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Institute of  
Social Studies

*Erasmus*

**From “Traditional Possession” to “Modern Property”: Com-  
modification of Stool Lands and Impact on Youth Participa-  
tion in Farming. Peri-urban Techiman, Ghana.**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this paper to my beloved dad whose sudden demise occurred during the course of this research. I have no words to describe how much he means to me. He is forever in my heart!

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## **Abstract**

With a gradual transition from “traditional possession” to a capitalistic property-based logic, stool lands have failed to fulfil their traditional role as essential building blocks for the youth to start an independent economic life. Seeking to address this problem, more egalitarian-possession based represent an alternative to commodified land access and show that customary ownership, though with its own pitfalls, may guarantee more just and secured farming livelihoods for the youth. Therefore, there is a need to rethink the logic of modern property which is gradually creeping in agrarian societies and unleashing unsustainable capitalist dynamics. In this paper, I explore the transitioning of customary norms through a case analysis of commodification of stool lands in Techiman and the impact on youth participation in farming. The analysis draws on 11 structured, qualitative interviews and is guided by the question: “How are customary norms transitioning into market and formalized transactions and how is it impacting youth participation in farming?” The findings suggest that commodification of stool lands occurs in four stages. The transition however has not reached the fourth stage of a full commodification. Yet, I find that the livelihoods of the young farmers are already being threatened in many ways.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

The role of the agricultural sector in alleviating poverty among the youth is indispensable. Rather than agreeing with mainstream assertions about youth disinterest in farming, this study adds to the body of literature that seeks to identify the challenges of youth participation in farming in agrarian communities. While it has been argued that a modern property system is essential for equal benefits of “everyone”, this study upholds critiques of modern property rights as a system that deepens inequality and threatens the livelihoods of youth in agrarian societies. Therefore it is necessary to revamp customary norms and also question the role of the state in this commodification process.

## **Keywords**

Land commodification, Land tenure, Stool lands, Youth and farming, Techiman.

# **|Introduction**

## **1.1 Land tenure, commodification, youth and land access**

Land tenure describes a particular system that comprises the various laws, regulations and rules that governs land acquisition and ownership. Such a system provides a framework within which the rights and interest are stipulated. (Kasanga 1998). The customary land tenure in Ghana is a system of land holding where land is often held by traditional authority (chiefs, lineage or family head) on behalf of a clan, family or community (Wily and Hammond 2001; Kasanga and Kotey 2001).

In the last few decades, much of literature on the land question in Africa focused on dissecting the flaws of the customary tenure, viewing it as outmoded and incapable of meeting the growing demands of agricultural productivity due to massive population growth (Diaw 2005). For this reason, the World Bank, IMF and other global organizations saw the need to implement land reforms in sub-Saharan Africa to transform the customary system into state or individualized property systems (Lund 2000). However, in recent times, there has been a transformed interest in the customary system by these same bodies who now view the system not as backward, but as adaptive and flexible (ibid 2000). Although recent scholarship on the land tenure in Africa has tended to counter hegemonic ideas about the backwardness of this system by revealing its adaptability and flexible nature, important insights about the “winners” and “losers” in the negotiable processes of land acquisition would reveal processes of social differentiation and competition (Peters 2004).

In Ghana, land management is practiced in a hybrid system (private and public). This is stipulated in two different state documents the Land policy (NLP) and the 1992 constitution. As enshrined in Land policy, there are two types of lands - public and private lands. Public lands consist of state and vested. State lands are lands that are reserved by the government on behalf of the state and usually, for public purposes. This is clearly spelt out in the state Lands Act, 1962, Act 125. Vested lands on the other hand are lands bestowed on the president of the country. On behalf of the state, he presides over these lands as established under the administration of lands Act, 1962, Act 123 (Kasanga 2001). On the other hand, private lands refer to lands owned by individuals, families, clans, groups, or communities. The land management system in Ghana is therefore a uniquely interaction between state land agencies and different categories of traditional authorities (Akateba 2019) thus, the term “pluralistic” or “hybrid” tenure system.



Land acquisition under the customary system is one fundamental institution that has endured pressures from western ideologies and continues to operate (Akateba et. al 2018). Different customary laws operate depending on the specific geographic context in Ghana (Amanor 2008). For instance in the Techiman traditional area, the lands are the of the ascribed to the kind of type of sit the chief uses. the lands are called “Stool lands” because the s chiefs sit on a uniquely made stools. In the traditional groups of some parts of Northern Ghana, customary lands are called “skin lands” because chiefs sit on uniquely made animal skins as a symbol of chiefly authority. Despite the varying practices, a common attribute is the fact that land under this system was not seen as a commodity and therefore had no monetary value. However, in recent times, (proto-) commodification of land has been observed under the customary system where chiefs demand huge amounts of monies for lands that are either owned by the community or the family (Mwingyine 2019). This is particularly common in peri-urban areas where there is excessive demand for land for urban development. In Techiman where this research is situated, land was predominantly used for agricultural purposes. The youth and people of Techiman derived their livelihoods mainly from farming. (Kiddido 2020).

## 1.2 Research Problem

Will the pattern of smallholder farming continue? Global trends indicate that there is a decreased participation or engagement of the youth in on-farm labor, posing a threat to the sustenance of social reproduction in agricultural communities (White 2020). In many regions, researchers have attributed this plight to the apparent adversity of youth to farming futures (Proctor and Lucchesi 2012; White 2012; Cuervo and Wyn 2012) – that the low participation of youth in farming is the result of youth disinterest in farming. White (2020) wrote that youth disinterest in farming has been the most stated reason for the poor participation of youth. He stated however, that, a more prevalent but less recognized cause is how rural youth, even when interested in farming are confronted with the challenge of increased narrowing of agrarian resources (White 2020). From a critical lens, it is not enough to accept the mainstream assertion about youth disinterest in farming. At least such a claim needs to be interrogated to reveal for instance, the reasons that cause youth disinterest in farming.

The customary system is a traditional institution where lands are held by chiefs on behalf of a community, clan or family. Stool lands can be acquired through inheritance, gifts or sharecropping. Although this system has its own pitfalls, originally, the youth under tra-

ditional authority could have access to land for farming under “favorable” conditions for instance, monetary demands was not a requirement for access thus, making it an affordable process (Amannor 2010; Kiddido et. al 2017).

While Stool lands served as building blocks for the youth to start an independent economic life, land access based on locally instituted social relations are shifting towards market transactions. Following Gerber & Steppacher (2017), this transition took the form of a shift from "traditional possession" to a "modern property". How is this transitioning happening? And how does this specifically impact youth participation in farming? Are stool lands able to fulfill their role as land provider for the next generation? How do they combine with capitalist dynamics? Can we still consider them as “just”? Finally, by considering agricultural futures, can the commodification of stool lands be a threat to the sustenance of smallholder farming?

### **1.3 Location and Case Study**

With an estimated population of about twenty four million (GSS 2011), Ghana’s total land area stands at about 238, 965 sq. km. Land continues to remain an important resource on which rural people derive their livelihoods. The agriculture sector in Ghana employs about 60% of the country’s population. An estimated percentage of nearly 40% of household income is generated from the agricultural sector. (GSS 2008). This clearly illustrates the integral role land plays in the economy of Ghana.

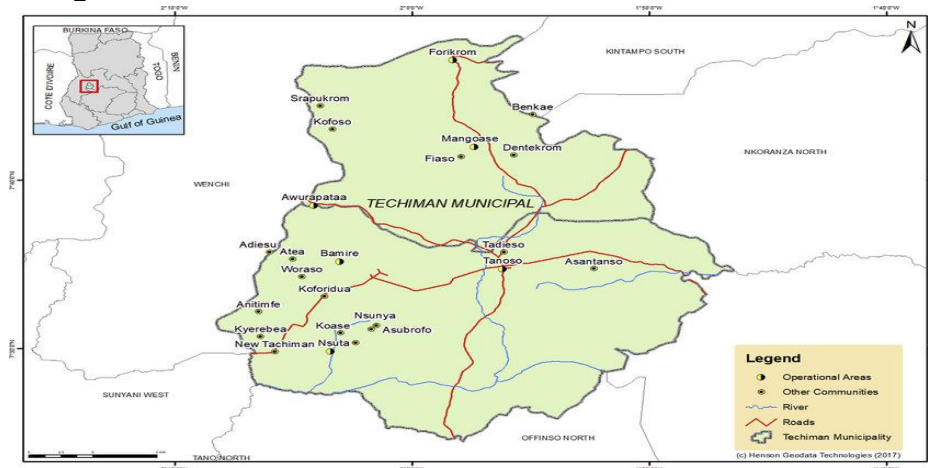
The study area, Techiman is located within the Bono East region of Ghana. In 2018, Techiman was made the capital of the Bono region which means that the region has been separated from the then Brong Ahafo region. With a population area estimated at 206, 856 with 47,627 households, the region have more females than males (GSS 2012). Data from the 2010 census shows that the male population was estimated at 100,498 which constitute 49% of the entire population. The female population stood at 106, 358 constituting 51% of the remaining population. (TENDA, 2013) estimated the population density to be over 316 persons/km. Techiman is relatively urbanized due to rapid expansion of most sectors of the city. The urban population in the regions is estimated to be 123, 939 (60%) while the remaining constitutes the rural population within the locality (GSS, 2012). Therefore, the urban population is relatively higher than the rural population.

Even with a small rural population, Ghana still derives majority of its food produce from the region. With an incredibly fertile land, the region has attracted migrant farmers

especially from the Northern part of the country to farm various kinds of food crops such as maize, rice, cashew, yam, groundnuts. Geographically, the region is located at the center of the country which also draws people from different regions and villages within the country. Techiman is also widely known for the presence of one of the biggest markets in West Africa, known as the “Techiman big market”. This market is suitable for selling all kinds of food produce. Some people also visit the market to engage in other kinds of businesses. These different activities have led to the massive increase in population growth in the Techiman municipality. (TENDA 2013).

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for a good number of the population in the area. Over half of the economically active population is engaged in agriculture and other related trade. The major food crops grown in the area are maize, yam, cassava, cocoyam, plantain and vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, okro, garden eggs as well as cash crops like cocoa, cashew and mango. While the area is host to many migrant farmers, many indigenous youth also prefer to engage in farming activities in the region. Most youth in the region are involved in agriculture especially the production of tomatoes (Okali & Sumberg 2012).

**Map 1.1 Map of Techiman**



Source: Modified from webpage

## 1.4 Positionality

As a young girl from the Northern part of Ghana, I was confronted with the challenges of “rural life” – the struggle to access good education, good health care, and access to good roads. In Ghana, there is a sharp divide between the Northern and Southern part of the

country. While living in the Northern part of the country meant living a simple and “happy” life like most rural settings (Layard 2005), the challenge comes when one wants more outside of the circumstances of rural life. For instance it is extremely a big challenge to access good higher education from the Northern part of the country. Most of the “good” schools are located in the South which is miles away from the North.

I had not travelled to the Southern part of the country until I gained admission into the university in 2013. My university was located in the central region of Ghana which meant that I had to travel through Techiman which is the center of the country. As the center, cars usually stop at the “Techiman car station” for passengers to grasp some food or take a rest before the journey continued. It was during those moments that I observed an incredibly huge population engaging in selling of a variety of food products. I was overwhelmed by the massive variety of food I saw, though I had heard that the region was rich in abundance of food, it was the first time I witnessed it. What attracted my attention was the number of young people involved in this venture. Later, I enquired about the youth – why are they not in school? (In Ghana, education is free up to the secondary level) Who do they work for? And where do they come from? I got a very simple explanation – young people from this region take advantage of the fertile soil of the area and begin farming and trading of farm produce at a very early age. While some are migrant youth from other parts of the country, majority are natives of Techiman.

In the era of rapid urbanization, greater demand of agriculture land for urban development has consequently led to land commodification. As an AFES (Agrarian, Food and Environmental Studies) student, the livelihoods of rural people forms part of my studies. How land and other agrarian resources are acquired, owned and distributed among rural people (Bernstein 2010) is of particular interest. Therefore, in the midst of land commodification, I was curious to know how this has impacted the livelihoods of youth in the region.

My positionality as an educated woman studying in Europe, who does not identify with the participants (including from a language perspective) presented several limitations involving data collection. However, my research assistants are natives of Techiman, this facilitated the data collection especially on language basis as well as building a good rapport with “gatekeepers” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007 pp. 49-52).

## **1.5 Research Objective**

My overall objective is to better understand the transitioning process of customary norms into market logics, and the impact on youth participation in farming in peri-urban Techiman.

## **Research Question**

How are customary norms transitioning into market and formalized procedures and how is this impacting youth participation in farming?

## **Sub-questions**

1. How did we arrive at the present customary system in Ghana
2. What is the transitioning process of customary norms into market procedures
3. To what extent is this transition impacting youth participation in farming?

## **1.6 Justification of the study**

This study is very relevant in many ways. To begin with, While the World bank only perceive the youth as a group that constitute social “capital” (World Bank 2007), the youth is much more than that – there can be no future for smallholder farming without the youth (White 2020). As smallholders are ageing, the sustenance of farming largely depends on the youth. It is therefore essential to reveal and address the challenges of youth in farming.

To carefully study the youth as an excluded group, it is important to understand the dynamics surrounding the intergenerational transfer of land under the hybrid system of land tenure. It has been widely assumed that young people are averse to farming due to aspirations outside of farming. However, little attention is given to the intergenerational transfer of agrarian resources and how that could impact youth participation in farming (White 2019). The intergenerational transfer of agrarian resources would be used as a framework to explore access dimensions of youth under the customary system.

Again, the agricultural sector has absorbed a majority of the working population in most countries. (IFAD 2010). In Ghana, the agricultural sector employs about 60% of the working population, majority of them being the youth especially from rural areas. For instance in Techiman, majority of the youth derive their source of livelihoods from farming and marketing of farm produce especially vegetables (Okali & Sumberg 2012).

Studies on land commodification in Ghana have mostly focused on land custodians and the relations with their subjects (Kasanga & Kortey 2001; Ubink & Amanor 2008; Kasanga & Woodman 2004). Few studies have also focused on the intergenerational dimension of land commodification – intra family dynamics in relation to commodification of agricultural lands (Amanor 2010; Duncan 2010). According to White, the related tensions and dynamics of access to agrarian resources are common themes in European agrarian history but are relatively neglected in contemporary studies of agrarian change (White 2020). This study adds to the existing literature on land commodification by unpacking the impacts of land commodification on youth participation in farming in Techiman – a rapidly urbanizing region in which increased demand for land has resulted in changing livelihoods, aspirations as well as customary arrangements in land delivery.

## 1.7 Methodology

The data gathered in this research was done using a qualitative study; a blend of in-depth interviews and focused-group discussions. As the Covid-19 pandemic presented the challenge of not able to personally visit the field, I employed two research assistants; one male aged 29 and female aged 31, both students from the university of Ghana legon. Both research assistants are native speakers of ‘twi’ - the official dialect of the people of Techiman. I found these two assistants through a friend who is an entomologist in Ghana. He has a team of researchers who are trained to assist individuals and groups with data collection. The group of researchers extended their expertise in training master students in data collection. The two research assistants therefore had the expertise in data collection. They were also selected not only because they have the expertise but also have conducted data collection in surrounding communities in the region.

Since I was not going to be physically present with the research assistants, I had to properly brief them on the research. Therefore, prior to the day of the data collection, I conducted several online meetings with the research assistants to discuss in detail, the objectives of my research, my questionnaire, Covid-19 protocol as well as other matters pertaining to the fieldwork. A clear budget stipulating the cost of items needed for the data collection was also drawn during these meetings. One very important thing that came up during our meeting was the selection of our study community; in 2019, the government of Ghana had created new regions so that some communities that were part of a particular region were separated to form a different region. This meant that we had to be careful in selecting our study community. Initially, we selected two communities; “Aworowa” and

“Fiaso” and both of which met the criteria of features required for the study area in this research; an active land market, Demand of land for urban development, increasing land values, monetary transactions on land. After we made some enquiries and research about these two communities, we found out that “Fiaso” has been separated from Techiman and now forms part of the Bono region. We then finally settled on “Aworowa” as the selected study area.

The data was gathered during a two-day period. However, prior to that the research assistants conducted community entry – they visited the study area with the help of one of the elders whom we contacted with the help of a resident in the area. As part of the culture, they visited the chiefs to brief them about the research. The chiefs were made aware that this was an academic research and that they are assured of non-disclosure of names and confidentiality.

The sampling technique used was purposive – the study had already pre-determined the composition of participants – Youth farmers between the ages of 15 -34. Having also identified the migrant youth, the chiefs and elders were asked to do the selection to include these two groups. The expert (neutral) person was randomly selected by our lead entry. In all a total of 11 participants<sup>1</sup> were selected; four indigenous youth, four migrant youth, two chiefs and one expert (neutral).

Triangulation was adhered using data sources from different actors (i.e. chiefs, expert). Two in-depth interviews were conducted with the two chiefs and one expert. The focused group discussions were conducted with two groups; migrant youth and indigenous youth. While Edwards and Holland cautioned the use of audio recording for qualitative interviews (2013 : 69 – 70), the audio recording was indispensable in this process : In my absence, it allowed the research assistant to have more direct contact with the participants and to keep track of important parts of the conversation that was needed for the analysis. The recorded information also served as evidence that fieldwork was done and data was gathered directly from participants.

While I am not a inherent uterer of “twi”- the original language of the region, I understood some vocabulary. Therefore, with the help of the research assistants who were both native speakers, the transcription of the data was done by three of us. I am therefore confi-

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for the profile of interviewed participants

dent that all quotes and text used from the translations are a direct reflection of participants' views.

This research also made use of existing literature on the research subject which it seeks to build on. Secondary sources used included; scholarly articles and historical literature. Principal information gathered included the historical background of the land tenure system in Ghana, scholarly debates on the land question and background studies of the selected community.

## **1.8 Limitations and Ethical Challenges**

The opportunity to conduct an in-depth study in a relatively small area allowed me to understand with some depth, sensitive issues like local power relations on land access, livelihood alternatives for youth as well as exclusions. However, this study was not conducted in “normal” times – the COVID-19 pandemic which did not allow for in-person research and created a lot of challenges and limitations for this study. For instance, as pointed out by Patton 2002 : 359, participant observation is an important advantage for the researcher – it gives researchers the opportunity to authenticate their data by comparing direct observations with the narratives they receive from participants. While the research assistants had the opportunity to observe some important aspects of this research such as the transformation of agricultural lands for urban uses, my presence would have been useful to ascertain a more vivid picture about important insights like the social structure, power relations and processes of land access.

Again, streamlined questions increased the comparability of the respondents' answers – for instance, some questions (what are the most prevalent uses of land in the area apart from farming? how did you acquire your land?) were asked in both groups. However, my interest was to unpack the candid and truest implications of commodification on youth. Without any prior or assumed knowledge, it was necessary to probe further based on participants responds. While I had the opportunity to interact with one participants via virtual means, all the interviews were conducted by the research assistants using the structured questionnaire, this did not allow for probing on some responses to the best of my interest.

The selected participants did not include any female. However, since I was also keen to understand the challenges of commodification for female youth farmers, some questions were posed to the expert (neutral) about what his views on female challenges were. He may have a substantiated opinion having lived in the area for many years. However, his opinion



may not necessarily reflect the exact situation if the responses were to come from the women themselves.

As I mentioned earlier, In Ghana, there is only one growing season which is commonly known as “the rainy season. This usually takes place between February until November. It was therefore difficult getting the participants since they were all busy on their farms at the time. This did not allow the opportunity of recruiting more participants as they were unavailable at the time. According to the research assistants, the migrant youth could not converge at the meeting point for the interviews; they had to meet them at a location called “zongo” – a common place where migrant youth usually converge. They had also cautioned the research assistants that they did not want to be late to the farm and had to seek permission from the landholders on whose farms some of them worked as laborers. I must also add that I personally faced a major challenge communicating with the research assistants online – internet connectivity in Ghana is very poor and costly.

## **1.9 Structure of the paper**

Chapter two provides a historical background of the land tenure system in Ghana. Chapter three provides the theoretical framework that this study builds on. Chapter four presents a presentation and discussion of the findings based on the data gathered. Chapter five concludes the research and provides suggestions for further research.

# **Hybrid land Management and Stool land Administration in Ghana**

While this research does not seek to explore in great details the evolution of the land tenure systems in Ghana, it is imperative to acknowledge the events that led to the present system we hold now. In this chapter, I will uncover this within three periods; pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. Thereafter, I will offer a brief description of how stool lands – the focus of this research, are administered within the general hybrid tenure system in Ghana.

## **2.1 Land administration in Pre-colonial Era**

Historically, Ghana has undergone massive land tenure reforms which dated back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during colonization. The central objective of these reforms is to increase productivity by regulating and strengthening traditional land tenure system (customary) as well as increasing investments in land (Amanor 1999). Due to this long standing history of land reform, it is impossible to grasp an understanding of contemporary land tenure reforms in Ghana without exploring the historical antecedents that has led to contemporary modes of land administration in the country.

Before colonization, there was no land scarcity. Land was available and much resources was not required in exchange for land (Kasanga and Kotey 2001). Authority over resources such as land was vested in chiefs, lineage or family in the community. Allocation of land was the responsibility of the leaders of the land-holding groups. Land was allocated by these heads on the basis of social relations and not for monetary basis. Therefore, before the first colonial reform took place, land was not commoditized, rather land was held under various forms of customary system (Amanor 1989)

Gaining access to land in most communities such as the northern areas of Ghana only required a token such as “colanut” or “guinea fowls” or local drink. The access procedure did not require any written contracts rather; verbal agreements and social relations were the common procedure for access. While land access was generally based on shared relations; the process of acquiring land under various forms of customary systems varied among different people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and communities. In some communities, mechanisms of negotiations of access to land took the form of purchase, donations or loans (Amanor 2010). These forms of negotiations were gradually transformed with the

inception of colonization. Legal state system begun to interfere with customary norms, forcing a new outlook about what land originally meant to the people.

## **2.2 Land administration in Colonial Era**

While some scholars on land tenure administration do not subscribe to the idea that the current inequalities present in land administration are caused by colonization, other authors (Peters 2004; Amanor 2010) argue that social conflicts and inequalities arising in the distribution of land, especially in rural areas are a direct effect of colonial administration. Traditional or customary system of land administration was criticized for being backward and did not yield to high productivity. As a result, Western ideas such as land titling were imposed which paved way for the current inequalities present in the distribution and ownership of land (Chimhowu and Woodhouse 2006). Therefore, it has been argued that the role of state legislations in controlling communal land has been responsible for the biases in land distribution.

The colonial government arrived in Ghana (the then Gold Coast) at a time when the country had discovered minerals such as Gold, diamond and bauxite in the forestry areas. This triggered their interest over land rights in the late nineteenth century and the immediate effect was an attempt by the colonial government to modify land relations (Amanor 1999). The colonial administration criticized the customary land tenure as being insecure and incapable of meeting the growing demands of agriculture to feed a growing population (Berry 1993).

When the Land Registration Act (1883) was enacted in the late nineteenth century (Kuntu – Mensah, 2006) it marked the beginning of land tenure reforms in Ghana (Aryeetey et. al 2007; Amanor, 2010). As colonial administration did not uphold the existing customary system of land rights, several laws were enacted under the Land Deed Registration Act as a deliberate attempt to regulate existing land rights practices) and introduce a Western – type system of property rights (Aryeetey et.al 2007. Existing land laws were then reinterpreted in many ways that led to either “the appropriation of land outright” or the manipulation of customary authorities to control land (Berry 2002: 641). While such a system of property rights ultimately favored colonial rulers, such rules could not co-exist with the existing traditional rules or laws governing land administration. Since this uneasy co-existence between statutory laws and local practices did not give colonial government con-

trol over local lands, they attempted to bring customary lands under the British Crown by proposing to enact two main laws; the “Lands ordinance” of (1894) and the “Land Bill” of 1897 (Aryeetey et. al 2007). Unfortunately, these ordinances were not adapted because they faced resistance by the people.

Chiefs and traditional leaders were also co-opted into what was called “Indirect rule” which was under the Native Authority Act. This Act was enacted to give chiefs and traditional rulers the opportunity to take part in the governance process. However, under this law, traditional rulers gradually lost power to control their natural resources which included land (Buah, 1998). With the suppression of traditional rules, traditional system of government in Ghana eventually became non-existent: Colonial government denied the paramount chiefs certain rights that they possessed. Sub-chiefs were then conferred the authority to manage the activities that were within the jurisdiction of paramount chiefs (Ampadu 2013). This was how the colonial government appropriated lands from the natives (Amanor 2010).

## **2.3 Land administration in Post – Colonial Era**

Ghana gained independence in 1957 when Dr. Kwame Nkrumah led the country to independence. When the Conventions People’s Party (CPP) assumed office, under the leadership of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, they attempted to achieve two main things in the land sector; to bring customary lands under state rule and to correct some inconsistencies that the country had inherited from colonial administration. The new government established a local council which was responsible for issues of both local and national development; all revenue generated where then asked to be paid directly to this local council. This policy meant that lands and monies accrued from the sale of lands were no longer going directly to chiefs. The policy succeeded in confiscating lands and bringing land administration under the authority of the office of Stool Lands (OASL) (Amanor 2010). However, some chiefs began to flout directives since their financial base was eroded through this policy. In response, the CPP enacted new laws to accommodate the interest of chiefs. Revenues accrued from the sale, rent or concessions under the new law were shared between traditional and state leaders.

The Nkrumah regime enacted several laws including the “Land title registration Act”. Land title registration which is an integral part of Ghana’s tenurial reforms begun under this Act. Though the Act improved land administration, there were many problems related to land administration that the Act could not address. Under this same regime, more than

ninety rules were passed between 1962 and 1998 (Kuntu-Mensah 2006), many of such laws are still very active in the country under the Land registration Act (Berry 2009).

The first post-colonial government ended in 1966 through military overthrow. While the first government selectively employed various policies to confiscate lands belonging to traditional leaders, successive governments did not interfere with traditional rights of local people due to lessons learnt from the past (Aryeetey et. al 2007). Therefore, the governments did not tamper with existing land tenure. Rather, policies on land focused on large scale agriculture through the private sector to improve agriculture productivity. The policies on land during post-colonial regime remained almost the same until the Land registration Act was modified in 1986. The Land title Registration Act of 1986 became the new law until the National Land Policy (NLP) was passed in 1999. This policy became the national comprehensive policy to provide guidelines on issues pertaining to land management in the country.

## **2.4 Stool Land Administration**

Presently, land management in Ghana is practiced within a Hybrid system. This means that land is governed within the framework of what is known as “legal pluralism – the state of affairs for any social field, in which behavior pursuant to more than one legal order occurs” (Griffiths 1986, pp 2-3). This framework is stated in the 1992 constitution of Ghana as well as the National Land Policy (NLP). Under the NLP, lands are classified into two main categories; private (Customary) and public lands (Amanor 1999). Public lands comprise of state lands – these are lands acquired and owned by the government to serve public purposes as outlined under the state Lands Act of 1962. Vested lands are lands that are entrusted in the president of the country and as stipulated under the administration of Lands Act (Ministry of Lands and forestry 1999). Private lands on the other hand refer to lands that are owned by the family, clan, groups, communities or an individual. These groups of people can acquire private lands through different modes. For instance while a member of a landowning family could acquire land through inheritance, another individual could acquire through sharecropping, lease or rent. The Hybrid land management in Ghana therefore, constitutes the interaction between land sector agencies from the state and traditional authorities from various regions.

Customary lands constitute the dominant form of landholding in the country with about 80% of lands. These lands are managed by traditional authorities who are leaders of a clan, family or a community (Kasanga and Kotey 2001). Traditional arrangements under

the customary system vary among different geographical context. For instance in Techiman and among the Akan speaking group, chiefs usually sit on specially carved stools as a symbol of traditional authority. Customary lands are therefore called “stool lands” among these regions. In the Northern part of Ghana, traditional leaders sit on animal skins as a sign of authority. In these regions, Lands are termed “skin lands”.

In Techiman where this study is situated, customary lands are administered under the stool system. The agrarian structure is such that power is given to the chiefs to serve as custodians over land. Land acquisition is therefore done through the traditional power structure where the <sup>2</sup>Omanhene possess the ultimate authority over land – performs two important roles; an administrative leader and landowner. The region is made up of over thirty six divisional chiefs. While the Omanhene possess what is called “allodial title – ultimate title over land, the divisional chiefs also perform a role in the administration of land. With the consent of the Omanhene, these chiefs manage and control land access and allocation. At the family level, the eldest and family heads possess authority to allocate agricultural land.

While it becomes difficult to access land on permanent basis if you do not belong to the community or any land holding family, it is still possible to get secondary or temporal access to land (Woodman 2011). This access mode guarantees only limited rights over land through sharecropping or rent. While access through rents were scarce in the past, they are very much common in recent times. Primary modes of access through the traditional structure is gradually fading ( Akateba 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> The Omanhene is the traditional name given to the chief who is made traditional head of the community

# **Unpacking the concepts: Land tenure, youth, commodification, capitalism, possession and property**

Key to the analysis of important concepts in this study, I employ the perspective of critical agrarian studies. “Critical” denotes here : “ the exercise of judgment and is not always negative; it means simply taking nothing for granted and carefully applying reason and evidence in the determination of whether a claim is true”(Moore and Parker 2009 : 3). With a critical lens, I explain and interrogate the concepts of youth, land tenure, commodification, possession and property as they apply to this study. These concepts are particularly relevant to help in the analysis of my findings.

## **3.1 Theorizing land tenure: what are the debates?**

The land question and the land tenure system in Africa have attracted viewpoints from a wide range of scholars. These debates emerged for centuries and have prevailed in contemporary times. In this chapter, I will discuss the arguments surrounding the land tenure system which would also include debates for/against formalization of land rights as well as mainstream perspectives etc.

The evolutionary theory of land rights which has been adapted by mainstream economists makes two important assumptions with regards to African Land Tenure: First, the formalization of land rights is inevitable due to land scarcity and secondly, the formalization of land rights would lead to an increase in agricultural output (Chimhowu & Woodhouse 2006). The evolutionary theory suggests that there would be a rising individualization of Land rights due to rising population pressure and market integration. Land holders would therefore press for formalization of private property rights on the basis of these assumptions. It is true that the relevance of this theory as applied in Sub Saharan Africa cannot be underestimated. Until the beginning of the 1970's, Africa was considered the “place of abundant Land” with flexible indigenous Land tenure institutions. Land reformers were almost exclusively focused on areas in Asia and Latin America (Eicher & Baker, 1982:98) not until recent times when attention has been shifted back to Africa with a loud call for “a genuine land reform” and the need to redraft its indigenous land laws (Falloux et. al 1988). This shift could be used to confirm the assumptions laid by the evolutionary theory of Land rights since the then “abundance” of land eventually became scarce. (Peters 2004) argues that the perception ascribed to Africa as a place of abundant Land only stands

in recent times when a comparison is made between Africa and countries in the Asian region where there is a large rural population. Africa no longer holds an image of plentiful land: “On average, land is more abundant in Africa than in other continents, but most Africans have only small plots and an increasing number are landless” (Raikes 2000: 66). Yet, there is the need to question this argument about scarcity – Is there really a scarcity of land in Africa? Is the rising demand for formalization of land rights a recipe for increase agricultural output?

There is growing evidence to show that there has been more hunger in Africa in the era of formalization of land rights than the period where indigenous tenure was the norm – holders of land rights have also lost lands through land titling (Platteau 1996). Therefore, while the assumptions of this theory only spell out the limitations of the customary tenure to prove that the existence of private property rights is an “ideal” structural reform, it is argued that most of the beneficial effects of this proposed reform have been grossly overestimated (Platteau 1996). The impact of Land titling at least in Sub-Saharan Africa has not produced the overwhelming benefits predicted by this theory (ibid 1996). Much of the criticism against customary tenure has also exaggerated the provocative role of traditional authority without any detailed institutional analysis which has the tendency to reveal strengths and otherwise resilient nature of this system (Diaw 2005).

While the dominant critique about the backwardness of the customary system of land rights is gradually fading, the new lens of seeing the system as flexible and adaptable has downplayed instances of social differentiation and competition that is gradually emerging under the system (Peters 2004). The distributive effects of the customary tenure are questioned in terms of equity among different class lines. Therefore, while the customary system of land tenure has received a wide pool of affirmations to indicate its flexible and adaptive nature, this current image needs to be analysed so that specific situations that lead to intensifying conflicts surrounding negotiability of access to land would be revealed. This would help identify actors that win or lose, included or excluded in these negotiable processes (ibid 2004). According to Peters, this is only possible if such an analysis is placed in a broader political, economic and social context – that the customary institutions does not exist in isolation but it is embedded in the complex system. Critiquing the system and attempting to change it into state system of land tenure is not enough to generate policies that would serve the interest of the poor and their livelihoods.

The situation of land tenure has been given a different perspective by (Chimhowu & Woodhouse 2006) who went further to identify specific characteristics of both customary



and state system of land tenure. Unlike the dominant critique that sought to question the customary system as the “ideal” system, they argue that the state can only work to benefit the poor if pro-poor policies are built on the specific features of “vernacular land markets”. There is growing indication of the existence of “vernacular land markets” which has not been fully formalized in contemporary literature on land tenure reform in Africa (ibid 2006). One of the arguments against policy on customary land tenure is that ambiguity and negotiability characteristic of the customary tenure only leads to low – rates of productivity investment. Customary land rights are argued to be dead capital since it cannot be used as collateral against loans (De Soto 2000). The World Bank and other proponents of this position advocates for “individualized property rights, written in formalized title to physically demarcated land, transferable through a market, similar to what is adopted in Kenya” (Deininger 2003:79). While customary land rights have been criticized, a second argument is made against formalization of customary rights - land titling particularly individualized title only favors the wealthy that have what it takes to meet the demands of bureaucratic procedures (Chimhowu & Woodhouse 2006).

Chimhowu and Woodhouse analyzed these two opposing views and identified that the two though with different lines of arguments, both by their arguments, agree that the customary system lacks a link with the market and the reasons given are only a product of this lack. However, Chimhowu & Woodhouse presented growing evidence that there is an emergence of vernacular markets which have been in existence for over a century within the context of customary land tenure in Africa. Although custom under the customary tenure in the past only practiced the use of “token” and not the sale of land, there is enough evidence to indicates that the practice of sale has already become common (Chimhowu & Woodhouse 2006). While property rights to land through vernacular (Informal) have no formal legitimization, these processes often involve processes that are attempted to mimic forms of legitimacy subscribed by the state. One of this is done through what is termed “documentation”. An evidence of this process is seen among buyers and sellers in Burkina Faso. According to (Mathieu et. al 2002), Buyers and sellers usually invite a government official to witness land transaction. As a form of documentation, the official is asked to place a stamp on the land document as a check on officialdom of the contract which can be used in cases of disputes that are likely to emerge.

### **3.2 Youth and agrarian change: who are the youth?**

Ideas and actual experiences of youth differ between society and among social groups and these also change over time (White 2011: 9). While lawmakers and statistical agencies are often seen defining the life phases (childhood, youth and adulthood) by biological age, these age-based categories have little to offer as analytical tools (White 2020). According to (White 2019) youth is a social construct and should not be defined only by their biological age but rather their relationship with the adult world and society, politics, the economy and culture. Yet, for policy and operational purposes, the youth are often described with a particular age bracket (Bennel 2000). In Ghana, youth are male and female who fall under the age bracket of 15 to 34. Under the children's Act, section 89, children under the age of 15 years are legally prohibited to engage in any form of employment activity.

Youth studies helps us to identify the youth with all their complexity – gendered, classed, ethicized. The youth should then be seen as embodying multiple identities (Wyn & White 1997). In the case of Techiman, the study area, youth are young men and women who could either belong to particular families, clans and ethnic orientations or a native of a different region residing in Techiamn. Their identities in these categories are very crucial to their access rights of land under the customary system. Access rights are generally classified under two; permanent and temporal access to land (Woodman 2011). Youth that identifies with a particular land owning family or clan can have long-term rights over lands through inheritance, gifts or sharecropping. On the other hand, temporal access rights such as leasehold or rent are often held by youth who are not natives of the community and therefore have no family relations but migrated and settled in the community. Techiman is uniquely known for the presence of migrant youth farmers. While it is evident that indigenous youth possess an advantage over migrant youth in terms of access to permanent rights, they (indigenous) youth equally confronted with several challenges under this access dimension. Giving the changes in customary norms as a result of commodification, indigenous youth have to can only inherit land when a family head dies or too old to farm.

Under the customary system of land tenure, household lands are essential building blocks for youth in Techiman; many youth rely on family lands for farming to start their journey to an independent economic life. However, in the era of urbanization, they are confronted with challenges of access to land particularly caused by lineage heads who allocate lands to “outsiders” for money neglecting the youth whose livelihoods are affected (Kiddido and Lengoiboni 2019). The youth under the customary system have limited access to land on a permanent basis through inheritance, gifts or sharecropping in the

Techiman region (Kiddido and Bugri 2020). This situation has compelled many youth to seek “pluriactivity” or multiple sources of livelihoods often times to complement farming. The concept explains a situation where one or more family member in addition to involvement in crop/livestock production, adopt other non-farm activities (White 2019).

### **3.3 “Pluriactivity”, an alternative to smallholder households**

Evidently, while the challenges of closure of access to land and other agrarian resources have driven away youth from farming, most youth have not entirely abandoned farming, rather, have resorted to engage in other livelihood alternatives alongside crop farming. White conceptualized this phenomenon as “pluriactivity”. With the challenges confronting agrarian societies now, the survival of smallholder households has been largely seen to be the result of reliance on a diverse set of activities alongside crop production (White 2020). In Techiman, both indigenous and migrant youth engage in diverse work activities alongside crop farming. Since agrarian societies comprise of a differentiated group of people – rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants (Lenin 1982), the ways in which peasants engage with pluriactivity takes on different forms and with different objectives. While a wealthy agrarian household would gather agrarian surpluses and invest in other non-farm activities which are more capital intensive, a poor household would have the one singular option of using their unskilled labour, to work in non-farm activities and the wages derived, however meager are then used to supplement sub-subsistence incomes (White 2020).

In Ghana, wealthy agrarian households are found mostly among farmers who are into the cultivation of cash crops such as cocoa, cashew, palm, cotton etc. In such households, pluriactivity usually take the form of investing their surpluses in real estate development, and other capital intensive businesses. Poor farmers are usually smallholders who do other small jobs mostly “galamsey” (illegal mining), car washing, and the wages derived are ploughed back by either renting more land for the next growing season or buying farm implements.

Unfortunately, these different dynamics continue to create further differentiation among the peasantry so that when the wealthy peasants gather higher returns from investing their surpluses, these returns are used to further accumulate land and rendering the poor the impossibility of coming close to owning a land (White 2020). This is the reason (Lenin 1899) posited that though among the peasantry, there exist only but a small percentage of “village elites”, they still have the tendency to control much of the rural economy. In Ghana, while land has become very scarce, the few landowners that exist are seen control-

ling the rest of the peasantry. They choose who, when and how much to lease or rent land to whom and under what circumstances (Akateba 2019).

### **3.3 Possession versus Property**

The concepts of “possession” and “property” are two categories of institutional systems. While possession rules have often times been used inaccurately to mean property, there is a clear distinction between these two types of ownership rights. Possession rules refer to the material use and yield of resources, production technologies, products and waste (Gerber and Steppacher 2017). In contrast, property is characterized by the use of property titles which allows land markets and credit transactions (when used as collateral). While both can be actualized in parallel - a house can for example be inhabited (possession) and at the same time used as collateral for money (property) – the potential of property dramatically transforms customary logics. Property can be seen as the core institution of capitalism and as its institutional driving force (Hodgson 2015).

Anthropologists have distinguished between different economic systems that do not have property rights. These systems, according to Gerber & Steppacher (2017), could be classified in broader terms: hunter-gatherer economies, simple agrarian economies, complex agrarian economies, informal economies, and soviet – type economies and post-capitalist economies. Relevant to this study is the category of “simple agrarian economies”. In brief, such economies are characterized by peasant communities that were originally operating under a system of abundant land. The latter at times enabled them to shift from one land to the other while allowing a fallow period for land to regain its yield naturally. Forests which are transformed into fields eventually become individual possession. However, after a fallow period, the land could then become available for the entire community or future generations. Gerber and Veuthey (2011) identified three main types of possessions observable in regions where traditional agricultural practices still exist: Possession of the lineage where the clan regulates access to land and makes it the possession of past, present and future generations; community possession where two or more lineages could share some spaces such as pasture land; individual or domestic possession where the lineage keeps its collective rights while individuals possess land. These forms of possessions do not place monetary values on resources making it possible for nearly equal benefits of land use in peasant communities.

Unfortunately, in recent times, there are hardly any peasant communities that are not linked to the market. Today, there has been a gradual transition of possession systems into

the logic of capital (Gerber and Steppacher 2017). A major transformation that has occurred in agrarian societies composed of smallholder farm households is the ‘commodification of land’, namely the transformation of resources into commodities, often by assigning a property title to them. Commodification is typical of property-based economies like capitalism. It is one of the key concepts for a critical analysis of agrarian structures and livelihoods. “Commodification is the process that results in the elements of production and reproduction being produced for, and obtained from, market exchange, making them subject to its logic, disciplines and compulsions” (White 2020 : 10). For instance, the customary system of land tenure where land is held in communal ownership and administered by chiefs on behalf of a clan, community or family that served the interest of peasant communities have, in recent times, seen a gradual transformation. Customary rights to land in peri-urban Techiman are gradually shifting to market transactions and formalized processes (property). There is a gradual demise of access modes through inheritance, gifts, sharecropping to more market-based procedures such as rent, leasehold and outright sale of land.

The monetary value that has been placed on agrarian resources which were hitherto readily available and freely acquired in agrarian societies has caused among other things, what Bernstein describes as “agrarian differentiation” – the tendency driven by commodification, of petty commodity producers (smallholders) to divide into classes of capital and labour (Bernstein 2010 : 125). So agrarian societies have now been broken down into what could be called groups of “the haves” and the “haves not” making an unfortunately differentiated group of people who were previously undifferentiated in terms of resource acquisition and ownership.

# **|The transitioning of customary norms: Impact on youth participation in farming**

Having discussed the debates surrounding customary tenure as well as a clear distinction between what constitutes possession and property logic, I will now present my data. In this discussion, I begin first by interrogating the argument that, customary lands are “dead capital”. I would then present what I have identified as “the four stages” of the transitioning from “traditional possession” to “modern property”. Finally, from the youth’s perspective, I will present the ways in which this impacts their participation in farming.

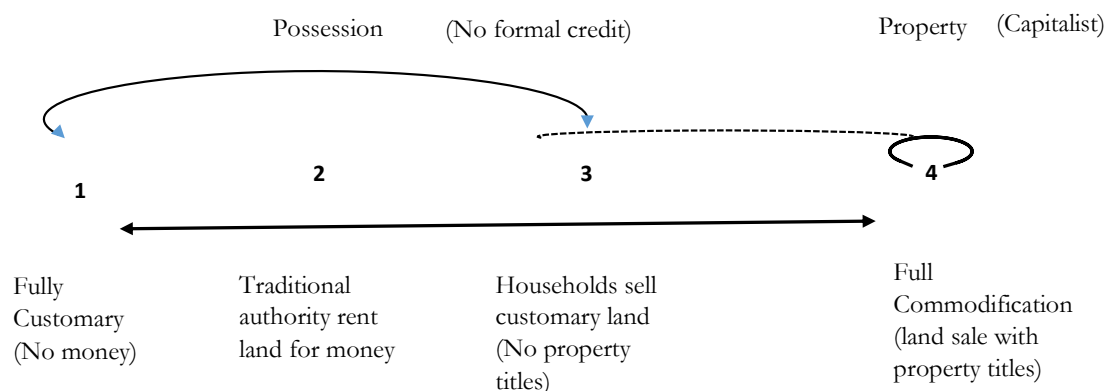
## **4.1 Customary lands are not “dead capital”**

In the debates surrounding land tenure, proponents against customary land rights hold the view that customary lands have no beneficial effects at least to its owners since they are not linked to the market. de Soto ( 2000) referred to such lands as “dead capital”. It is important to evaluate his argument to see if customary lands are indeed completely cut off from the market. While past custom only practiced the pledging and not sale of lands, Chimhowu and Woodhouse argued that in recent times, customary lands are being linked to the market in what he termed as the emergence of “vernacular land markets” – A situation that involves land sales even within the framework of customary tenure (Chimhowu and Woodhouse 2006). These markets as he described attempt to mimic the state processes as a form of legitimization, one way for instance is *documentation* when land is being sold out. The plight of stool lands in Techiman as described by one of the youth confirms this argument: ....*Lease agreement is signed (abunu or abusa) when the land is hired out to cultivate cash crops* (Kweku, youth). So the practice of “vernacular land markets” where customary lands are now linked to the market – up for sales, hiring or rent has been observed in the region. Based on this evidence, the assumptions that applaud the customary system as the “ideal” type, on the basis of its supposed non-market characteristic, must be questioned. How that is impacting rural societies especially youth farmers is something that would be analyzed later in this discussion.

## 4.2 Changing norms of access in Techiman: Four stages of commodification

Customary rights to land have seen a tremendous transformation following the gradual commodification of customary lands. The increasing value of peri-urban lands has resulted in the modification and reinterpretation of customary norms as traditional leaders try to meet formal requirements of land use conversion (Akateba 2019). A study conducted by Akateba 2019 revealed that traditional authorities have collaborated with state land agencies to sub-divide customary lands before lands are leased out to prospective buyers at the going market prices, a process she calls “pilarization”. This emergent practice of surveying and formally planning and sub-dividing peri-urban lands were non-existent and hitherto a deviation of a fully customary process of accessing lands. This process however, has led to some changes in traditional customs of acquiring customary lands in Techiman as well as most peri-urban regions like Tamale. While it can be argued that in peri-urban Techiman, customary rights to land are gradually shifting towards more market transactions (Akateba 2019), to understand this transition process better, it is important to outline the specific transition from a “traditional possession” to “modern property”. In this section, I have identified four stages in the emergent commodification of customary lands in Techiman. This is illustrated in the table below - A fully customary system (no money, just token), leasehold, rent (pay and keep some portion of the land for a period), outright sale of land (no property title) and sale of land with property title (full commodification).

Figure 1: The Four Stages of Commodification



From the figure, the four stages are clearly outlined. Stage one is a fully customary system. Under this system, ownership or access rights over land is acquired through various customary processes, no monetary transactions are involved. This is characteristic of a possession-based economic system. Stage two is a step away from the fully customary system; it involves monetary payments to rent or high portions of land. The third stage is outright sale of land in exchange for money. Stage four is the final stage and it constitutes a property-based economic system - lands with property titles are sold in exchange for money. In brief, these are the specific stages I have identified in the transition of customary norms towards a property-based system. In relation to data gathered, the specific practices under each stage are explained in detail below.

At stage one, (fully customary system), two major classifications of land rights were revealed in the study area; primary and secondary rights. According to one of the chiefs, primary rights are derived largely from kinship or family relations. These are mostly permanent, inheritable and transferable. An indigene can hold such rights by being a member of a land holding group. Secondary rights on the other hand are non-transferable and are acquired by non-members of the land holding community. In Techiman, secondary rights to land can be obtained through rent, grants, leases and tenancies from either chiefs or land holding families. A chief in a similar study explained the fully customary system as follows:

*“When a person needs land, they usually go to the chief who leads them to the place of his choice. A foundation stone is laid to show ownership. The elder will then pray and pour libation and slaughter a fowl as part of tradition. During that time, there were only witnesses to testify that the land was yours, no lay-outs.. After that, the person only brings some schanapps”* (Chief, Techiman 2020)

From the extract, under a fully customary system, whether a person held primary or secondary rights to land, the access procedure was completely detached from the market – no monetary transactions. Basic principles of possession-based economic systems are clearly consistent with this system; its economic logic centres on the family and it co-exist with the community-based ethics. Gerber and Steppacher (2017). Therefore, this was purely a non-capitalist system and ownership was purely based on “possession” – regulating the material reproduction of all societies as opposed to “property” – fostering modern credit or debt contracts Gerber and Steppacher (2017). Although the youth had to undergo certain processes to acquire land under this system, monetary demands were not part of the process.



Still under stage one (fully customary system), sharecropping, locally known as “abunu” and “abusa” were common access modes especially among migrant farmers. This system emerged between the 1960s and 1970s following the advent of cocoa and cashew production. In the “abunu” system, the migrant farmer cultivates the crops and receives half of the produce whilst the farm owner also receives half of the produce. The “abusa” system is quite similar except that the migrant farmer receives one-third of the farm produce whilst the land owner gets two-thirds of it (Ammanor and Diderutuah 2001). Akateba 2019 in her study explained that this system of sharecropping was gradually fading away and giving way to long term leases and rental agreement. In the data I gathered, I found that though sharecropping still exist, lease and rental agreements are becoming the most common modes of access in the area. One of the youth in Techiman explains this as follows:

*“Initially around 2005, land was not scarce, land was given for free for farming until lately when the population of the town increased and as well increase in indigenous youths who engaged in farming especially cash crops. Also around the year 2010, land was so scarce that since then no family is ready to sell out their land but rather hired it out or least it to migrant to cultivate cash crop (cocoa and cashew). Those days an acre piece of land was leased or hired out at 100ghc for a year but increases each year at the discretion of the landowner. Lease agreement (“abunu or abusa”) was signed when the land was hired out to cultivate cash crop. These “abunu” and “abusa” means that after the land has been cultivated the land is divided into two (for “abunu”) or three (for “abusa”) and is shared among the farmer and the owner. But now you can only purchase, hire or rent a land at least three thousand Ghana. ( Indigenous youth, Techiman 12.08.2020).*

Beyond highlighting the gradual demise of the “abunu” and “abusa” system (sharecropping) in stage one, the extract above also reveals the role of population growth as a result of migration and rapid urbanization in the transformation of primary modes of access through customary norms. With pressures of rapid population growth in Peri-urban Techiman, land access through secondary and primary modes has seen significant modifications. This gradual shift is what I highlight as the second stage of the commodification process – monetary transactions on land for either leasehold or rental. This is a step away from a fully customary system (possession-based) and a step towards a capitalistic-based system (property-based economic system).

Stage two is the beginning of market transactions on land. This is the stage that begun that involves renting out portions of land in exchange for money. Under the customary system, Stool lands as explained earlier are lands administered by the chiefs on behalf of

the community. Therefore, these lands are originally not exchanged for money. However, population growth begun to appreciate and demand for land increased, landlords took advantage of this scarcity. In Techiman, access rights through annual rental agreements have become common: *“Those days land was not scarce, land was given for free for farming until lately when the demand and population begun to increase. Now you can hire or rent a piece of land for as much as 3000gh, which could increase at the discretion of the landowner”* (Indegenous youth, Techiman 12.08.2020).

According to the youth, the situation is common for two reasons: land is expensive for the youth to buy and secondly, families are unwilling to sell lands at affordable prices due to scarcity. Majority of the youth were found to own a piece of land via rental modes. This only provides them with limited rights over the land, for instance, they only own land for a specific period of time. One of the participants explained the process as follows: *“Land in this community is hardly sold because each family wants to keep their lands for posterity”* (indigenous youth, Techiman, 12.08.2020)

Although findings from the study area showed that outright sale of land was not common, sale of land by chiefs and family heads is a common practice in some parts of Techiman and other peri-urban regions like Tamale (Akateba 2019). This practice is what I term the third stage in the commodification process.

At stage three, it is important to state clearly that, the practice of lands sales under the customary system happens without property titles. Therefore it cannot be seen as a fully commoditized system according to De Soto (2000) and other proponents of individualized property titles.

One other fascinating insight is that, whilst chiefs have been blamed of using uncus-tomary modes to allocate land to satisfy their monetary gains, chiefs have laid the blame on the state, explaining that earlier custom did not involve planning and surveying of lands but now, statutory regulatory processes involves monetary procedures and they have no options than to incorporate that into the cost of lands. One of the divisional chiefs explained this as follows:

*“In the olden days, lands were in abundance and you could just build anywhere. Now, due to population growth and land scarcity, the government have laid down laws that require us to pay for layouts of our lands. These are huge sums of monies and the chief is required to pay for that. So how do I pay that huge cost by myself? I have to add that cost to the person who needs the land. And this is what has caused us to give out lands in exchange for money.* (chief, Techiman, 12.08.2020).

At the family level, family heads who act as custodians over land also dwell on the excuse that, they have to earn money in order to perform their responsibilities as heads of the family. They explain that the only assets they can exchange for money are the family lands which are the reason they prefer to sell the lands rather than gift them to their children. An elder explained:

*“As an abusuparin, (family head), I am responsible to solve family issues which usually require a lot of resources including money. If land is given out to the youth for free, how do I get money to solve family issues in times of crisis? When the youth receive the lands, they keep the proceeds without supporting the family. So I prefer to rent land to other people for money than given it out to family members.”* (Elder, Techiman 13.08.2020)

From the extracts the changes in the customary norms affects both indigenes and migrants in peri-urban areas. The changes in customary norms are consistent with previous findings that showed that customary land tenure systems are constantly being re-interpreted in the face of rising land commodification especially in peri-urban areas (Arko-Adjei, 2011; Ubink and Amanor 2008). It can therefore be argued that access to stool lands under customary norms can be said to be gradually fading out, giving way to market transactions and formalized processes. Communally held rights are gradually disappearing and allodial<sup>3</sup> title holders (chiefs, elders etc.) are unable to fulfil their responsibility as just and equitable distributors of land. Community members, the youth, poor and other weaker social groups who are unable to acquire land at market prices are further disadvantaged in many ways. In the next section, analysis of the implications of this commodification process on youth participation in farming is presented.

### 4.3 Commodification of customary lands: Implications on youth participation in farming.

**Figure 2**

Transformation of agricultural land into urban development



Source: Fieldwork 2020

Figure two above shows how agricultural lands in Techiman are transformed into settlement lands for building houses. The conversion of agricultural land into residential uses gradually started the transformation of customary norms into market transactions. Within this transition, both indigenous and migrant youth suffer the implications. Migrant youth as used in this research refers to youth who do not originally belong to any clan or have family relations in Techiman whilst indigenous youth refer youth whose families originate from Techiman. While indigenous youth had hitherto an upper hand in land access under the customary system, within this transition, both indigenous and migrant youth are unable to go into full-time farming or make long term choices as a result of high market prices of agricultural land. One of the chiefs summarized this as follows:

*“The particular youth acquiring the land is required to pay a sum of money as a commitment fee locally known as “te nsa” the amount depends on the size of the land to be giving out. The person will then cultivate the land for a number of years agreed on by both parties after then the land is divided into two the other half is permanently given. Note this is in the case when the youth is part of the family. A youth outside the family can only acquire his land by hiring the land.”* (Chief, Techiman, 13.08.2020).

The transformation of customary norms into market transactions do not favour even the indigenous youth who hitherto were entitled to farmlands for free. From the findings, they either get access through sharecropping and in some cases; they pay some money to hire some portions of the family land. Although they still possess some advantage over the migrant youth, what is apparent is that commodification is deeply rooted in custom and the ways in which these lands are managed affects all the youth in similar ways. This reflects the changing dynamics in intergenerational relationship that exist among youth and older farmers in smallholder households (Li 2014: 59; Punch 2011; Amanor 2010).

While they are not completely denied access to farmlands, it is worth questioning whether the youth have agency in their participation – are they able to make long term choices when lands are only being hired at high costs? How does a youth under such a circumstance find the inspiration to be a “farmer” (permanent farmer) without a land of his

own? When asked whether land access has affected youth participation in farming, one of the elders admitted that the youth desire to go into long-term farming but they get discouraged when they are unable to access land:

*“Yes, lands nowadays are expensive and it is very difficult to acquire land. The youth in our community does not get the land they require which discourages them from venturing into farming. These people are energetic who wants to farm on large scale so when it nearly impossible for them to obtain the land they require it discourages them.”* (Elder, Techiman, 13.08.2020)

It appears that the agency of the youth is not restricted only in terms of the scale of farming, but also the kinds of crops to farm. Techiman was well known for the cultivation of a variety of food crops namely; tomatoes, okra, vegetables, beans etc. While the cultivation of cash crops was uncommon in the region, the indulgence of chiefs in the capitalistic-based logic – profit maximization, has caused them to shift from the cultivation of food crops to cash crops.

*“There has been a great shift towards the cultivation of cocoa and cashew. Currently annual crops are not cultivated on a large scale because of difficulties and high cost of acquiring land everyone is now engaging into cash crop farming so that they can make profit at the end. Also the land owner’s mostly prefer cocoa and cashew to arable crops.”* (Migrant youth, Techiman, 12.08.2020)

Since the cash crops are cultivated on large scale and expensive to cultivate, It is no surprise that majority of youth farmers in the region were revealed to be labourers who only sell their labour power. I was able to relate the situation of youth to what Bernstein referred to as the most distinctive feature of a capitalist mode of production – “the commodity labour power”. The options available to anyone who is interested in farming are limited to either hiring a piece of land, sharecropping, working as labourers. While these conditions are glaringly unfavourable, it becomes even worse as it lives the youth with the most available option of merely clinging to being labourers. Farm owners are either old or too busy to work on their own farms and are therefore in desperate need of labour. However, this does not give the youth (labourers) complete agency to resist against “capitalist exploitation”. As a matter of fact, it appears the youth (owners of labour power) have only but one choice: to sell their labour power or starve! (Marx 1973). Therefore, although Social change is possible under political agency thus people determine their own actions leading to social change, political agency is not the sole determinant of social change.

Besides, land scarcity, high rents, preference for cash crops, It is also worth pointing out that, land custodians are unwilling to completely sell their lands, at least not at a cost

that is affordable to the youth : “*Land in this community are hardly sold because each family wants to keep their lands for posterity*”(Elder, Techiman, 13.08.2020). This suggests that, their interest is not in the youth and the community they have been entrusted to allocate lands, but their own private interest. Though the land owners are not quite formal proprietors yet (because they do not have formal property titles), they already behave like them! While this situation is affecting young farmers, the would-be proprietors are becoming everyday stronger, mimicking capitalism in many ways. This could be the beginning of class consolidation!

Though landowners are indulging in these transactions in the name of “customary tenure”, their actions as stated earlier, are mimicking a capitalistic based logic. It is therefore a deviation of what customary norms represent. The argument then is that, under a fully customary tenure, land questions were better dealt with. Land problems were solved collectively and democratically.

#### **4.4 “Pluriactivity” among the youth in Techiman**

When White propounded the term “Pluriactivity”, he observed through many years of research in various agrarian societies that an emerging key tool for the survival of agrarian households especially among stallholders and landless workers was their reliance on a diverse set of activities alongside crop production. Even though it was expected that some youth would have a few other activities they engaged in alongside crop production, I was surprised with the findings of this research which showed that all youth had at least an extra activity they engaged alongside farming. This may be a result of the unfavourable conditions of land access that prevents them from making long-term decisions in farming. One of the youth explained this in these words:

*“Since lands became more and more costly, we have no other choice than to move out of the town to work to supplement the small farm land. When the growing season is over we move out the region to work to acquire to hire more land in the subsequent growing season”* (indigenous youth, Techiman.13.08.2020).

In Ghana we have one growing season which we often refer to as “rainy season”. This season is when we experience lots of rains and the appropriate time to engage in massive farming. While it is possible to farm all year round, the cost involved with that is often high and as described by the youth, poor and landless farmers are unable to meet the cost demands which could be cost of hiring additional lands, irrigation, or purchasing additional seeds for crop production. So what usually happens is that during what we called “the dry

season”, most youth migrate to other regions to engage in non-farm activities for money. The migrant youth in Techiman revealed that most of them engage in “galamsay” – illegal mining activities. These monies help them to hire more lands in the next growing seasons. There was something interesting about the response of the indigenous youth:

*“these other sources of livelihood include purchasing clerk and teaching. It is our desire to go into full time farming but due to scarcity and high prices of land we decided to keep our professions. Small amounts from these jobs help us to care for our families during lean farming seasons”* (Indegenous youth, Techiman, 12.08.2020)

There is one important thing I observed from the response above. It is contrary to an argument made by Moraji – that when young people are educated, they do not contribute to household and farm work (Moraji 2016 : 228). Moraji observed this in North India and this has also been a mainstream argument - Low participation of youth in farming has often been attributed to their aspirations towards skilled jobs and interest in education. While this is true for some youth, the situation in Techiman is different. The youth in their own words, desire to go into full time farming but are confronted with the challenges of land access as a result of commodification. What is more interesting is the fact that they are a group of educated youth with skilled jobs and they not only engage with farming alongside these jobs, but their income from these jobs have become a source of finance for their farming activities. Therefore, though the limitations posed by commodification are enormous, the enthusiasm, interest and passion of youth in this community towards farming cannot be underrated.

## **Conclusion: From “Traditional possession to “Modern property”- A reverse required?**

While access to stool lands under customary tenure can be defined as a communal right, in the midst of rapid urbanization, chiefs, family heads, elders etc who are supposed to be custodians over communal land prevent the realization of this right. The reinterpretation of customary norms has led to a gradual transition of stool lands which were hitherto a “traditional/ communal possession”. In this study, I have identified four stages in this transition; the first stage which exist within a fully customary system with no link to the market, the second stage where chiefs rent out portions of land for money, the third stage involves the outright sale of lands with no property tittles, finally, the last stage is a fully commoditized system where lands with property tittles are sold by chiefs. While this transition has not reached a full commodification system – a system where resources (land) sold has

property titles, the commodification process is already threatening the livelihoods of youth farmers in the community. Farming to most of them has now become just another opportunity to sell their “labour power” for survival and it has become impossible to even decide “when”, “how” and “what” to farm. Therefore, while De Soto (2000) has argued that a modern property system presents an opportunity for “everyone” to become an entrepreneur and fully benefit, based on this findings, I join von Benda – Beckmann 2003 in challenging this claim:

*“That formal property rights and free market for it to circulate under conditions of great economic and political inequality should work to the benefit of the poor is wishful thinking to me. I think that it is scandalous that the political aspects of property and the issue of redistribution are so downplayed [by De Soto]”.* (von Brenda-Beckmann 2003 : 190)

Banking on traditional authority and strategic alliances with market players, chiefs and landholders accumulate peri-urban lands to the disadvantage of the youth. The transition into market transactions only work to favour a few “powerful” groups and individuals who are able to pay for lands at the market prices. This is the reason many of the youth are tenants with only farming rights.

Some have argued that even under a fully customary system, youth access to land was impeded by the customary structure, dwelling their argument on the fact that access modes such as inheritance can only be acquired by youth that belong to a land holding family or clan. While this also presents a challenge to youth that have no access rights in any land holding family, the changing norms as a result of commodification only favors the few powerful minority. Access to land through inheritance is almost non-existent. From the findings, it is clear how “indigenous” (belonging to land owning families) and “migrants” are both denied access rights in this commodification process. Therefore, if traditional authorities are closely monitored to ensure they perform their roles justly, access rights through customary may still guarantee a more just and secured farming livelihoods for the youth.

While this research did focus on the role of the state in this commodification process, participants in the study have blamed their actions on state officials. Therefore, there is the need to conduct further research on the extent to which state officials contribute to the actions of chiefs on land transactions within customary tenure.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Description of participants

Name	Age	Identifies as a	Occupation :	Affiliation to Techiman:	Date of in- terview
Mashud Abdul Rahman	27years	Man	farmer	Migrant	12.08.2020
Boahen Gabriel	29years	Man	Farmer	Migrant	12.08.2020
Hamidu Rasimono	30years	Man	Farmer	Migrant	12.08.2020
Frema Felicia	33years	Man	Farmer	Migrant	12.08.2020
Sabastein	34years	Man	Farmer	Indigenous	12.08.2020
Kyermeh Patrick	30years	Man	Farmer	Indigenous	12.08.2020
Ameyaw	28years	Man	Farmer	Indigenous	12.08.2020
Clifford Kwabena	33years	Man	Farmer	Indigenous	12.08.2020
Nana Osei	56years	Man	Chief	Indigenous	13.08.2020
Nana Bedia-	62years	Man	Chief	Indigenous	13.08.2020

ko					
Kwabena	65years	Man	Elder	Indigenous	13.08.2020

## Appendix 2

### Interview guideline

#### Migrant Youth

1. Where do you originally come from before you came to Techiman?
2. Which year did you migrate to Techiman and why? ( Number of years they have lived there would be known)
3. In the year you came, what was the price of Land and how much is the price of Land now?
4. If the price has increased, what do you think has caused that (who or what factors are responsible?)
5. Aside farming, what are the most prevalent uses of land in Techiman?
6. How did you acquire your land? And what processes did you have to go through
7. Who are responsible for administering the Land?
8. Do you undergo the same processes with the indigenous youth in acquiring the Land? If No, Why?
9. What crops do you mainly farm? Do you still farm the same crops?
10. If no, why have you shifted to farming different crops now?
11. How many hectares of land did you use to farm when you first arrived and how many hectares of land do you farm now?
12. Do you sometimes live or work in other regions apart from Techiman? (If yes, then question 14, 15, 16, 17 follows).
13. Do you travel there because of work?
14. What work/jobs do you engage in these other regions?
15. How long have you been working in these other regions (compare the year to the period when commodification became prevalent in Techiman)

16. Why did you decide to find an additional job in other regions?
17. Do you use some of the money from your farming to finance other businesses or use the money from your other jobs to finance the farming?

#### Indigenous Youth

1. How long have you been farming? (then you compare the responses of those that have been farming for many years to those that are new in farming)
2. How did you acquire your first land when you started farming? (If it was not acquired through inheritance, then ask of the cost)
3. Do you still own that land? (for those who acquired through inheritance)
4. How much did you purchase your land when you started farming?
5. Has the price changed now?
6. What do you think is the cause of the change and who are those responsible?
7. What are the most prevalent uses of land now apart from farming?
8. How many hectares of Land did you start farming and do u still have access to same number of hectares?
9. What kind of crops did you use to farm and what crops do you farm now?
10. Why have you shifted to these other crops?
11. Apart from the farming, do you have other sources of livelihoods? (Are these other jobs here in this region or other regions)
12. What kind of work are they and why did you decide to add other jobs to the farming?
13. How long have you been working in these other regions (compare the year to the period when commodification became prevalent in Techiman)
14. Why did you choose to do other jobs in addition to the farming?
15. Do you use the monies from your jobs to invest in the farm or you rather use money from the farm to invest in those other jobs?

#### Chiefs

1. How are lands allocated in this community
2. How has the mode of allocation of lands changed over time? (Comparing it to previous years).
3. Do other people purchase lands here for other things apart from farming?
4. What has resulted in this change/what factors are responsible?
5. How does the youth acquire the lands for farming?

6. In your opinion, has the participation of youth in farming changed overtime? Has it increased or decreased?
7. What has caused the change in participation of youth in farming?
8. Has the access of land affected youth participation in farming? How?

**Expert Interview (One neutral person in the community)**

1. What have been the changing trends of farming among the youth in this community?
2. In your opinion, does the youth have favorable access to land for farming?

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