

Policy pointers

The ongoing Land

Administration Reforms and consolidation of land related laws create opportunities for the legal empowerment of communities. Both state and non-state actors should enhance tenure security by ensuring transparency and strengthening farmers' capacity to demand accountability from the custodians of customary lands.

Policymakers also need

to develop a national land use planning process, to mark out available land, and to consider national food production and security as part of economic growth strategies.

Government policy needs

to focus on strengthening smallholder farmers, who are facing challenges in accessing land and securing livelihoods. This requires investment in agriculture and a strategy to improve the skills and productivity of smallholder farmers.

The Ministry of Food and

Agriculture and allied stakeholders should support smallholder farmers to increase their range of livelihood opportunities by offering sustainable alternative skills and ensuring adequate links to markets.

Shifts in the landscape: increased pressure on rural land and livelihoods in Ghana

In Ghana 70 per cent of the population are smallholder farmers who depend on the land for their basic needs. Growing competition for this resource is having significant impacts on rural livelihoods and land governance. A recent study¹ by Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) highlights the key drivers of pressure on rural land, including population growth, urbanisation and acquisition of land by new actors including government and business. It shows how, in this new context, rural communities are changing how they access and manage land: shifting from customary to more commercial systems; farming smaller plots of land; and renegotiating access to common resources, such as grazing land. This in turn is influencing crop choices and livelihoods. This briefing explores some of these changes in the rural landscape. As Ghana is currently in the process of consolidating a number of land related laws into a single Lands Act, there is an opportunity for the government to address some of the challenges highlighted in this research.

A Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) study was carried out in 2015 in selected rural communities in northern and southern Ghana and examines the main drivers that are changing the way that land is being accessed, governed and farmed, and the implications of those changes for livelihoods and food security.¹

Growing demand for agricultural land

Two key features of Ghana's development are prompting changes in the study areas. The first is population growth: Ghana's population has increased by around 38 per cent in the last 15 years. Secondly, urbanisation is placing further demands on agricultural land, as land

that was previously used for agriculture is being acquired for urban development. An estimated 52 per cent of Ghanaians are living in urban areas, seven per cent higher than the average for West Africa and 14 per cent higher than sub-Saharan Africa.² This has created a new group of investment-orientated actors seeking to acquire large tracts of land, particularly for real estate development or export-oriented agriculture. The government is adding to the pressure on land through compulsory acquisitions for state projects.

Commercialisation of land use

The 2015 Land Matrix finds that nearly 1.5 million hectares of land have been acquired in Ghana within the last decade.³ The KNUST

Growing pressure on land is leading to increased competition and a redefinition of access to common resources

research demonstrates a growing demand for agricultural land, which is fuelling land speculation and driving up agricultural land prices. Land transactions are gradually moving

away from traditional community-based methods to more commercial, market-based transactions. In the past people accessed land mainly through inheritance, as a gift or due to being a member of the land

owning community. The study shows an emerging trend for local people accessing agricultural land through market-oriented channels such as rent, long-term leases, outright purchase or shared contracts. Commercial means of accessing land have increased from 45 to 87 per cent in the Ahanta West area over the last decade. Similarly, market oriented pathways for accessing land also rose from 25 to 63 per cent in the Tamale and Savelugu enclave over the same period. Significantly, even people who previously accessed land as members of the land owning community are now turning to long-term leases and other market-oriented approaches.

Where there are minimal pressures on land, customary land governance mechanisms are more likely to still apply. However, these are becoming increasingly rare, especially as chiefs and other stakeholders advertise their available land stock to potential investors. The Government of Ghana is helping promote investment through the Ghana Commercial Agriculture Project, which is establishing a 'bank' of land assets that are available to commercial agricultural investors. In effect, where pressures on land are low, chiefs are becoming the market drivers — and in some cases the agents — for large land acquisitions.⁴

Shrinking plot sizes and falling productivity

The research also shows that increased competition from different forms of land use as well as inheritance is reducing average plot sizes for rural land users. In some areas, average farm plots have halved over the past 10 years. This impacts most severely on smallholder farmers who hold on average two to three hectares of land and represent an estimated 70 per cent of all farmers in Ghana.⁵

Reduced plot sizes are driving rural land users to search for suitable farmland elsewhere. In Tamale and Savelugu, which were the study

areas for the northern part of the country, 49 per cent noted that the size of their farming plots have reduced over the past ten years. The situation was more pronounced in the southern part of Ghana where 81 per cent of respondents from the Ahanta West district observed that farming plots are becoming smaller. In contrast, only five per cent of respondents from Ahanta West and 11 per cent from Tamale and Savelugu indicated that their farming plots increased in size over the past decade. Eleven per cent of respondents from Ahanta West and 33 per cent from Tamale and Savelugu reported unchanged plot sizes over the same period. Across the selected study areas in the Ahanta West District of the Western Region, this trend is more pronounced with 80.7 per cent of respondents observing that farmland sizes are reducing. There was also agreement among 92 per cent of respondents that they are 'very unlikely' to acquire a larger farm plot size, as compared to 10 or more years ago. Female headed households are likely to have smaller farm lands than their male counterparts. This is because rural women are less likely to have access to and control over agricultural resources, which in turn reduces their ability to accumulate the capital required to acquire land. As one farmer from Punpune put it, this is only likely "if you have so much money and you know the chief and the other 'big men'".

The intensified use of agricultural land is also having an effect on productivity. A District Officer for the Ministry of Food and Agriculture in Ahanta West District notes "When you look at the yield per acre, you can see a consistent pattern for each of the staple crops — there is a reduction of about two to five per cent annually. This accumulated over the years and was becoming a threat to local food security...Even with the improved varieties, yield per acre is again reducing and the reason is simple — the land is being over stretched".

As a response to dwindling productivity, people are seeking other land for farming. Many farmers now have multiple farms of smaller sizes, often located far from their homes. Of the farmers interviewed, 64 per cent had three to five farms. This affects productivity and revenue as farmers now spend several otherwise productive hours travelling between farms on foot, or spending a portion of their income on transport.

Local elites reap the profits

The majority of land in Ghana is still held under the customary ownership of chiefs and other

traditional authorities. They act as the custodians and administrators of the land but often lack accountability to their communities. Chiefs are now using their authority, for example, to curtail the 'usufructuary right' (a potentially permanent interest in land often held by a member of the land owning group) for their private gain by granting long-term land leases to outside investors. This displaces customary land users from their own lands without their consent.

While there have been examples elsewhere of chiefs using revenue from collective resources for community development such as building schools and hospitals and providing scholarships, there was no evidence of this within the case study areas.

Chiefs are traditionally well placed to benefit personally from land deals, particularly in the absence of strong accountability mechanisms. Even in areas where there are not commercial pressures on the land, educated members of the land holding community — who often reside in urban areas — are facilitating large-scale land acquisitions by directing investments to their places of origin. Increasingly, wherever there are weak accountability mechanisms, there are escalating land grabs by elites.

Disputes over common resources

Growing pressure on land is leading to increased competition and a subsequent redefinition of access to common resources such as fishing, grazing land, seeds and other forest products. Coastal fishing is being threatened by a proliferation of seaweed and increased competition from commercial fishing vessels. As a result, community members are attempting to self-regulate their fishing rights by taking it in turns to go fishing. In this way the local community is working to protect its common assets despite competition and the negative impact on their livelihood.

In Northern Ghana, competition over traditionally common resources is sometimes sparking violent clashes between locals and nomadic pastoralists. Fulani pastoralists from the Sahel were always regarded as part of the community, especially when they inter-married. They would commonly stay in a community for three years or more. But in the face of increased competition for land this is changing and pastoralists' right to access grazing land and water for their herds is being contested.

From food to cash crops

In Ahanta West District farmers are switching from food cultivation to commercial rubber

production for a number of reasons. Firstly, land is becoming less fertile after years of intensive tilling and requires greater amounts of expensive fertilizer. More favourably, rubber matures within six years after which it needs minimal maintenance and adapts well to changing climatic conditions. Secondly, the market price for latex is significantly higher than food crops. And thirdly, one company that buys latex from farmers often pays them through their bank accounts, which gives them the opportunity to secure a loan using the anticipated stream of income as security.

Although the conversion of food crops to rubber can improve the living conditions of local farmers, it may also risk an over-reliance on export-oriented crops. This can make local communities more vulnerable to food insecurity.

Threats to vulnerable groups

Young people in rural areas face specific challenges around access to land for agricultural use. Many do not have a formal education or employable skills beyond local agricultural work, which limits their social mobility. Others are turning to illegal small scale mining, mining sand for building sites, gravel extraction: all activities which further degrade arable lands. These young people can end up trapped in a vicious cycle of land scarcity leading to increased land degradation, which further contributes to land scarcity.

Women are also facing new challenges due to growing pressure on rural land. For example, the collection of shea nuts and other lucrative fruits in the northern part of Ghana has been a major economic activity for women. But as some large commercial investors restrict access to these products, women are being hit hardest. In the coastal regions also, where fish-mongering has evolved as an important economic activity for women, the steady decline of fish stocks is taking its toll on women and their families.

Box 1. Land scarcity forces poor crop choice

"I had an oil palm farm but I lost it when the government acquired the land. All I have now is about half an acre which lies close to the river. I am now cultivating vegetables as the land is too small for growing perennial crops. Not long ago, I took about 25 cedis [\$7] worth of ayoyo to Takoradi because the people did not come over to buy as I had expected. But when I got there, there was so much ayoyo on the market that day that I only managed to sell 5 cedis [\$1.4] worth I decided to throw away the remaining stock since I don't have a means to store it. To my surprise I realised that I had to pay before I could dump. So after paying for transportation and the cost of dumping, I was left with nothing."

Interview with a female vegetable farmer, Egyam, Ahanta West District

In some areas of the Ahanta West District pressures on land have pushed rural people — particularly women — to compete for small plots of marginal land. These plots are suitable only for growing vegetables, which are perishable products without a guaranteed market. An example of the impact this can have on women is given in Box 1.

Conclusion

Mounting pressures on agricultural land over the last 10 years have had a significant impact on the way that land is accessed, managed and farmed. The rapid pace of change is altering the rural landscape, causing smallholder farmers to farm smaller more fragmented pieces of land, switching their crop choices as well as changing community-based land governance practices. This has social as well

as economic repercussions, particularly on women and young people. The Ghanaian government needs to address state level policies around land governance and livelihoods so as to support farmers to develop sustainable livelihoods and ensure that current power imbalances can be managed and not increased. As Ghana is currently in the process of consolidating a number of land related laws into a single Lands Act there is an opportunity to address some of the challenges highlighted in this research.

John T. Bugri, Eric Yeboah and Catriona Knapman

John T. Bugri and Eric Yeboah are lecturers and researchers at the Department of Land Economy of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi — Ghana. Catriona Knapman is a consultant to IIED.



Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.

Established in 1952 by founder Kwame Nkrumah, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) has the vision of “Advancing knowledge in Science and Technology for sustainable development in Africa”.

Contact

John T. Bugri
jtbugri@yahoo.com

James Mayers
james.mayers@iied.org

80–86 Gray's Inn Road
London, WC1X 8NH
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055
www.iied.org

IIED welcomes feedback
via: @IIED and
www.facebook.com/theiied

This research was funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with some complementary funding from supporters of IIED's strategic work: Danida (Denmark), Irish Aid and Sida (Sweden). However the views expressed by the authors in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of IFAD, Danida, Irish Aid, Sida, IIED or KNUST.



Notes

¹ Bugri, JT and Yeboah, E (forthcoming) Understanding changing land access and use by the rural poor in Ghana. IIED, London. Two case studies were selected for study including three communities in the Ahanta West District: Egyam, Punpune and Apowa close to Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana's oil enclave. The study sites in the northern region were Tamale Savelugu and Nanton. / ² Obeng-Odoom, F (2014) Oiling the Urban Economy; Land, Labour, Capital and the state in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana. New York: Routledge. / ³ Land Matrix (2015) Land Deals — Ghana. www.landmatrix.org/en/get-the-detail/by-target-country/ghana/?order_by=&starts_with=G [accessed on 15/5/15]. / ⁴ Campion, B and Acheampong, E (2014) The Chieftaincy Institution in Ghana: Causers and Arbitrators of Conflicts in Industrial Jatropha Investments. *Sustainability* 6 (9), 6332–6350. / ⁵ Nin-Pratt, A and McBride, L (2014) Agricultural intensification in Ghana: Evaluating the optimist's case for a Green Revolution. *Food Policy* 48:153–167.