growing feminization of labour in large-scale horticulture agribusinesses (Dolan & Humphrey, 2000). It is a reflection of the broadening scope of agrarian change in many rural societies, coupled with enabling customary institutions that influence investors' preference for women (deemed to have 'nimble fingers'), who are less conflictual and more willing than men to accept lower wages (Bernstein, 2010; Kay, 2015). On the other hand, for other crops like oil palm and sugar cane, the task division of labour favours men over women and is therefore accompanied by wide wage disparities. On the Herakles-Volta Red oil palm plantation studied, women constitute just about a quarter of the working population and obtain lower incomes than men (see chapter five). They are engaged primarily in loose picking and weeding, compared to men who, also as a result of their physical attributes, can have opportunities in over twelve different tasks. In this study, it has been illustrated that during seasonal task variations, women benefit less in terms of job opportunities, and a larger percentage of women than men are laid off during the lean seasons.

Thus far, women stand a high risk of being cash-strapped and unable to benefit from land resources fully, and therefore become attracted to wage labour on large-scale farms, even when they have to work under exploitative labour relations (Julia & White, 2012; Tsikata & Yaro, 2013). Women, in particular, when incorporated as wage labourers and contract farmers, are often caught in a complex web of being attracted to (seasonal) livelihood diversification and economic empowerment opportunities while at the same time, being exposed to structural vulnerabilities posed

by institutions that ‘work together’ to benefit and marginalize them. From empirical chapters four, five and six, it is apparent that given the existing land tenure systems, many women<sup>10</sup> are more concerned about job opportunities and labour conditions than questioning the land acquisition itself<sup>11</sup>. The large majority of carriers who are women in very low-income households working informally with harvesters seek to be incorporated as official casual workers. Similar accounts have been reported by Levien (2017) and Park & White (2017) in their work in Asia and other parts of Africa. Responses toward land grabs ‘extend far beyond “resistance” in its many manifestations — to demands for compensation, insertion and even counter-mobilizations against land deal resisters’ (Edelman et al., 2015, p. 467). When food sovereignty movements engage with some of these complex realities, it will imply dealing with contradictions of interests but also provoke discussions based on the diverse experiences and different forms of struggles among the rural working poor, including farmworkers.

## 7.4 Chapter Conclusions

This chapter has reinforced the argument by Borras et al., (2013) that regulatory responses do not necessarily lead to particular outcomes but requires evaluating what happens on the ground concerning the specific political-economic context within which they are implemented. Even when jobs have been promised under ‘consultative’ agreements, it may be difficult to realize the expectations of decent jobs. The regulatory environment in Ghana demonstrates how and why the institutions that are expected to protect workers are either non-existent or inadequate. Particularly, the public sector and industry-related labour policies are prevalent. They either exclude or leave to the margins, agricultural wage labourers. Thus, several of the existing regulations tend to legitimize oppression and inequality instead of protecting marginalized groups. Evidence from this study reinforces arguments that are critical of optimistic narratives about the employment creation prospects of large-scale land investments; notably, when there is not a strong business case to demand labour.

Yet, anti-land grab claims and demand framing ought to be pursued cautiously so as to not trip into the danger of essentializing the interests of certain groups and classes over others or conflating them under a broad categorisation. The governance framework for land investments and wage labour are largely characterised by absent, illusively present and repressive

institutions that are influenced by both global and domestic factors. In the past few decades, land policies and redistributive reforms have come to the centre stage of development, and they ought to be accompanied by labour reforms as well. Historically, how land and labour are combined, are the fundamental distinguishing feature of plantations or large-scale farms (Evans, 1995, p. 155), and this necessitates that attention is given to the labour question as much as it has been done in the context of land tenure issues. Farms are not mere units of agrarian production but embedded in power relations and social institutions that are deeply rooted in people's lives (du Toit, 1994, p. 380). The complexities of agrarian transformations within which food sovereignty has to be constructed in light of a raging land rush should embody the differentiated competing rural class and identity interests, all which are linked to livelihoods.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sections of this chapter have been published by the author in (Gyapong, 2020a, 2020b).

<sup>2</sup> The lease was written by a private legal firm in Ghana for the company without the involvement of the affected landholding families, not even the family heads.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://gfzb.gov.gh/index.php/incentives/>

<sup>4</sup> With the exception of two extended families that lost all their land to the acquisition.

<sup>5</sup> The minimum wage is a benchmark above which the company sets daily piece rates, but as explained earlier, because there are no regulations to protect pieceworkers, productivity rates and output standards could be arbitrary and as such the labourers often complain about being overworked.

<sup>6</sup> As of September 2019.

<sup>7</sup> See Koita, (2013) and Losch (2004) on ROPPA's influential role in leading the resistance by smallholder cotton farmers against unfair international trade policies.

<sup>8</sup> Conseil National De Concertation Et De Coopération Des Ruraux.

<sup>9</sup> The liberalization of the cotton sector had led to several upheavals and strikes by producers in Mali. Economically dispossessed smallholder farmers rallied against excessive cotton subsidies in the USA and EU because it distorted prices and affected export returns (Koita 2013; Losch 2004). ROPPA coordinated the 'Big Noise Petition,' to the WTO in Cancún 2003 and Hong Kong 2005 meeting for the elimination of USA and EU cotton subsidies (Koita 2013). In Losch (2004 pg. 337), he quotes a 2001 submission by Mamadou Cissokho then honorary president of ROPPA on trade restrictions.

<sup>10</sup> This is also a general concern for most people interviewed, and it is linked to the broad structural and socio-economic inequality.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that in this case, there is a variegated dispossession effect —due to relative land availability and access to alternative lands (although with differentiated degrees of access and control-broadly, between sharecropping settlers and native landowners) that helps to maintain their basic subsistence ethic.



# 8

## Conclusions





## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Survey (Farmworkers)

#### A. Demographics

Interviewer				Residence			
Gender	[ 1 ]	Male		[ 2 ]	Female		
Contract	[ 1 ]	Casual		[ 2 ]	Permanent	Nationality	
comments							

Ethnicity	Religion	Migrant Status	Origin (if Mi-grant)	Marital Status	Highest Level of Education	Current Edu. Status
Ntrubo	Christian	Native	Rural-Rural	Never Married	Never Nursery/KG	In School
Adele	Muslim	Migrant -Native	Urban-Rural	Consensual Union	Primary	Temporarily out of School(with continuation plans)
Challa	Traditional-ist	Migrant	Border-Mi-grant	Married	JHS	
Konkonba	Non -Religious	Migrant	Regional Mi-grant	Separated	SHS	
Bassare, Ewe, Akan	Other	Others	Others	Divorced	Tech/Voc./ Diploma/HND	Permanently Out of school
Kotokoli. Guan Ga				Widowed	Bachelors	
Dagomba					Post-Graduate	
Hausa						
None						
Others						

160 *Political dynamics of global land grabs: exploring the land-labour nexus on Ghana's eastern corridor*

B. Land (Acres)

	Source of Access	Land Accessible	Farm size	Form of Access	Labour (choose all relevant)
Plot	1. Individual 2. Family land 3. Tenancy 4. Communal 5. Public (free use)	≤1 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10-11 11+	≤1 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10-11 11+	1. Full Owner 2. Entitled to use 3. Tenancy 4. Usufruct 5. Just occupying (public land)	Self Paid family Labour Unpaid family Labour Wage Labour
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

1. Have you lost access to land within the past 5-10 years?
  1.  Yes
  2.  No
2. If Yes, which types of land? (*Choose all relevant*)
  1.  Individual
  2.  Family land
  3.  Tenant Land
  4.  Communal
  5.  Public
3. Which of the above selected, affected you the most? (*choose 1*)
  1.  Individual
  2.  Family land
  3.  Tenant Land
  4.  Communal
  5.  Public
4. How much land was lost?
  1. <1
  2. 1-2
  3. 3-5
  4. 5-10
  5. 11-15
  6. 16-20
  7. >20 specify
5. How did you lose your land?
  1.  sale/lease (by self)
  2.  sale by spouse
  3.  Sale by family/ clan (head)
  4.  Sale by chief
  5.  Sale by government
  6.  Natural Disaster
  7.  others.....

6. Who owns the lease of the land you lost now?
  1.  An individual peasant
  2.  An individual medium farmer
  3.  Large-scale investor
  4.  Volta Red
  5.  A family/clan
  6.  Chief
7. Did you receive any compensation if your land was forcibly taken?
  1.  Yes
  2.  No
8. If yes, in what form? .....
9. What is the monetary value of the compensation?.....
10. How has the loss affected you?.....

**B. Employment at VR Farms**

Duration Of employment	Tasks (select all relevant)
1. < >6mts 2. 1-2 yrs. 3. 3-5yrs 4. 5-6 yrs 5. 6-7 yrs 6. 7-8ys 7. 8yrs-9yrs	loose picking weeding Chemical application security/guard Driver (general) Truck Driver Mill wage worker Caterer Cleaner Technical support (electricians, mechanics, carpenters, plumbers etc) Administration .Management Others.....

1. On the average, how much do you earn per month ?.....
2. In the lean season how much do you usually earn per month?.....
3. In the peak season how much do usually earn per month?.....
4. How many days do you often work in a month in the past one year?.....
5. How many months have you worked in the past one year?.....
6. In the past 1-3 years have you worked over time?
  1.  Yes
  2.  No
7. Are you compensated for overtime work?
  1.  Yes
  2.  No
8. If yes, when is it paid and how do you get paid (overtime payment system or rules).....

162 *Political dynamics of global land grabs: exploring the land-labour nexus on Ghana's eastern corridor*

9. If no, why?.....
10. What do you do for better wages and conditions.....
11. Have you ever been provided with loans or wage advances by employer generally or at times of difficulty or crisis? 1.  Yes 2.  No
12. Did you leave any other paid job to work with Volta Red? 1.  Yes 2.  No
13. If yes, what job? .....
14. If yes, what type of employment was it?.....
15. If no, what were you engaged in?.....
16. Why did you decide to work with Volta Red?.....
17. Did you migrate specifically for this job? 1.  Yes 2.  No
18. If yes, did you migrate with all your nuclear family/household? 1.  Yes 2.  No
19. If no, who did you move with?
  1.  Spouse
  2.  children/and other dependents
  3.  help
  4.  Parents
  5.  others.....
20. Who did you leave behind? 1.  Spouse 2.  children/and other dependents 3.  help 4.  Parents 5.  others
21. Where did you migrate from?

Village/town/city	District	Region (Initials)	Country

22. Would you consider where you migrated from as your hometown/or place where you have lived with your family for a long time (over 10 years)?
  1.  Yes
  2.  No
23. If no, what brought you to that town? 1.  Work 2.  School
  3.  Marriage
  4.  Others, .....
24. What mobility plans do you have while working with VR?
  1.  Permanently Settle here alone
  2.  Move my family and Permanently Settle
  3.  Temporarily settle here alone
  4.  Move my family and Temporarily Settle
  5.  Shuttle between here and home
  6.  others
25. How has VR benefitted you and your household?.....
26. How has it affected you and your household negatively?.....

- 27. Is there any aspect of the work that is risky or dangerous to you?  
 1.  Yes    2.  No
- 28. If yes, specify the task, and the risk involved.....
- 29. How long do you intend to work with the company? 1.  As long as it exists    2.  For some time, while looking for a better job 3.  Until Pension/retirement    4.  for some time to start own job 5.  Do not know.....    6.  Other
- 30. If for some time to start own job, please describe
- 31. Further comments from the respondent in relation to his work at VR.....

**C. Other Employment**

- 1. In the last 12 months have you ever left or abandoned a waged job for any reason? 1.  Yes    2.  No    3.  Not applicable.
- 2. If yes, what were the reasons for leaving? (*circle all relevant events*) 1.  Changed employer    2.  Finished casual or seasonal work 3.  Quit for family or personal reasons    4.  Quit, wages too low 5.  Insufficient work hours 6.  Dismissed by employer    7.  Dispute with employer    8.  Other, .....
- 3. If you quit for personal/family reasons what was the main reason? (*Choose all relevant*) 1.  Pregnancy 2.  Marriage 3.  No permission from spouse 4.  Need to care for household member 5.  Request of spouse 6.  Health 7. Other .....
- 4. Describe the problems you have faced in finding and keeping decent wage employment during the past 5 years?.....
- 5. What other employment are you engaged in addition to work on the plantation? 1.  Farming 2.  petty trade 3.  Construction 4.  Transport 5.  service 6.  others .....
- 6. Commitment to own farm

	Months per year	Days per month	Hours per day	La-bour support	Sea-sonal De-mands	Yearly* expenses	Yearly* income

\*estimates or if records are available

**D. Food**

Food Item	1. Eaten Daily 2. Once a Week 3. Two /more times a week 4. Monthly 5. Yearly 6. Never 7. Others..... 8. I don't know	1. Usually purchased 2. Usually self-produced 3. Sometimes purchased, produced or gifts
Maize		
Cassava		
Yams		
Rice		

1. Have there been any changes in the past 1-5 years in how you access food items?
2. 1.  Yes      2.  No
3. If yes, how .....
4. How often do you eat the food items below and how do you obtain them?
5. Have there been any changes in your eating pattern since you started work with VR? 1.  Yes      2.  No
6. If yes how? (Select all applicable) 1.  Eat more   2.  Eat less   3.  Eat more regularly   4.  Eat less regularly   5.  I eat more nutritious food  
6.  I eat less nutritious food   7.  Others.....
7. Have you had challenges with getting food since you started work with VR? 1.  Yes      2.  No
8. If yes, what kind of challenges?.....
9. Have you had benefits with buying or producing food since you started work with VR? 1.  Yes      2.  No
10. If yes, how?.....

**E. Community Development, Conflicts and Other Challenges**

1. In your view, what are the major problems facing your community?.....



2. What solutions will you suggest to address these problems?.....
3. Does your household have outstanding loans or debts to other households or institutions? 1.  Yes. 2  No
4. If yes, Who do you owe? 1. Family 2.  Personal Friends 3  
Employer 4  Colleague at work 5. Others
5. How much did you borrow? .....
6. How do you intend to settle it?.....
7. Do you consider your household well off in the past five years? 1 Yes  
2.  No
8. Give Reason for your choice in question.....
9. Does your household feel secure?  Yes  No
10. What possible risk does your household face and how do you intend to manage them?.....
11. Are you a member or do you participate in any group activities?  Yes  No
12. If yes what group/activity are you a member? 1 Farming/Food Association 2  Village Savings and Loans 3 Youth Group  
4 Women’s Group 5 Religious Group 6 Trades Union  
7Political Group/Association 8 Others.....
13. What is the main benefit from joining this group?.....
14. Are there any incidences of conflicts within your community?  
1 Yes 2.  No
15. If yes, what are the causes of these conflicts?.....
16. Have there been any land-related conflicts or disagreements related to VR?  
1 Yes 2. No
17. If Yes, describe what you know.....

Any Other Concerns By Respondent.....

*Appendix 2: List of Institutions Contacted*

A. State Institutions and Agencies

Institution	(Department)	Location
Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (PPMED)	Coordinator, Modernizing Agriculture in Ghana programme (MAG)	Accra
(MOFA) Policy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (PPMED)	Programmes	Accra
MOFA	Planting for Export and Rural Development in Ghana (PERD) Programme	Accra (Telephone)
MOFA	Consultant for Ghana Commercial Agricultural Project office	Accra
Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC)	Research	Accra
Lands Commission (Volta Region)	Valuation	Ho
Lands Commission (Volta Region)	Registry	Ho
Ghana Agricultural Workers Union (of the Trades Union Congress (GAWU- TUC) Volta Region Office	Office	Ho
GAWU -TUC	Gender	Telephone Interview (Accra)
Nkwanta South Municipal Assembly	Planning	Nkwanta

B. Chieftaincy Institutions

Stool Name	Position	Jurisdiction
Nana Kwame Sewodie	Nifahene -holds the right flank of the traditional army's formation in times of war	Papase Traditional Area Dodi- Asubuye Dodi Aboabo Dodi Kponkpa Dodi Konsuaso Dodi Akum Poase Cement Sabram Atta Kofi
Nana Amenano	Adontehene -in charge of security and fronts the traditional arm in times of war Also doubles as the chief of Poase Cement	
Nana Tedebu Obanda Kora	Paramount Chief	Ntrubo Traditional Area Domabin from Dambai Gegenge from Togo Pusupu (Akyem Ntrubo) Bontibo Kumda Asukokor Tamale (Dodo Tamale) Abubruwa Salifu Obanda Adomadom
Nana Bekoe	Adontehene (see above for description)	Ntrubo Traditional Area
Nana Dahonso		Ntrubo Traditional Area
Nana Saafo Atara II	Chief of Dodo-Pepesu	Sub-chief under Dodo the Traditional Area

Appendix 3: Farmworkers' struggles and Everyday Politics

Issue Areas	Affected Groups	What they want	Everyday Actions	Constraints to Agency
LABOUR ORGANIZATION				
Casualization and Seasonal Lay-offs	Casual Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unpaid Leave</li> <li>• Regulated progression to permanent contracts</li> <li>• Transparency about Conditions for seasonal lay-offs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• False Request for Sick Leaves</li> <li>• 'Own-Leave'</li> <li>• Active engagement in own Farming</li> <li>• Acquiescence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sanctions</li> <li>• Endorsed in Labour Regulations</li> <li>• Challenges to Unionization</li> </ul>
Strict Working Hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All (men)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility to work a 'real' piece rate without strict time constraints</li> <li>• Flexible working hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sluggishness</li> <li>• Acquiescence</li> <li>• Excuse duty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sanctions (non-remuneration for work done if one closes before time)</li> <li>• Employment contract</li> </ul>
Gender Insensitive Targets and Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women</li> <li>• Slashers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction of Slashing target for women</li> <li>• Women be taken off slashing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absenteeism</li> <li>• 'Own Leave'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm maintained below full capacity</li> <li>• Outsiders are not attracted to slashing</li> </ul>
'Forced' Labour Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a preferred/specific Task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absenteeism and side (by day) jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm maintained below full capacity</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To have Voice in decision making on shifting between tasks</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seasonal lucrativeness of some tasks</li> </ul>
Extended On-farm Hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Off-Farm Residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes to closing time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquiescence</li> <li>Alternative means, e.g. Walk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Location of the plantation</li> </ul>
INCOME RELATED				
Delay in Payment of Wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prompt Payment of Wages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absenteeism and side (by day) jobs</li> <li>Invest time on own farm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employer Relations</li> </ul>
Low Incomes, Unpaid Overtime and Debts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All</li> <li>Casual Workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased Wages</li> <li>Soft Loans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Absenteeism and side (by day) jobs</li> <li>Acquiescence</li> <li>Invest time on own farm</li> <li>Support systems (family, friends)</li> <li>savings groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited Job opportunities</li> <li>Complex Trade-offs</li> <li>Employer relations</li> </ul>
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH				
Irregular Health Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sprayers</li> <li>Pruners/Harvesters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quarterly Health Screening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquiescence</li> <li>Quitting/Resignation / Long Breaks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sanctions (possible job loss after break)</li> </ul>
Inadequate Protective Clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sprayers</li> <li>Loose Pickers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate and frequent supply of quality protective clothing-gloves, face masks etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquiescence, Non-compliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employer Relations</li> </ul>

170 *Political dynamics of global land grabs: exploring the land-labour nexus on Ghana's eastern corridor*

Defective Machinery and Vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operators</li> <li>• Off-Farm Residents /All</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humane Transport Service</li> <li>• New Machinery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquiescence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer Relations</li> </ul>
Limited Scope of Medical Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical Cover beyond direct farm specific illness e.g. Malaria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquiescence</li> <li>• Deception</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NHIS</li> </ul>
Inadequate Basic Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electricity and other social services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquiescence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employer Relations</li> <li>• National Level issue</li> </ul>
<b>FOOD AND SUBSISTENCE</b>				
Inadequate Food Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migrants and Farm residents</li> <li>• Women</li> <li>• Workers with little family labour support</li> <li>• Dispossessed workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivate on undeveloped sites of the plantation</li> <li>• Adjust working hours and prompt transportation</li> <li>• Chance to do 'real' piece rate to make time for own farms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backyard farming at residencies</li> <li>• Exploit Transport facility to own farms</li> <li>• Illegal Hunting</li> <li>• Harvesting food crops from plantation</li> <li>• Invest time on own farm or other jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sanctions</li> <li>• Security and Safety Risks</li> </ul>
No hunting Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dispossessed Proletariats</li> <li>• Farm residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow Hunting under some negotiated conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illegal Hunting</li> <li>• Harvesting of remnant food especially cassava and cocoyams (leaves)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security and Safety Risks</li> <li>• Sanctions</li> </ul>



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## About the Author

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Her PhD research investigates the impacts of the global agricultural land rush on land, food and labour relations among small-holder farmers and farmworkers in rural areas in Ghana. Using mixed methods approach and political economy perspectives, she has examined how and why large-scale farmland acquisitions impact agrarian transitions; particularly, their implications on social (re)production, farm labour relations, food security/sovereignty and rural politics. She has presented the findings of her PhD research at seminars and several international conferences. She has also published in top academic journals including *Land use policy*, *World development*, *Globalizations* and *Land*. Her aim is to contribute to knowledge, research and policy interventions in food security, agrarian development and social justice. Adwoa's academic publications are listed below.

## Peer reviewed Publications:

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