

# Implications on gender through large-scale land transactions in Ghana – a case study in the Asante Akim North District

Barbara Spechtl

## Abstract

This paper deals with the consequences arising from large-scale land acquisition for the production of biofuels for affected farmers – especially in terms of gender relations. Based on a case study in the Asante Akim North District in Ghana, specific implications for men and women are being analysed under the framework of Feminist Political Ecology in order to reveal gender related implications for the access to and use of natural resources, as well as for the underlying power relations. The study concludes that land transactions lead to a destabilisation of community structures and a shift in and manifestation of existing gender relations. In addition, new dependencies and power relations are being established.

## Introduction

Since the report *Seized! The 2008 land grab for food and financial security of GRAIN* was published, the international debate on land grabbing has increased significantly, as numerous research papers on the topic show (e.g. Daniel/Mittal 2009: 1). Land grabbing is mostly defined as “large scale land acquisition through foreign investors – be it purchase or lease – for agricultural production by foreign investors” (Graham et al. 2010: 17). Other definitions prefer terms like “(trans)national commercial land transactions” as many treaties are of national origin, rather than international (Graham et al. 2010: 17). The fact that companies acquire land for production and/or extraction of resources – either with or without the cooperation of

governments – is nothing new. What is quite new, however, is that investments are not only made in cash crop commodities, like coffee, but increasingly in staple foods as well. Additionally, new actors investing in land have entered the stage. Before the dramatic increase of interest in land as a commodity, it was mainly the agri-business companies that were involved. Nowadays, investment funds, private and national investors and industrial companies are also taking part in the “game”. Furthermore, these new land acquisition processes are directly linked to the so-called multiple crises – financial and economic, energy, climate and food security. Particularly, rising prices caused by the scarcity of resources result in an increasing pressure on agricultural land (Altvater/Geiger 2011: 10ff.; Fritz 2010: 8, 49f.).

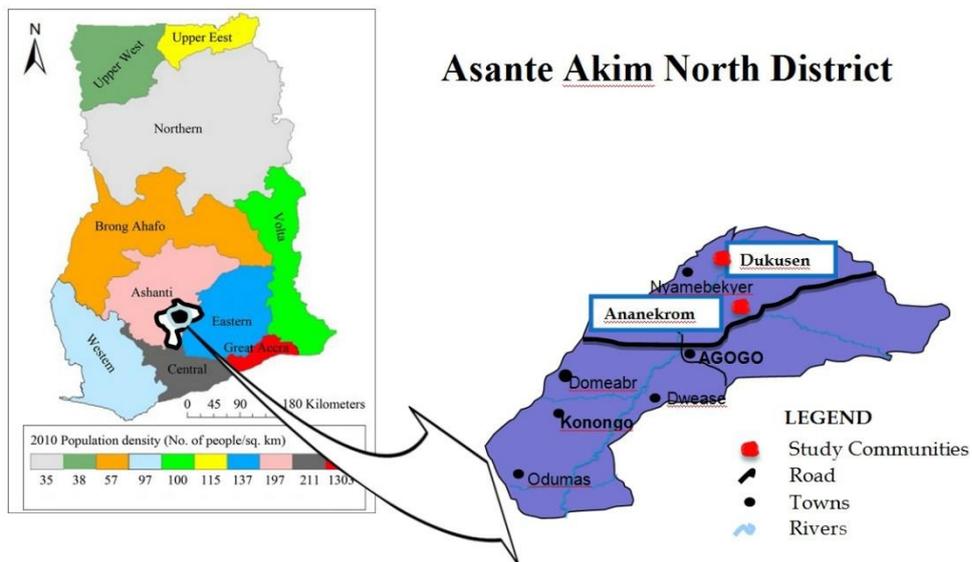
These trends are seen as highly critical, especially by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Groups (CSG). Although some regions like the EU have established ecological sustainability criteria, there are still no criteria for social aspects of the production mode (Franco et al. 2010: 668). Therefore, there is an urgent need for further research concerning the consequences and impacts of these international developments and trends, especially for vulnerable groups. Since the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) for the first time recognised development as universal – which means that development has to take place in the Global South as well as in the Global North (United Nations 2014) – it became even more important to keep track of new international trends and developments, like the bioenergy boom, especially with respect to their coherence, socioeconomic impact and development implications, so as not to jeopardize local development or community groups while at the same time searching for sustainable solutions and development paths.

This research, therefore, aims to contribute to the diverse discourses on the socioeconomic impact of large-scale land acquisition on local communities and will attempt to offer some answers as to how it affects income, livelihood and gender relations. As women in the Global South are disproportionately involved in the agricultural sector, as well as in gathering, collecting firewood and wood products, it is quite important to recognise how their socioeconomic circumstances are changing or being altered due to large-scale land acquisitions. Therefore, the study will be guided by the research question, what the consequences of large-scale land acquisitions for the socioeconomic status and well-being of the communities

in Ghana are, especially for women. Eventually, this study aims to offer a broader understanding of the impacts of large-scale land acquisitions in the Global South, especially for women, in order to provide basic information for new decision- and policymaking processes.

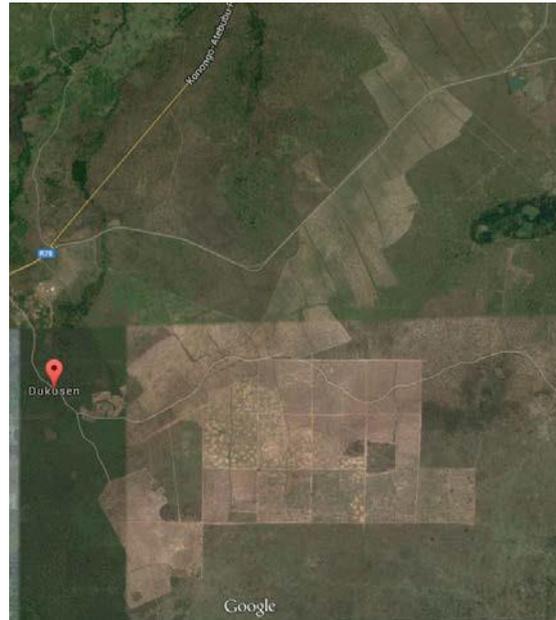
### Case Study

Land grabbing for the purpose of biofuel production has increased in Ghana as in many other countries. Since 2005, a growing interest in purchasing land for the production of energy plants – especially *Jatropha* – can be observed (Schrader 2014: 168). The land leased by Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. is located in the Asante Akim North District of the Ashanti Region (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Geographical scope (Source: Quansah 2014)

In 2007, Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. signed a contract for the lease of 750,000 acres (~303,514 ha) with the Traditional Council of Agogo with the purpose of cultivating *Jatropha* on 60% of the land, and food on at least 30% of the land while the remaining land would be used as biodiversity buffer zones. The leased land is located east of Dukusen and is clearly visible in the satellite image (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Satellite image of the land lease area (Source: Google Maps 2015)

Scanfuel Ltd. is a Norwegian company with a Ghanaian subsidiary – Scanfuel Ghana Ltd. specialising in the production of biofuels, mainly out of vegetable oil from *Jatropha* and palm oil (Wendell 2008). The contract states that the land is to be acquired in steps between 2008 and 2017. The annual rental fee amounts to USD 1.00 per acre for the first 12 months, increasing by USD 0.50 per acre annually, to a maximum of USD 3.00 per acre from the fifth year on until the end of the lease contract. Moreover, the parties agreed upon a one time payment of USD 37.500 to the Traditional Council of Agogo (Wisborg 2012; Expert interview conducted on Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> 2015).

Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. had initially estimated an output of 5.000 barrels per day, roughly 300.000 metric tonnes of crude oil (equivalent) per year by 2015 (Wendell 2008). It soon appeared, however, that these expectations were far-fetched and could not be met. According to a study by Wisborg (2012), the intended goals were unrealistic and the estimated output and profit fell far below the original expectations. As a consequence, the company decided in mid-2010 to gradually cease the production of *Jatropha* and to expand food production, especially of staple foods like maize and soya. Following this reorientation, the company changed its name from Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. to Scanfarm Ltd. But even before this reorientation, the company had not utilised the whole area due to several complications (Wisborg 2012; Expert interview conducted on Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> 2015).

In order to determine how the livelihoods of the affected people had changed due to the land transaction, especially with regard to gender relations, three methods of data collection were combined in this study: First, 23 qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with people (9 men, 14 women) of the communities in the Asante Akim North District that are affected by the large scale land acquisition. Second, the data was supplemented with semi-structured interviews with experts from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi (KNUST), the local NGO *Community, Land and Development Foundation* (COLANDEF) and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture Ghana, Directorate of Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD) which are all three working on the issues of land questions. Third, the data acquired through the interviews was analysed with regard to other case studies and embedded in the current discourse and the theoretical framework of the Feminist Political Ecology approach, the latter providing an excellent framework for analysing aspects of access to and the use of resources under a gender related perception.

### **Feminist Political Ecology**

The analysis of large-scale land acquisition processes under the framework of Feminist Political Ecology contributes to a better understanding of historically determined socio-economic structures and underlying power relations. Furthermore, it provides a means to analyse land transactions under the perspective of changing social conditions. According to Thomas-Slayter et al. (1996: 289) Feminist Political Ecology “[...] links an ecological perspective with analysis of economic and political power and with policies and actions within a local context. Feminist political ecology rejects dualistic constructs of gender and environment in favor of multiplicity and diversity, and emphasizes the complexity and interconnectedness of ecological, economic, and cultural dimensions of environmental change. It recognizes the relationship among global, national and regional policies and local processes and practices”.

It has to be emphasised that gender should not be seen through an essentialist approach, but rather as a construct of social conditions. Women, therefore, should not be conceived as a homogenous group, but possess different positions of power according to different social strata, which are defined by categories like class or ethnic group (Wasser et al. 2014: 190f.).

The process of taking-in-possession and utilization of land constitutes itself within a specific historical and socio-economic framework of unequal power relations. According to poststructuralist theorists, like Arturo Escobar, it is essential to consider colonial history when analysing the development of privatisation and individualisation processes of soil, as well as the perception and spreading of one 'modernity', referring to European ideas, rules, cultural norms and history, including historical narratives, as the only point of reference (Escobar 2004: 211ff.; Engels/Dietz 2014: 154f.). Accompanied by the expansion of the capitalist system in a manner that covers all social spheres, nature has been incorporated into this system as well, which means that land, soil and natural resources are being treated as commodities. Polanyi (2013) refers to these as 'fictitious commodities', as these are not produced by humans in the first place (Polanyi 2013: 102, 107f.). Thus, the process of the commercialisation of land has enormous consequences for the structures of the communities. "In traditional African settings land is said to belong to the living, the unborn and the dead" (WiLDAF Ghana n.d.: 1). Without idealizing spiritual attachments, it should be taken into account that land and soil are seen as a source of livelihood for the present and future generations and is, therefore, not considered as a commodity that can be sold (Ibid.).

When analysing large-scale land acquisition for the production of biofuel, it is important to identify gender-specific aspects in order to fully comprehend the implications of biofuel production on communities. Especially in cases of plantation economy, large-scale land transformations are being conducted that lead to a restructuring of working and production conditions and thus require different forms of knowledge concerning cultivation methods, utilisation of machines, pesticides and fertilisers (Wasser et al. 2014: 194f.). Consequently, the question arises, which sources of knowledge are being tapped, and to what extent knowledge systems and the perception of 'development' are hierarchically structured.

### **Large-scale land acquisition in Ghana**

Although there is no precise data on the level of large-scale land acquisition, a study of Schoneveld et al. (2011) indicates that 1.184 million ha land was acquired for the purpose of biofuel feedstock production. The investors are mainly foreign-owned companies and most transactions take place in the Northern Region, Brong Ahafo Region and Ashanti Region (Schoneveld et al. 2011).

As mentioned above, multiple international crises led to an increased interest in land and agricultural production. At the same time, the promotion of production and compulsory usage of biofuels in some countries of the Global North contributed to a stable demand and created incentives for investments in land that promised high profits. However, the Ghanaian government also contributed to this development by establishing policies designed to foster an investor-friendly environment and create incentives for Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), e.g. the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) and the Food and Agricultural Sector Development Policy (FASDEP II) (FAO 2013: 8f.).

As the major part of land in Ghana is customary land and the Traditional Councils are empowered to lease land for 50 years to foreigners and for 99 years to nationals by renewable leases, investors seeking to develop property can directly negotiate with the Traditional Council without communicating with the government or local community members. When the negotiations are concluded and the contract is signed, the investor is obliged to apply for a formal leasehold title from the Land Commission. Furthermore, an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) has to be conducted for investments in land exceeding 40 ha and a permit from the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) has to be obtained, although, in many cases, this is not being done. The Land Commission Act, as well as the EIAs, do not take gender issues into consideration, which is why there is no legal framework to protect women's interests in specific. Furthermore, the fact that gender aspects are not explicitly mentioned in the policies and strategies reflects the absence or under-representation of women in the Traditional Councils and government bodies. In general, loose regulations and the lack of sanctioning mechanisms are prevalent in large-scale land transactions. This is highly problematic, especially when it comes to the misuse of power by Traditional Councils or paramount chiefs, as the

government pursues “an implicit policy of non-interference with chiefs’ affairs” (FAO 2013: 10f.).

### **Land system and land rights**

When discussing large-scale land acquisitions in Ghana, insecure property rights and predominantly unregistered land titles, as well as the dual right system consisting of customary and legal law, have to be taken into consideration. Land ownership in Ghana is divided into three different types: state land (~20%), vested land (~2%) and customary land (~78%) which is managed by Traditional Councils or the head of a family. In practice, there are various ways how customary ownership, access to and control over land are managed (Vrolijk 2013: 28). Some authors see a high potential in the customary right system as it allows for enormous participative elements and the right to self-determination for local communities, at least in theory. But it has to be taken into account, that this system hands a great deal of power to the chiefs and elders – who, with rare exceptions, are predominantly men (Ubink 2008: 139). This sphere of authority of the chiefs today – especially related to land and resource management – arose from the usurpation of the chiefs by the British colonial administration. Increased mining activities and the extension of cocoa plantations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century led to large-scale land sales and speculations that were not controlled by the colonial power. To gain control of these activities and to reconstitute their power, the British colonial administration vested the allodial title of all unused land to paramount authorities who were then the only ones given discretionary power to sell land (Amonor 2010: 105, 111). The British colonial administration delegated authority and decision-making power only to male elders and by that omitted the precolonial system of power sharing in which elderly women, as in the position of the Queenmother, were involved in decision-making processes. The Queenmother was the female counterpart of the chief and each of them had different tasks and duties. Although the Queenmother did not have the same authority and did not get the same level of public attention as the chief, the consolidating and consulting role she was primarily accounted for was essential, especially for women (Miescher 2007: 254ff.). During colonial times therefore two processes took place: the instrumentalisation of the chiefs by the colonial administration on the one hand, and the usurpation of traditional rights by men, through which

elderly women were excluded from political and social decision-making processes, on the other.

Another critical aspect of the customary law, as it is practiced nowadays, is its implication for the access to and control over land for women. Access to land through outright purchase or lease is not forbidden and quite common. But, as the case studies in the Ayensuano District and Suhum Municipality have shown, women need a male relative as a witness, and in some cases the husband may also claim to have his name included in the document (WiLDAF n.d., 9, 10). In cases of marriage or inheritance, access to and control over land highly depend on the local inheritance system on the one hand, and on the extent to which legal laws are being applied and implemented on the other. In matrilineal systems it is common that land is passed on to the brother or the nephew. The matrilineal inheritance system is widely spread in Akan communities. In contrast to this, in patrilineal systems the children succeed the father, whereby the sons are usually being privileged. Although the rights for women and children have been strengthened by the implementation of the Interstate Succession Law of 1985<sup>1</sup> as well as by the Constitution of 1992<sup>2</sup> – through which the marriage partner and the children are granted a statutory share – in practice there are two law systems, the customary law and the legal law, that are being applied (WiLDAF n.d.: 14f.; Quisumbing et al. 2001: 157f.).

### **Analysis**

All of the interviewees stated that before the land acquisition took place their main source of income consisted of their agricultural output. The main produce was staple food such as maize, cassava, yam or plantain and, less frequently, often in combination with staple food, crops like tomatoes,

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1 The Intestate Succession Law provides the following division of the farm: three-sixteenths to the surviving spouse, nine-sixteenths to the surviving children, one-eighth to the surviving parent, and one-eighth in accordance with customary inheritance law (Quisumbing et al. 2001: 158).

2 Article 22 (1) states that a spouse shall not be deprived of a reasonable provision out of the estate of a spouse whether or not the spouse died having made a will. Article 22 (3) (a): spouses shall have equal access to property jointly acquired during marriage; and (b) assets which are jointly acquired during marriage shall be distributed equitably between the spouses upon dissolution of the marriage. Article 28 (1) (b): every child, whether or not born in wedlock, shall be entitled to reasonable provision out of the estate of its parents (Republic of Ghana 1992).

pepper, okra and egg plant. For all of them, the agricultural output was sufficient for self-consumption and – depending on land size and crop yields – for sale of the surplus to acquire everyday necessities or pay school fees.

Concerning access to land, the interviews showed a difference between men and women with regard to how they acquired land. While men acquired land through diverse methods, such as clearing a forest, purchase or rent, allotment by the chief or inheritance, women gained access to their land mainly through allotment by the chief or inheritance. However, some of the women could not or did not want to specify how they got access to their land. They only claimed that the land was theirs. The interviews also showed that older persons had gained their land primarily through clearing of a forest or inheritance. Especially elderly women received land through inheritance from their mother or, in one case, from her uncle. Others stated that the land was bushland before. Younger women on the contrary gained land through allotment of the chief or they could not make precise statements on how they got access to their land. In contrast, the access to land was by far more diversified among the younger men: from clearing a forest to rent or purchase of the land.

The lease of 303.514 ha land to Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. had a major impact on the everyday life of the affected farmers in the region and led to shifts within the community structure. Apart from elucidating the lease's impact on everyday life, the interviews show some interesting aspects concerning the process of the land transaction. As all of the land that has been leased constitutes customary land, the right of disposition is held by the paramount chief. The fact that the Agogo Traditional Council was responsible for signing the contract with Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. and that the local community members were not involved in the land transaction process in advance has led to major distrust and protests in the community. Some of the community members feel that they have been deceived. Two elderly women reported that, deceived by false pretences or simply by a sheer lack of knowledge, they gave their names and details of their fields to the chiefs, thereby unwittingly approving the land transaction. They believed that the "white people" came to dig wells again, as it had been the case a few years before.

All of the interviewees reported that the chief of Agogo leased their land to Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. Only one man stated that they came to see him

personally, and so he agreed. He was also the one who could give the most detailed information of the land lease process. Although none of the interviewees (with the exception of one) had a say concerning the land transaction, the interviews show that women had less information and knowledge about the transaction in general.

Concerning the impact of the lease on the everyday life of the farmers in the region, the interviews reveal that their economic situation became worse, and that it caused shifts in the relationship of dependencies and power relations. Although a major part of the interviewees stated that they were offered money as compensation, the amount was far from adequate; furthermore, not all of them received payments. So, despite the compensation payments, all of the interviewees indicated that their economic situation had become worse after the loss of their land. Three persons, however, saw some positive aspects arising from the land transaction in the form of new job opportunities. A farmer from Dukusen said that there are now job opportunities in the area, although he also added that “we are left no option than to join them, so that we could also get something to feed ourselves” (Interview conducted on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> 2015). These three though, did not have family land or acquired land by clearing of a forest but were given a piece of land by the chief when they came to the village. All but three of the interviewees stated that they had lost all of their land in the area. The loss of the land brought about significant changes to land ownership in the area, as well as to the ways of generating income and to the livelihoods of the families. Among the interviewed men, two cultivate parts of the land which the company is not using at the moment, two are working as labourers, one still has a small portion of land left to cultivate, one now works on the land of his wife’s mother, one got some family land, one borrowed some land and one cultivates his second land in another area. Among the interviewed women, five received some family land, three could not get access to new land and now work in petty trading, two are cultivating small portions of land that is left to them, one received some land from a friend, one is cultivating her backyard garden, one is cultivating her second land in another area and one cultivates parts of the land which the company is not using at the moment.

In this context it is noteworthy, that all persons who received family land were older persons, with the exception of one. Four of the five women who received family land were elderly women. Among the older persons one

man and one woman could not gain access to new land. While three younger women could not gain access to land, none of the younger men were able to gain access to land. In general, it can be observed that the affected farmers had to rely on family or friends to gain new land or were forced into wage labour. Some of those still involved in farming complained that they now produce less and are not able to sell any surplus.

Furthermore, some of the women who still do farming have to rely on other sources of income as well, e.g. working as labourers on other fields or engaging in petty trading. The men who have no land left are working as labourers on other fields, while women who have no land left are now engaged in petty trading. One elderly woman said that she is now selling chilled water in front of her house because she does not have the strength to walk long distances and that she is also dependent on her husband's pension fee. Three elderly women stated that they were too old or too weak now and are being assisted by their children. In comparison, only one elderly man stated that he and his wife were too weak to work and therefore have their second piece of land cultivated by labourers.

An interesting point regarding the job opportunities on the plantation is that only two women among the interviewees had been working on the plantation and one of them quit because of the poor working conditions. They were not regularly employed; instead they were called upon when seasonally needed, e.g. during the harvest. On the plantation men are usually needed for tasks such as weeding and clearing, while women are responsible for collecting harvest residues and carrying away the harvest, which is usually hard and poorly paid work. A woman from Dukusen reports: "I was working with them personally and then I came to the point that I said I cannot work with them. Why? Because I became sick, the work was so tedious and when I recovered to resume working, I said I can not work with them and then the money was also not good. And that was what prevented me from working with them but previously I was working with them. What we were doing is that there were machines that were weeding and cultivating but we carried the harvest and then sent it to where we supposed to put it. So carrying it from that long distance, that was what affected us, that were the reasons" (Interview conducted on Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> 2015).

The interviews reveal that not only the poor working conditions, but also the fact that men and women were working on the land not owned by

themselves, be it on the plantation or on family land, lead to a certain loss of autonomy and self-determination.

### **Discussion**

The analysis of the case study shows that the implementation of commercial plantations leads to a dispossession of local community members, thereby supporting similar conclusions in other studies (e.g. Schoneveld et al. 2011; Tsikata/Yaro 2011). Not only does this mean the loss of land for individuals, but the transformation process is also accompanied by a valorisation and financialisation of land and the establishment of de facto individual property rights through the conversion of communal user rights into exclusive private property rights (Pichler 2014: 30). The process of 'enclosure', as analysed by Polanyi (2013), describes a stepwise incorporation of nature into the market system that eventually leads to the integration of land and soil into the logic of the self-regulated market (Polanyi 2013: 245). With large-scale land acquisitions, especially in the Global South, the process of enclosure is being carried forth whilst communal or state-owned resources are expropriated and 'released' for the purpose of capital accumulation. The condition when land becomes a material resource and is therefore no longer available for subsistence can lead to restrictions in access to land for vulnerable groups in the future (Rossi/Lambrou 2008: 6). Already today, women are more affected by this than men, as 80% of the consumed aliment in Africa is produced by women, and women in rural areas are mostly dependent on their agricultural output (Kachingwe 2012: 12f.). This is also reflected and verified in the interviews; all of the interviewed women stated that they gained their income solely through farming. One woman also indicated that she utilised the forest for collecting fire-wood. Collecting non timber forest products is often an additional source of income, especially for women. A study by Wisborg (2012) shows that the clearing of land by Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. had an enormous impact on environmental resources in the area. Women in particular complain that the collection of shea nuts and *dawadawa* (African locust bean) has become increasingly difficult (Ibid.).

Another aspect is that due to the gender related division of labour, women are responsible for domestic work and child care. This means that children are with their mothers most of the time, leading to a reduced mobility of women, especially in rural areas. This necessitates that as a result, women

have to cultivate nearby fields, since the acquisition of new and more distant land is far more difficult for them than for men. Commenting on these circumstances, Mrs. Victoria Aniaku, Department Director of WIAD, mentioned that “women cannot easily travel far because of time constraints, she has to get up, take care of the house, the family, prepare food, even as the husband is gone she has to prepare food and send to the husband, maybe even before she comes to her farm. So with time constraints and also when travelling far it means you have to clear virgin land, you have the resources to cut the trees, remove the stumps, you don’t have the resources but the marginal land, once it is cleared you can use it. Not far from the house or you need to come from the farm, go to the market come back and prepare food. Can you travel far like that? And the children are also in her hand, so it is about time constraints and resources” (Interview conducted on Mar. 9<sup>th</sup> 2015).

The dual right system in Ghana means that in the case of stool or customary land community members gain access to land mainly through allotment by the chiefs, clearing of forests or inheritance. Clearing a forest is almost exclusively a male activity, and it is therefore nearly impossible for women to get access to land this way (Quisumbing et al. 2001: 157). This also means that women are more dependent on already cleared land and that it is more difficult for them to acquire new, virgin land. This aspect was confirmed during the interviews as well. While men gained access to land by diverse means – clearing a forest, purchase or rent, allotment by the chief or inheritance – women gained access to their land mainly through allotment by the chief or inheritance of family land. The latter can also be ascribed to the traditionally-rooted practice of matrilineal inheritance in the Akan communities whereby female family members inherit land more often. Amanor (2001), in his study on matrilineal communities in Akyem Abuakw, concludes that female family members pass on their land to their daughters and granddaughters far more often being well aware of the unequal access to and control over land and the usurpation of traditional rights by men. Amanor describes this as ‘matrifocal alliances’ (Duncan 2010: 302). The loss of land, therefore, affects women more severely as their access to land is much more restricted than that of men, and it affects even further generations, especially daughters and granddaughters.

The access to land has also changed between the generations due to the commercialisation of soil. Because farmland is becoming scarce but with

more available labour force at the same time, competition between labour migrants and the family youth is growing, which is also being exploited by the elders. Concerning this aspect Amanor (2010) states that “[t]he chiefs and elders within families, who control land, can now play off migrant labour against the local youth. [...] Under the new conditions, the youth are increasingly dependent upon elders for land, since they cannot go out and clear virgin forests” (Amanor 2010: 106). This, on the one hand, leads to younger generations not willing to work on family land in many cases, because it is no longer guaranteed that they will inherit the land some day. On the other hand, land is more likely to be worked by labourers – often in terms of sharecropping – where the land owners only take the role of a monitor (Amanor 2010: 106ff.). This aspect can also be observed in the conducted interviews. While the major part of the older persons (men and women) stated that they received their land through clearing a forest or inheritance, only one younger woman received her land from her father, but who is in charge of the land for her siblings.

The increasing scarcity and valorisation of land therefore leads to former social structures and practices being transformed, where especially male elders who already own land gain a higher position of power, both in the family and in the community. In regard to this aspect Amanor (2010) states that “[y]outh and women become the victims of the shortage of land [...] and they are no longer guaranteed access to family land” (Ibid. 2010: 107).

A study of Quisumbing et al. (2001) in Western Ghana also shows that the access to land has changed significantly. While younger men gained access to land through clearing of a forest until 1976, a shift can be observed, where the majority gained access to land through inheritance until 1989. Since the late 1980s although the access is more and more gained through rent or purchase. The cause for this change can be found primarily in the increasing scarcity of forests and available land and the fact that land at the same time is being increasingly valorised. The access to financial resources is therefore essential to acquire land for younger generations. This process of valorisation of land also leads to better educated young men being in favour, as they are more likely to be able to earn money through nonfarm activities than women. For women, who usually have less financial resources available, it is therefore more difficult to gain access to new land (Quisumbing et al. 2001: 166ff.). The shift in the modes of acquiring land is also reflected in the interviews. Two young men stated to have rented or

bought the land, while none of the women gained access to land by rent or purchase. Large-scale land acquisitions accelerate the process of land scarcity and the valorisation of land. The loss of land therefore has severe consequences for those who have less financial resources, especially younger women.

The implementation of monocultural and commercial plantations also leads to a loss of biodiversity as traditional farming methods are characterised by a higher (agro) biodiversity. Furthermore, the remaining forests are exposed to a higher grade of exploitation, as the risk of these forests getting cleared increases with the farmers' growing demand for new land. Monocultural and commercial plantations also require more water, which will lead to an increased pressure on water resources (Schoneveld et al. 2011; Rossi/Lambrou 2008: 10). Free access to water sources is also part of the contract between Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. and the Agogo Traditional Council (Expert interview conducted on Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> 2015). The growing pressure on and loss of natural resources are being experienced differently by women and men. First, women are more affected by the pressure on water resources than men are. This can be explained by the time spent by women on the provision of water. According to a study of Rosen and Vincent (1999) women spend considerably more time on the provision of water than men; 700 hours a year in Ghana, 500 hours in Tanzania, and 200 hours in Zambia (Rossi/Lambrou 2008: 10). Second, the loss of land is also accompanied by a loss of knowledge about traditional agricultural systems. This knowledge is mostly passed on by women due to the fact that 80% of consumed aliments in Sub-Saharan Africa are produced by women. Traditional agricultural systems not only comprise certain farming activities and the production of food; they also include the utilisation of natural resources for shelter, medicine, energy, transportation, household implements and clothing. These non-farming activities and women's knowledge of a sustainable utilisation of natural resources are essential for the livelihood of rural communities. The loss of land and natural resources thus also leads to a loss of additional income sources for women in rural areas and a loss of local knowledge, including knowledge on edible and wild plants used for food, fodder and medicine (Kachingwe 2012: 12f.; Rossi/Lambrou 2008: 10). Large-scale land acquisition and its underlying methods of production also cause a shift concerning the question of which knowledge is considered relevant or important. As the transfer of knowledge to younger women –

especially concerning cultivation methods, utilizable plants, herbs and its medical uses etc. – was in the area of responsibility of grandmothers and the Queenmother, elderly women of all were the ones to suffer a decrease in status and respect in the community. This also led to a loss of self confidence and to a new form of self-perception. In a study discussing the changing knowledge structures in Ghana Müller (2005) states that especially young men found monoculture plantations – for cocoa – appealing and adapted these cultivation methods, while younger women usually still exercised mixed farming. However, it can be observed that the responsibility for the knowledge transfer gradually shifted from grandmother to mother. This also contributes to the fact that elderly women more often speak of themselves as weak, while in prior times they were working the fields as long as they were capable of walking, even when not being able to do all tasks on their own (Müller 2005: 66ff.). These aspects also became apparent in the conducted interviews, where several elderly women stated that they were too old and weak and are now depending on their children or husband. Plantation economy, therefore, alters given knowledge structures away from traditional knowledge – mostly passed on by elderly women – towards institutionalised, technical knowledge. At the same time, the shift in power relations leads to women in rural areas losing both appreciation and responsibilities.

The loss of access to and control over land additionally means a loss of autonomy, self-determination and economic independence for the affected farmers (men and women), especially related to subsistence farming (although living in subsistence might be precarious). The process of 'enclosure' also includes a 'release' of work force that cannot be absorbed by industry or other economic sectors. A capitalist agricultural production that aims mainly at exporting the produce, therefore, perpetuates a "proletarianised peasantry, providing low paid labour to the new estates and plantations" (White et al. 2012: 625). This aspect was also confirmed in the conducted interviews, where one farmer put it straight: "We are left no option than to join them". This process obviously has distinct gender-related implications, as it also became apparent in the interviews. While men who could not gain access to new land mostly work as agricultural labourers, women who could not gain access to new land are mostly engaged in petty trading or have become dependent on their husbands or children. The loss of land, therefore, also means a loss of economic and

social independence and leads to new dependencies and power relations. This is also underlined by the fact that only a few of the interviewees (only two women) work or have worked on the plantation. The creation of relatively few job opportunities was also verified in a study of Wisborg (2012). Although Scanfuel (Ghana) Ltd. originally intended to create a thousand jobs, eventually only 80 permanent and 30 to 40 casual jobs were created (Ibid.).

Even cases where the integration of the local community worked out better and where permanent job opportunities were created (e.g. FAO 2013) fall far short of expectations with regard to the type of labour tasks created and their gender-related implications. The analysis of the case study revealed a reinforcement of gender-related division of labour due to the implementation of the plantation. This is reflected in the fact that women are mostly tasked with unqualified activities like carrying the harvest or sometimes cooking meals, which are poorly paid. The insufficient integration of local communities and the lack of more beneficial conditions for the community, e.g. technology transfers, are partly rooted in the loose regulations of the government and partly in the contracts, which are often poorly negotiated by the Traditional Councils. Mrs. Nana Ama Yirrah, who focuses on the topics of access to land and land rights at the local NGO COLANDEF, says: "Usually that is the plan when they start that there will be technology transfer, but who is monitoring, who is facilitating? They take the money and they rest. Governments take a share and the people here are the ones who suffer. So they will be the ones agitating against the company to get what they want, but because there is no leader obligation of the company on these ones it is difficult to manage it. So it is really the traditional authority and the government that are supposed to help to ensure that these land deals are actually managed in the way that brings these benefits and they should be managed in a way that the obligations are clearly spelled out and so both partners actually monitor to ensure that the obligations are met, but it doesn't happen that way" (Interview conducted on Mar. 6<sup>th</sup> 2015).

As I have previously discussed, in the case of customary land the right of disposition lies within the paramount chiefs. The reason for the lack of knowledge and say in land transactions, especially of female community members, can be found in the structure of chieftaincy in Ghana, which is generally represented by men. Women's interests, needs and day-to-day

routines with specific tasks and responsibilities are, therefore, not taken into consideration (FAO 2013: 10f.). But the power of decision-making and right of disposition and the resulting abuse of it nowadays should be conceived in a historical context. On the one hand, the interests of the former British colonial administration in mining activities and cocoa export and the usurpation of the chiefs are still causing problems – even today. On the other hand, the colonial rules disrespect of the traditional decision-making processes – especially of the role of the Queenmother – also led to a shift in the community structure where women are excluded from political processes. Relation of power and authority in pre-colonial African societies were shaped by age and personal attributes as the primary factors and gender only as the secondary. Older sisters therefore had a ‘higher rank’ than younger brothers (Sudarkasa 2005: 27f.). This of course does not mean, that pre-colonial African societies were egalitarian, as the division of labour and work tasks were structured along gendered lines as well; further reproductive work too was accounted to women, but the hierarchically structured dichotomy of male public and female private spheres with its unbalanced valuation did not exist. As Claire Robertson (1984) states “[i]t was not a change from “primitive egalitarianism“ to complex capitalism – rather the nature of the hierarchy changed” (Robertson 1984: 13).

The process of capitalisation and commercialisation of nature also reflects the current mainstream discourse on development. In order to stimulate the agricultural sector or to encourage development in rural areas, the government sets measures to create an investor-friendly environment for companies and investors in the agri-business instead of developing or funding small-scale farming. These measures and policies are also supported and promoted by international organisations, such as the World Bank and USAID (FAO 2013: 8f.). This also reflects the current perception of modernity and development based on the assumption that progress and development cannot be achieved by small-scale farming, but only by financially strong international enterprises. Implications for vulnerable groups are not taken into consideration in these policies as the Land Commission Act or the EIAs have shown. In the process of restructuring the agriculture the dispossession of local farmers is accepted in order to promote a mode of development that is based on Eurocentric ideas and assumptions. This study shows how power relations and positions are newly manifested by the current mode of development, and how some

actors are given a strengthened position of power in the same manner as Escobar (2004) had identified that “development and modernity [...] were always inherently displacement-creating processes” (Escobar 2004: 216).

### **Conclusion**

The study has shown that large-scale land acquisitions are accompanied by grave consequences for affected communities, and that these consequences are much more detrimental for women than for men. The interviews reveal that the livelihood of all of the interviewees had decreased after the land transaction. Different implications for men and women also became apparent in the interviews. Major consequences of the land transaction were destabilisation of the community structure and the shift in and manifestation of existing gender relations.

The implications on gender through large-scale land acquisitions are therefore characterised by (1) reproduction and strengthening of existing gender inequalities, (2) the loss of autonomy and self-determination for women, (3) degradation of women’s roles in the society, (4) the shift in the knowledge structure regarding farming systems and methods, (5) new dependencies and power relations, and (6) reproduction and intensification of gender-related division of labour.

The study also showed that the accelerated scarcity and valorisation of land caused by large-scale land acquisitions has different consequences for certain groups. First, elderly men who possess land gain a higher position of power within the community as well as the family. Second, for the acquisition of new land increasingly correlates with the availability of financial resources, younger better educated men are more likely to gain access to new land through rent or purchase. Third, the access to new land proves to be extremely difficult, especially for younger women and younger men with less financial resources.

While it cannot be denied that Ghana’s agriculture is in need of investments, it is essential to implement strong legal regulations in combination with a functioning and legally binding monitoring process for large-scale land transactions which would explicitly recognise and honour the needs and interests of vulnerable groups and women and contain provisions for the integration of local communities. Considering the fact that a major part of the produced aliment in Ghana is being provided by small-scale farmers, it would be advisable to focus on the current difficulties and needs of small-

scale farmers when modernising or investing in the agricultural sector. This could be achieved by policies and strategies that include small-scale farmers, particularly women, as they are more involved in the agricultural production.

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### Interviews

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- Expert interview, KNUST, February 27th 2015, Kumasi
- Mrs. Nana Ama Yirrah, COLANDEF, March 6th 2015, Accra
- Mrs. Victoria Aniaku, Department Director of WIAD, March 9th 2015, Accra

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