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بعث أفريقيا الغد في سياق التحولات المعولمة :

رهانات و آفاق

Land Grabbing, Dispossession and the Threat to Peasant Livelihood in Northern Ghana

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Abstract

The study discusses how the security of communal lands tenureship and the livelihood choices that such land entitlements confer on peasants in northern Ghana is being undermined by new forms of land deals. This is done against the background that unlike the past, northern Ghana is also witnessing an influx of transnational organizations that are interested in establishing jatropha plantations as biofuel feedstock. The implications of direct land deals between the traditional leaders and the transnational corporations, which invariably involve large tracts of land on the livelihoods of the peasantry in the communities is a matter of interest in this work. The vulnerability of the traditional leaders caused by their weak institutional capacity and poverty expose them to enter into agreements that they do not understand; and yet such agreements impose serious burdens on the social and economic life of their peoples. The study examines both sides of the debate pertaining to the outcomes of the land transactions on livelihoods in the light of poverty in the northern half of Ghana.

Key Words: Biofuel, Dispossession, Ghana, Jatropha, Land deals, Livelihood, Northern Ghana, Peasantry

Introduction

The publication by Nyari (2008) 'Biofuel and Land Grabbing in northern Ghana' and the IRIN news report of 9 September, 2009 captioned 'Land Grab Force Hundreds off Lands' were to draw attention to a new form of land transactions in northern Ghana in which their traditional rulers, just as it is becoming the trend elsewhere in the country were now dealing directly with transnational corporations, to meet the latter's demand for large land tracts for agriculture. The publications also revealed that dozens of peasant farmers were dispossessed of lands without recourse; and were thereby deprived of their sources of livelihood which customary land entitlements had provided them (Nyari, 2008; IRIN, 2009; Action Aid, 2012; Bugri, 2012). The concerns that were raised about the implications of land dispossession in rural communities, evoked strong sentiments as some described this development as a land grab (Action Aid, 2014).

A profusion of intellectual discourses was generated, in consequence, to discuss the implications of these land deals on the livelihoods of the people in the affected communities (Nyari, 2009; Tsikata & Yaro, 2011; Akwensivie, 2014; Boamah, 2014). However, the accounts provided by many tend to be blunt and generic about the Ghanaian situation as they proceed on the assumption that there is a monolithic customary land tenure system in the country (see Boamah, 2014). Our seminal concern, in this study, is to draw attention to the particularities of land tenure systems in northern Ghana; and to discuss the implications of the



new forms of land deals on the predominantly peasant communities of the guinea savannah ecological zone.

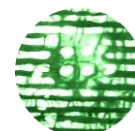
The global economic crisis of 2007/2008 has caused movements of global finance capital out of the metropolitan centers to new destinations in the emerging economies of Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia, for a more secured and profitable economic engagements (Boamah, 2014; Osabuohien, 2014). This search for new investment destinations especially as it relates to the establishment of large scale plantations for biofuel feedstock and food agriculture, have ineluctably brought the peasant communities into an uncomfortable embrace with transnational capital. The imperative of economies of scale for large commercial capital-driven cultivations, which in turn require large scale land appropriations have resulted into land dispossessions of the indigenous peoples (Action Aid, 2012).

The mediascape in Ghana have therefore been inundated with reports of unfair land transactions between transnational corporations and traditional rulers in rural communities of the country, with a deracinating effect on the indigenes' primordial customary land holdings (Boamah, 2011; Akwensivie, 2014). The role of traditional leaders in these land transactions with transnational corporations, especially the weak capacity of the latter to deal effectively with the more sophisticated multi-state business actors featured in the discourses that emerged (Tsikata & Yaro, 2011; Bugri, 2012).

The emerging situation in northern Ghana is actually part of a global trend of land deals in which unsuspecting peoples in various parts of the developing world are outwitted and deprived of large parcels of land (Gan et al., 2011). The term 'land grabbing' has often been used in the land deals debate to denote 'unfair practices' perpetrated by investors on unsuspecting indigenous people (FAO, 2012). But what really constitutes 'unfairness' in the land deals debate is not a settled matter. This has thus generated differences in the conception of what constitutes land grabbing.

Cotula et al (2009) for instance posit that land grabbing occurs when there is a large scale land acquisitions that are above 1000 hectares. It is however indicated by Graziano da Silva (2009) that not "every large scale acquisitions or lease of land should be considered as 'land grab.' He indicated that there are a number of benchmark considerations that should be analyzed; among which are the needs, and rights, of the poor and vulnerable rural families, particularly smallholders, who are the main food producers in several countries. These benchmarks are more or less reiterated in the definition provided in the Tirana Declaration (Land Coalition, 2011). In this declaration land grabbing is conceptualized as land acquisitions or concessions that are characterized by one or more of the following:

- (i) Violation of human rights, particularly the equal rights of women;
- (ii) Not based on free, prior and informed consent of the affected land-users;
- (iii) Not based on a thorough assessment, or are in disregard of social, economic and environmental impacts, including the way they are gendered;



- (iv) Not based on transparent contracts that specify clear and binding commitments about activities, employment and benefits sharing, and;
- (v) Not based on effective democratic planning, independent oversight and meaningful participation.

Thus, land grabbing is associated with wanton abuse of the rights of the indigenous and vulnerable people. This consequently affects their sources of livelihood. The inherent trampling on the rights of the indigenous people by the concessionaires often drives the discourse on such modes of land acquisitions into the emotional realm. While da Silva (2009) reminds us that not every large scale land acquisitions may be considered a land grab, it is also true to indicate that very large land deals are most likely to involve a loss of tenureship rights by others, especially those who own the land in ways that may differ from the model of titled private property. In many communities, rural families have access to land through customary rights that have been handed down for generations, but which are not recognized under law. It is unto land that the livelihood of the peasant is absolutely tied (Mafeje, 2003).

For the peasantry land is the most important economic and social resource that assures them of subsistence (Lenin, 1965; Mafeje, 2003; Moyo, 2008). Because the traditional socioeconomic formations are established on the peasant mode of production land forms the basis for social identity, social security and political inclusion of the individual into the corpus of the community (Mason, 1993). It is for this reason that land in traditional communities in northern Ghana defines not only their social structure but also provides the foundation for social inclusion and the appreciation of the social glue that keeps descent groups together (Bugri, 2012; Lentz, 2013). Mafeje (2003) affirms this generic role of land in Africa by emphasizing the inalienability of the customary community-based land tenure systems and their associated rights. He warns subsequently against the global homogenizing tendencies toward private land tenureship; as in his estimation that only gnarls the fabric of the traditional African social formations (Mafeje, 2003).

Until recently, communities in northern Ghana had not had the experience of large scale land appropriations by foreign concessionaires and the afflictions of discrimination and land deprivation (Nyari, 2008; Yaro, 2010). Indeed large scale land concessions, in Ghana, since the colonial period had been focused mainly on the more resource-endowed southern sector of the country principally in the extractive industries of mining and lumbering (Tsikata & Yaro, 2011). Land concessions were also made available in the south for oil palm and rubber estates (Tsikata & Yaro 2011). Of course the foreign capitalist interests in agriculture in Ghana did not result into massive land deprivations as was experienced in the settlerdoms of Eastern and Southern Africa (Gasu, 2010). But the dynamics of the globalized economic system has brought about transformations, which has turned lands that hitherto were of little economic interest into keenly sought-after resources (Cotula et al., 2009). Apparently this is the current situation on the African continent; as new vistas for international finance capital emerged in the aftermath of the global food and energy crises (Akwensivie, 2014; Osabuohien, 2014).

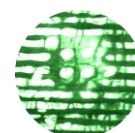


The oil shocks which first took the world by storm in the early 1970s, and their reoccurrence over the years, has brought about the harsh realization of how expensive it has become relying on fossil fuel for energy needs. The cost of energy from fossil fuel sources is expensive on many counts; which include high financial costs, high levels of pollution and non-renewability. Biofuels have arisen as a potential alternative to fossil fuels. With this in mind, the United States and European Union have set alternative energy consumption targets that have stimulated increased investment in biofuels cultivation worldwide (Biemans et al., 2008; Environmental Leader, 2014). Similarly, African governments have also been looking for ways to decrease their dependence on fossil fuels for economic and environmental reasons. Consequently, the search for cheap and sustainable alternative sources has since been high on the global agenda as a way of dealing with the problem. Among the proffered solutions is the resort to biofuel which is derived from oil seeds. In consequence, several edible oil-bearing seeds and grains have become sources of biofuel, earmarked to finding solutions to the reliance on fossil fuel.

Nevertheless, the binary nature of the crises of 2007/2008 had also exposed the limitations of depending on edible agricultural produce as sources of biofuel. The crises involved shortage of food, and an astounding hike in oil prices that peaked in the summer of 2008 (Hamilton, 2009). The nature of the crises indicates the undesirable tradeoffs that are available, should the world continue depending on edible agricultural produce for biofuel (Mittal, 2009; Headley and Fan, 2010). The social unrests that accompanied the dual evils of hunger with high fuel costs especially in the developing world have ostensibly catalyzed the shift to non-edible biofuel feedstock like the jatropha.

The jatropha plant which originates from Central America has rich oil seeds; but it is toxic to both humans and animals. Moreover, the jatropha plant does well in many ecological zones in the tropics, and indeed tolerates various soil types (Nyari, 2008). With such qualities the jatropha plant has become the plant of choice in the new search for alternative sources of biofuel. The low lying topography of its large tracts of land, and the ecology of northern Ghana, has made the region the most preferred agricultural zone for large scale mechanized agriculture in Ghana. In the past however the pull to large scale mechanized agriculture in this part of the country was led by two main actors: the postcolonial state and the local champions (Girdner et al., 1980; Bugri, 2011). The local champions who by virtue of their superior accumulation capability, are able to transcend the constraints of peasantry by engaging in capital-driven commercial agriculture (Bugri, 2011).

For the purposes of securing national food security and for the modernization of agriculture, the postcolonial state backed by the State Land Act 1962 (Act 125) has expropriated large hectares of land for agricultural irrigation and rain-fed projects. The irrigation projects at Tono, Veia and Bonganta are but few examples of the state's effort of land acquisitions for boosting food security through irrigated agriculture (Namara, et al., 2011). For the local champions, the state-managers have since the 1970s, facilitated the processes for them to



acquire land for large scale grain production. These were policy choices meant to wreck the predominantly peasant culture of use value production by promoting agricultural capitalism within the ranks of the indigenous people (Girdner et al., 1980).

Nonetheless the jatropha biofuel plantation projects have presented a different scenario; and altogether a different mode of land acquisition techniques. It has also presented a new form of engagement with the local peasant communities with its associated problematic situations. This is especially revealed in the cupidity for land by the foreign agricultural capitalists that infringe on the patrimonial heritage guarantees of customary land tenureship. The implications of the new land deals in northern Ghana on the peasants' land rights and their livelihood choices remain the focus of this study; and this is done against the backdrop that the socioeconomic formations under discussion – peasantry and capitalism - are at different epochs of social production. It therefore stands to reason that the epistemic views of the peasantry and the agricultural capitalists would essentially diverge (Bernstein, 2001).

Land as the Nexus of Social Relations in Northern Ghana

Ghana has predominantly customary land tenure system with about 80 percent of the land owned by traditional leaders like chiefs, earth priests, clans, and family heads (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001; Sarpong, 2006; Ubink, 2008). The remaining 20 percent of the land is either owned by private individuals or the state. Since customary tenureship predominates in Ghana, it is important to devote some attention to appreciate how such a system works, especially in northern Ghana.

In discussing land tenureship in northern Ghana, it is important to understand the roles of two main traditional institutions, namely: the tindana and chieftaincy. Generally, the roles played by the tindana and chiefs are respectively linked to the nature of the sociopolitical character of the ethnic groups (Bugri, 2012). Based on their sociopolitical structure, ethnic groups in northern Ghana are usually classified as being either an acephalous society or a centralized state (Tait, 1958; Awedoba, 2006). A society is described as being acephalous when it lacks hierarchical structured administrative machinery and authority system. This denies such kind of societies a definitive characteristic of statehood. In the acephalous societies of northern Ghana, therefore, political allegiance is given to patrilineal lineages and clans (Maasole, 2006). Nonetheless, in the epistemology of these societies, they acknowledge the existence of the 'earth god' whose shrine was ministered by the tindana in the local parlance. The tindana plays mainly religious roles in the lives of the people, as he intermediates between the living and the patrimonial ancestors (Imam, 2012). The performance of this spiritual role was very important as the livelihoods of the community were intimately tied to land. The tindana ministering as the earth priest was the custodian of the community land (Mason, 1993). It needs to be said, in the specific case of northern Ghana that the allodial rights rested in the community; while the usufructuary rights are exercised by the patrilineal lineages (Asenso-Okyere, 1993). Land in this respect could neither be appropriated by the tindana nor lineage heads as their individual private property.



The centralized societies however bore the characteristics of a state in their political and administrative structure. The centralized state structures were introduced by two invading forces. On one hand were the invaders from Zamfara (northern Nigeria) that established the kingdoms of the Dagomba, Mamprusi and the Nanumba (Awedoba, 2006; Maasole, 2006). On the other hand was the group of invading forces that entered Ghana from the Mande land that established the Gonja kingdom (Awedoba, 2006). Remarkably in all these cases, the kingdoms were superimposed on the autochthonous acephalous societies (Awedoba, 2006). The primacy that is given to land by all traditional societies was most exhibited by the invading forces' sheer atavism in their land dealings with the indigenous peoples. However, what emerged in the sociopolitical structure of the kingdoms was a dyad; whereby the invading forces became culturally and linguistically assimilated but their political structures remained largely in place (Awedoba, 2006).

Thus in the kingdoms, the influence of the tindana waned as chiefs became competitors for influence and authority (Imam, 2012). The emergence of competition of who should have the ultimate allodial rights over land in the kingdoms, generated rivalries that led to the extermination of the tindana in western Dagbon, for instance. The creation of space for the chief to exercise allodial land rights did not translate into an investiture of feudalistic land proprietary entitlements on the chief. Land continued to be communally owned by patrilineal lineages as that was the key to community membership and for livelihood. What is remarkable about land rights in northern Ghana is that irrespective of whether one is dealing with acephalous or centralized chiefly societies the communal land tenureship remained the critical basis for defining the social formation.

The dynamics of the colonial and postcolonial political economy have trembled foundations of the patrimonial land tenure systems across Ghana, including northern Ghana. The colonial administrative system that was instrumentalized through chiefs, in many ways elevated the status of chiefs and their economic relevance beyond what was traditionally the case. The diffused governance system within acephalous communities placed them at a disadvantage in their relationship with the colonial authorities. A glib approach was adopted in the colonial political governance structure, which was operated by placing the acephalous societies under the control of the chiefdoms; notably Gonja, Dagomba, Mamprusi and Wa. The place of the acephalous societies under the centralized political system also went with the depreciation of the value of the tindana, who was the anchor of spiritual and political authority within the acephalous communities (Awedoba, 2006; Imam, 2012). It is pointed out further by Awedoba (2006) that other factors like Islamization of the chiefdoms, the surge of Christianization, and secularization through formal education have also contributed to the waning of the authority of the tindana. The chief benefitted most from the loss of significance of the tindana in the traditional political system.



The dynamics generated by these social changes have also created markets for land beyond what a primordial society could sustain. This suggests that the current land transactions involving transnational corporations and the traditional leaders are taking place within an already difficult situation in which land tenure systems are in a state of flux; as primordial tenureship is crumbling under the weight of myriad of neoliberal socioeconomic forces (Yaro, 2013). This is contributing to the erosion of the communal principles underpinning land tenure systems and the take-over of agricultural lands by the rural elite with the support of the state and the urban elite (Yaro, 2010; Action Aid, 2012). In northern Ghana, the earth-priests, the traditional custodians of land have been edged out by paramount chiefs who now exercise significant control over the land. The 1992 Constitution, in returning land in northern Ghana to the control of customary land owners has given legitimacy to the processes of privatization of the commons property resources (Yaro, 2010).

Peasantry and the Livelihood Systems of the People

The economic space of northern Ghana is populated mainly by rural communities whose dominant mode of livelihood is peasant agriculture (Nyari, 2008). As it is the case in many traditional rural societies, agricultural activities are primarily done for subsistence, with a minimal creation of surplus value. In the context in which it occurs, farming is mainly carried out as a way of life which is bequeathed by one generation to the other; rather than as a business engagement (Gasu, 2010). The limiting factor of the traditional farmers is their emblematic lack of rational business approach that would make them reckon with their profitability, through input-output calculus (Ake, 1981). Peasant farmers in northern Ghana, like their counterparts elsewhere on the African continent, are characterized by a lot of constraints; among which are the following: low scientific and technological application, low capital investment and cultural inhibitions. In the circumstances, in which the peasants are situated, they find themselves ill-prepared for the transactions in the marketplace (Bernstein, 2009).

The guinea savannah grassland of northern Ghana is ecologically suitable for tuber, horticultural and grain food crops. The specific food crops that thrive in the region include yam, sweet potato, peanuts, rice, millet, guinea corn, maize, vegetables and cassava among others. These farm produce serve both as the means of subsistence and as the conduits for entry into the monetized economy. However, the harsh climatic conditions of prolonged dry season and erratic rainfall severely affect yields. This situation is exacerbated by poor application of scientific knowledge and modern technologies to agriculture and the overall subculture of peasant conservatism.

Northern Ghana has comparatively advantage over the southern sector in animal production. A combination of such factors as savannah grassland, low population density and the large expanse of pastoral land make northern Ghana the most appropriate ecological zone for animal husbandry. The country depends very much on such protein sources as cattle, sheep, goats and poultry birds from the north. Even though the sale of these animals provides alternative sources of income, their mode of animal husbandry is determined by the same

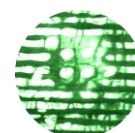


peasant attitudes and worldviews. Animals are primarily kept as a cultural wealth and for marital bride price payments. The same peasant constraints that limit their accumulative capacity in food agriculture are again the limiting factors in animal production; with the same outcomes of low economic returns.

Fallow land together with commons property resources are yet another important supplements to livelihoods. The vast uncultivated lands of the area provide commons resource for livelihoods especially for the rural peoples. The commons provide water, fuel, forest produce, vegetables, fruits, medicinal plants and meat as well as grazing rights. The commons' importance is often underestimated in discussions about land hunger and food security. However, in resource poor communities and in rural farming systems, the commons provide critical support for livelihoods, and are particularly important for the most disadvantaged members of the community (Tsikata & Yaro, 2011). The vast wild savannah is the source of a variety of economic trees like the shea tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) and locust bean tree (*Parkia biglobosa*) known locally as dawadawa. These products from the wild are normally gathered by women. The shea fruit has an oil bearing nut that is processed by women. The oil is used as edible oil and for the production of cosmetic goods.

The locust bean seeds are often processed into a nutritious seasoning or condiment, which is beloved in many parts of Africa for culinary purposes. Thus even though these trees are hardly cultivated in the region, they are important sources of income for the people (Akinoso and El-alawa, 2013). It is for this reason that strong sentiments are attached to even uncultivated lands. The benevolence of nature in this regard easily translates into a pecuniary gain. This is precisely the case as shea nuts have become important export commodities for the country.

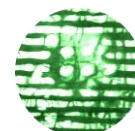
The economic potential of the northern guinea savannah belt had not been much appreciated by Ghanaian governments since the colonial period. This was mainly due to the fact that the savannah zone unlike the rainforest zone of the south could neither support cash crops like cocoa nor timber (Songsore & Denkabe, 1995). The colonial administration did not open up the region early enough for it to be part of national development process. Northern Ghana typified the discriminatory colonial policy which Gilpin (1987) described as an 'imperial neglect.' The non-discovery of minerals and the lack of tropical forest cover dampened the colonialist drive to extend transport infrastructure to the north. The colonialist was also not motivated to open up the north through formal education (Plange, 1979; Brukum, 1998). With indirect rule system in place, the colonial government was able to use chiefs as surrogates to administer the area. The working of the colonial administrative policy in the north was to implant few colonial administrators to superintend the chiefs. One of the essential duties of the chief was to carry out the main colonial policy objective for northern Ghana, namely – the supply of labor for the south (Abdul-Korah, 2011; van der Geest, 2011). The north supplied labor for the muscle demanding jobs in the security services, mining activities, domestic duties, and as farm hands in the cocoa producing areas in the forested south. Thus by the dawn of independence it was clear northern Ghana was a laggard in the country's development process (Brukum, 1998).



The belated efforts to bridge the gap between the north and the south by various postcolonial governments have not really succeeded in halting underdevelopment and poverty in the north. The colonial policy of keeping northern Ghana in the backwater and its preservation as a reserve of unskilled labor, helped in facilitating a migrant route for the northern youth to the south (Abdul-Korah, 2011). The natural instinct for survival has over the years kept these routes busy, with far reaching social and psychological implications on the opportunity seeking northern migrants. The movement to the south for the purposes of finding alternative sources of livelihood is carried out, both on seasonal and permanent basis. The seasonal migrants respond more or less to the rhythm of the seasons (van der Geest, 2011). The short mono-modal rainy season of the north creates the condition for idleness and low productive work in the dry season (van der Geest, 2011). Thus the youths migrate to the south to engage in short term economic activities as farm laborers, domestic hands and itinerant manual workers; but with the object of going back once farming season begins with the onset of rains in the north.

There exists another cohort of migrants which we describe as permanent migrants. They are those from the north who migrate with the intention of relocating permanently in southern Ghana. While primordial attachments may not allow this category of migrants to alienate themselves absolutely from their ancestral roots in the north, they nonetheless have no immediate plans of going back to resettle there. The range of migrants in this category is varied, and these include: workers in the formal public and private sector, informal workers in the farm, drivers, traders, laborers and artisanal workers. A common denominator between the seasonal and permanent migrants is their sentimental attachment to their ancestral homes and land. It is the allodial and usufructuary rights to land that define their citizenship in their ancestral communities; and their entitlement to participate in the local social discourse (Lorentz, 2013).

It is important to underscore the fact that in the urbanized communities in northern Ghana, as compared to their rural counterparts, there exist some latitude for non-farm job opportunities and economic accumulation (Yaro, 2010). The opportunities in formal and informal occupations render the urban dweller not only less dependent on patrimonial land entitlements but also leave the urban dweller in a superior accumulative position than the rural dweller. While the general picture in northern Ghana projects a relative prosperity in the urban communities than it is in rural communities, the stark reality is that poverty levels in northern Ghana are the highest in the country (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). This is because livelihood sources are not adequate to lift the bulk of the people out of pauperized existence. It is in this sense that the geographical boundaries of northern Ghana tend, as well, to be coterminous with the poverty map of Ghana.



Jatropha Biofuel Projects and Indigenous Vulnerability

The drive to make Ghana a major player in the production of biofuel has kindled enormous investment activity in that direction (Hughes et al., 2011). The favorable investment climate of the country has attracted many companies from around the world seeking to acquire tracts of land to cultivate jatropha, sugarcane and palm oil (Tsikata & Yaro, 2011; Action Aid, 2012; Akwensivie; 2014). The democratic credentials of the country since 1992 and the relative stability that the country enjoys in a volatile sub region have given the country a comparative advantage for foreign direct investment (Ahwoi, 2010; Gan et al, 2011). The country also has agronomic conditions that are favorable for such agricultural investments. The Ghana Investment Promotion Center (GIPC) established in 1994 is a key player in this investment drive. The activities of GIPC in this direction include the facilitation of processes including helping potential investors acquire necessary permits and paperwork (Ahwoi, 2010).

The promotion of jatropha as the preferred biofuel feedstock has attracted a number of foreign investors into Ghana including its northern half; where land is available for such projects. Even though it is acknowledged that about 20 foreign companies are engaged in biofuel feedstock cultivation across the country, the estimates of the land acquisitions is often anecdotal and inaccurate; as corporate data is often unreliable and government statistics incomplete (Schoneveld et al., 2010). While, Schoneveld et al (2010) put the acquisitions for biofuels projects at 1 million hectares, Action Aid (2012) indicated that by August 2009, there were about 1, 075, 000 hectares of land were acquired for jatropha plantation in Ghana. The national estimates of land acquisitions by transnational corporations for agricultural purposes consequently vary, depending upon the source of the data. Cultivating jatropha as feedstock for biofuel production is said to require large land sizes of more than 1,000 hectares. Having a National Energy Policy objective 'to ensure the sustainable supply and processing of feedstock into biofuel for local and export market' one can expect an increase in investment in the sector. The enthusiasm to promote biofuel production in Ghana is clearly captured in the National Energy Policy (Government of Ghana, 2010).

The overall goal of the current policy on bioenergy is 'to develop and promote the sustainable supply and demand of bioenergy to ensure energy security for Ghana. The policy direction for biofuel is to 'complement national petroleum fuels consumption with biofuel' through:

- Encouraging the Commercial Scale Production of biofuel feedstock
- Creating Demand for the Product
- Sustainable Production and Supply of biofuel
- Becoming a net exporter of biofuel
- Institutional Framework



- Pricing and Incentives
- Quality of biofuel
- Research and Development (R&D)
- Human Resource Development, Science and Technology

As already indicated the development process in Ghana reveals a bifurcated situation of a relatively developed south versus an impoverished north. Again it needs to also recall that the roots of this developmental asymmetry between the south and the north are in the country's colonial past. The development pace of northern Ghana has not been in tandem with the rest of the country and hence leaving the north behind in national development (Bugri, 2012). The evidence of this is shown in the measurements of living standards in Ghana, which has persistently depicted northern Ghana as the poorest in the country (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). Consistent with the underdeveloped nature of the region, northern Ghana posts the lowest levels of education, health care access, food security and high levels of communal conflicts (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008).

The activities of biofuel corporations in the north have however triggered two main standpoints regarding the outcomes of their operations. Both sides of the debate pursue their views with a high level of passion. We would, therefore, devote some time examining these viewpoints, to enable us appreciate the implications of the projects on the lives of the indigenous people.

The mainstream argument underpinning the promotion of the jatropha biofuel projects, see a win-win situation for the parties involved - foreign capital and local peasantry. A myriad of actors subscribe to the win-win argument for the parties involved in the biofuel feedstock projects. The proponents of the win-win argument include the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Government of Ghana, sub-national (local) government bodies and local chiefs. The argument is that the biofuel project as it is carried out in the local communities in northern Ghana is actually a pro-poor undertaking that would help in achieving energy and livelihood security in the rural communities. The non-governmental organization, Rural Consult Ltd, also expressed win-win outcomes for the project villages (Boamah, 2010). Within the context of northern Ghana, it is easy to push the argument that the jatropha plantation projects would help in creating the necessary jobs that would help in reducing out-migration to the southern sector of the country and also contribute in alleviating poverty in the area.

For those in political authority, the implementation of the biofuel projects is an assured way of ensuring provisioning of jobs for the rural youth and to accentuate their political legitimacy (Gan et al., 2011). This position was also underscored by Brew-Hammond and Kemausuor (2009), when they tied the objective of the biofuel project to the government's job creation effort. The same job creation argument and by extension the improvement of the living conditions of the local community people was used by BioFuel Africa Ltd (now Solar Harvest



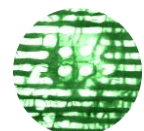
Limited) one of a major actor in the jatropha biofuel feedstock project in northern Ghana to outwit the chiefs in their project areas into ceding away their community lands. In the small village community of Kusawgu, the Land Acquisition Director of BioFuel Africa Ltd, Finn Byberg employed the same arguments of optimism regarding what the project portends to convince the local chief to sign off 38, 000 hectares of community land for jatropha plantation project (Nyari, 2008).

There was a replay of the scenario of grand promises when BioFuel Africa relocated its operations to east of Tamale on the Yendi road, covering an area that encompasses seven villages – Kpachaa, Jashe, Tugu, Kpalkore, Joro, Chegu and Tijo (Tsikata & Yaro, 2011; Bugri, 2012). The Tijo-Naa, who the divisional chief of the operational communities relinquished 10,600 hectares to BioFuel Limited (Solar Harvest), on undocumented promises which the company employing the community members, building of schools, tractor services to plough farm lands for community members and the provisioning of potable water to the host communities (Bugri, 2012; Tsikata & Yaro, 2011). On the more global terms, the environmental argument was pressed to hype the benefits of the jatropha project to the general public as follows:

The environmental benefits of biofuel are well-recognized and acknowledged throughout the world: carbon emission reductions, increased fuel economy, reduction of dependence on fossil fuels. But the creations of a biofuel industry in developing economies, like Africa, go far beyond environmental concerns. Jobs are being created, economies are being impacted, infrastructure is being built, services provided, and lives profoundly changed. ... We believe in partnering with communities, tribes and governments to create lasting economic infrastructures and change lives (BioFuel Africa Ltd., 2008: 2).

The experiences gathered from the field belie the optimism and the positive claims. The operation of the projects has rather exposed community members to many difficulties. The critics of the jatropha biofuel feedstock plantations in northern Ghana underscore the land grabbing proclivities; and the deprivation that the activities of foreign agricultural capitalists were inflicting on the people. Among the critics are such institutions like the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Action Aid Ghana, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Regional Advocacy Information Network Systems (RAINS). Their argument is that the biofuel projects were aggravating the already poor conditions of the people through land alienation, food insecurity and the destruction of sources of livelihoods. The thrust of their argument is that instead of ameliorating the conditions of the rural poor, in the project communities, the implementation of the projects have rather reinforced preexisting forms of marginalization.

The empirical study by Bugri (2012) on the operations of BioFuel Africa Ltd (Solar Harvest) indicates that the land deals were largely transactions between the transnational company and the chiefs. The Tijo-Naa acting on behalf of the Ya-Na (the Paramount Chief of the Dagbon state) apparently took advantage of the monetization of agricultural land and the huge promises made to him to cede the land and the usufructuary rights of the people. It is



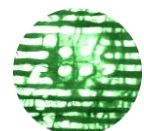
indicated for instance that in Kpachaa village 60 people lost their farms. The indigenous farmers lost on the average 1.8 hectares each while non-resident farmers lost an average farm size of 4.32 hectares. The difference in the farm sizes is mainly due to the fact that the non-resident farmers are usually better-resourced who commute to Kpachaa to develop farms (Bugri, 2012).

The manner in which the land deals in Kpachaa between BioFuel Africa (Solar Harvest) and the Tijo-Naa led to displacement, dispossession and discontentment among the people has become a matter of concern. The project has forced the people from their farmlands and caused them to relocate. The relocation, according to Action Aid (2012) have far reaching social consequences for the affected people as their movement from their original community lands to lands elsewhere, has caused identity problems as they relate to members of the communities which now host the displaced people. The customary land rights and the associated sociopolitical entitlements which their primordial connections had conferred on the displaced people are now distorted.

Those who have not moved altogether from their villages have been transformed into squatters on the acquisitions of the company with uncertain futures pertaining to their ability to use the land. The initial jobs that were opened to the community members were not sustained. The company, BioFuel Africa Ltd, which was incorporated in Ghana in 2007 was liquidated in 2009; and as such had difficulties sustaining their financial viability. It was be resurrected as a feeble entity under a new name Solar Harvest Limited. But the Solar Harvest Limited carried the liabilities of BioFuel which resulted out of its business model, which did not engage community members. Because the traditional leaders failed to consult their subjects in any meaningful way, the leaders got carried away by grand promises to relinquish large tracts of land to the investors (Bugri, 2012; Gan et al., 2011). The challenges that emerge in the aftermath of the land deals only contradict the position of those pushing the economic win-win advantage buttons.

The land transactions approach of BioFuel Africa in their relationship with the Tijo-Naa had earlier been adopted by the company in its dealing with the illiterate chief of Kusawgu (Kasawgu-wura). The chief was tricked by Finn Byberg of the BioFuel Africa Ltd into thumb printing a document that was to cede 38, 000 hectares of the community land for jatropa plantation (RAINS, 2007; Nyari, 2008). The illiterate chief was unaware of the import of the thumb print and the contractual implications of a loss of control over that parcel of land.

One thing that seems to be lost on the biofuel feedstock investors in northern Ghana is the economic importance of uncultivated lands. The economic benefits of community lands are not limited to the cultivated tracts alone; but also include the uncultivated lands. Economic trees such as the shea and locust bean trees are part of the commons resources for households that are harvested from the uncultivated lands. Women in particular gather the fruits of these economic trees and convert them into various income generating commodities. The clearing of the vegetation therefore creates an income gap that cannot easily be filled by the jatropa biofuel feedstock plantation. It stands to reason therefore that indigenes would resist the



clearing of the natural vegetation on a large scale. The women in Kusawgu, according to Nyari (2008) lamented the felling of the forest trees when the vegetation of their land was stripped by BioFuel Africa in the latter's drive of establishing the largest jatropha project in the world. The loss of the uncultivated forest trees was indeed a loss of livelihood source as the economic trees were no longer available (Boamah, 2011; Action Aid, 2012).

While the establishment of the plantations has created some job opportunities for the project communities, the argument that such projects are going to deal with the unemployment of the youth has not been adequately borne out on the field. The capital intensive nature of the plantations limits the scope for human labor engagement, especially in land preparation. Labor hiring is therefore limited to planting and harvesting periods (Tsikata, 2011; Bugri, 2012). In the Kpachaa area there are only five workers currently at post; and this consists of three security persons, the Assistant Manager and the Managing Director. The initial employment figure of about 500 workers in the Kpachaa area plantation has dwindled mainly due to the declining fortunes of the company and also the lesser need for manual workers once planting was done (Bugri, 2012; Action Aid, 2012). In fact the periods for hiring labor on the plantations actually coincide with the seasonal periods of planting and harvesting in northern Ghana. Thus, the youth are not motivated enough to abandon their own farming activities for proletarian economic engagement and that could expose them to hunger if the wage on the farm is not adequate.

Action Aid Ghana has particularly been worried about the implications of biofuel feedstock plantations on food security in northern Ghana. As we have indicated earlier, food production in the north is constrained by the prolonged dry season and the erratic nature of the rainfall. Perennially therefore the many parts of the north suffer seasonal hunger. In the current circumstances, peasant farmers in the communities in which the biofuel feedstock plantations are located are made to pit against the agricultural capitalists. The promoters of the jatropha project have created a situation that allows for out-growers schemes. The out-growers are typically peasants who instead of concentrating their efforts in cultivating food crops that they had been farming are made to believe that an additional income would be made by cultivating jatropha. The divided attention of the peasant and their characteristic low outputs ends up exposing the peasant to double jeopardy. The peasant's food security is endangered and monetary reward system is undermined by the monopsony that purchases his inedible jatropha seeds. It is important to note that unlike cocoa, the jatropha has no government guaranteed purchasing price. This point has been made amply by the advocacy groups Food Security Ghana (2013) and Action Aid Ghana (2012). They ascribed the food shortage of 2010 in the country to the diversion of attention away from food agriculture to biofuel feedstock projects.

Conclusion

The influx of investors into northern Ghana for biofuel feedstock plantations especially in jatropha has raised many concerns. While the National Energy Policy is abundant with the benefits that would accrue to rural economies with the implementation of biofuel projects through job creation and the rejuvenation of the local economies, questions are raised about



whether the nature of the land deals in northern Ghana would rather not sink the people deeper into pauperized existence.

The study discussed the context within which land rights occur in northern Ghana. And with current influx of foreign agricultural capitalists into northern Ghana, the land rights of the people are undermined by chiefs usurping their traditional roles by ceding out large parcels of land. The implications of this situation for the predominantly poor peasants are far reaching.

The argument of the advocates of the biofuel plantation as a means of job creation and improvement of incomes generation for local community members have been questioned by the counterarguments that interrogate the assumptions made by the proponents of the biofuel projects. What is evident in the current situation is that the economic situation of the people has not changed for the better. The stripping of the vegetation and tree cover has denied them of the benefits of the commons which traditionally serve as income supplements, especially as provided by such economic trees as shea and locust bean.

The ceding of large parcels of land has either driven the people in the project communities' to marginal lands or dispersed them to communities far away from their original homes. The social implications regarding their identity of the uprooted people have not been factored into nature of the land transactions. The initial idea that jatropha plantations would be sited on marginal lands has not been adhered to. This has worsened food insecurity for the many; as jobs that were supposed to be the new sources of revenue are essentially seasonal and low-income jobs that are unable to lift the people out of poverty and hunger.

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