"We have become strangers on our land": Some observations on the Implications of Land grabbing for the Livelihoods of Smallholder Farmers in Agogo, Ghana

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Azechum Aburinya Emmanuel

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Members of the Examining Committee:

Tsegaye Moreda Shegro

Julien-Francois Gerber

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Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the International Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

Inquiries:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460
e: info@iss.nl
w: www.iss.nl
fb: http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl
twitter: @issnl

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

Contents

List of Maps

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Abstract

Land is a major resource that provide for the daily existence of most the world populations, especially those who live in rural areas across the developing world and are heavily dependent on agriculture and its related activities. However, in recent decades, much discussion has occurred both within and outside the academic arena about issues of large-scale land acquisitions and its implications for rural people's access to land resources. Similarly, the issue of large-scale land-based investments by foreign and local private investors has generated a lot of public discussion in Ghana, as is the case in many sub-sub-Saharan African countries. While the Ghanaian government, like many African governments, view large-scale land investments as a major development strategy, this approach has not produced the expected benefits particularly for smallholder farmers and marginalized groups. In this paper, I explore the driving forces behind large-scale land acquisition and their livelihood implications for smallholder farmers in Agogo, Ghana. The analysis draws on data obtained through a review of existing literature and field study involving first-hand data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions. The study employed a purposive sampling technique. Participants included smallholder farmers, traditional authorities, government officials, including 'lands commission' personnel and agriculture extension officials. The study found that Agogo is experiencing significant farmland acquisitions by foreign investors due to deliberate government policies which sought to modernize the agricultural sector productivity and achieve national food security. The paper concludes that large-scale farmland acquisitions negatively impact the livelihoods of populations living by agriculture especially smallholder farmers. The study underscores the need for the Ghanaian government to revisit its strategy of promoting large-scale land investment and institute policies that would ensure that investments primarily benefit and enhance the productivity of smallholder farmers and improve rural livelihoods. Therefore, there is the need for the Ghanaian government to institute landforms to address the challenges emanating from land management and allocation in the country. The findings of the study provide useful information to government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders about the major triggering factors of land grabbing and how it affects smallholder farmers, especially women farmers.

Relevance to Development Studies

There have been various studies carried out by both individual scholars and organizations concerning large-scale farmland acquisitions in Ghana (Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Kerr, 2017; Lanz et al., 2018; ElHadary and Obeng-Odoom, 2012). This research focuses on an understudied aspect of the large-scale farm acquisition discourse, namely the impacts of large-scale farm acquisitions on smallholder farmers. The study also fills an important geographic gap by focusing on Agogo which has been a neglected area yet experienced massive agrarian transformation as a result of large-scale land deals. Previous studies have only concentrated on the conflicts in the area as a result of Fulani headers invasion and the struggles associated with land access. This will contribute to providing a deeper understanding to government, land stakeholders, NGOs, and other development bodies of the impacts of land grabbing on the livelihoods of rural agricultural producers. This will assist in designing measures to sustain the livelihood of rural populations who are dispossessed of their land and other negative implications of large-scale farm acquisitions. It will further contribute to existing literature concerning large scale land deals and their impacts on smallholder agriculture

Keywords: Land grabbing, smallholders, large scale land acquisitions, Ghana

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Land grabbing and livelihoods of smallholder farmers

In recent years intense debates have occurred around land access and tenure rights, agrarian transformations, and livelihoods in the face of increased and widespread 'land grabs', (often referred to as 'large-scale land investments' by governments and investors), across many developing countries. Sub-Saharan Africa is among the hotspot regions where land grabs of diverse types involving a wide range of actors are taking place mainly since the global food crisis of 2007/08. Although the global dynamics and implications of such land grabs or 'land investments' continue to be debated more broadly, an empirically grounded understanding of the actual implications and impacts on local food security, particularly how it manifests and affects socially differentiated communities, remains limited especially given the scale and scope of the land grabs. This study aims to investigate the local dynamics of land grabbing by looking at its key drivers and the implications for the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Ghana, with a particular focus on Agogo.

The West African country of Ghana is not immune to the phenomenon of land grabbing occurring in many countries across the developing world. As highlighted by Kasanga and Kotey (2001):

> "*Land sales and other dealings in land have increased in all areas. Settlements are being uprooted or livelihoods dislocated in the face of this onslaught. Yet there is no equity, transparency or accountability in the management of this process, neither as it concerns the 'disposal' of land nor in the distribution of benefits. The displacement of helpless families and individuals from their legitimately owned land without due recompense raises legal and moral issues*" (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001, pp. iv).

Similarly, Kidido et al. (2015) note that large scale land-based investments, particularly in the cultivation of jatropha for biofuel production, have raised concerns among indigenous landowners and experts in land administration in the country. According to Boamah and Overa (2016), some Chiefs in various parts of Ghana have granted farmlands to foreign land-based investors from countries such as Norway, Israel, Italy, and Canada, and according to them, these lands are specifically used to cultivate jatropha (the oil-bearing jatropha curcas plant)

for the production of agrofuel. Also, Dogbevi (2009) reported that between 2004 and 2010, multinational corporations and local enterprises in collaboration with foreigners scrambled to secure land for jatropha plant cultivation in Ghana to produce biodiesel for the world market. Dogbevi adds that more than twenty foreign land-based companies have acquired land during this time and invested in the cultivation of jatropha for the production of ethanol and biodiesel, particularly for export. Recently, Kakraba-Ampeh et al. (2019) in their study identified 28 land-based investment companies operating across the country, 13 of which (representing approximately 46%) have acquired about 105,503.11 hectares (roughly only 0.78%) of Ghana's total arable land solely for jatropha plantations.

Alhassan et al. (2018) note that a key feature of recent land deals and acquisitions in Ghana is that lands allocated to foreign investors are far greater than those given to local investors. They further claim that the Ghanaian government typically believes that big projects would succeed because foreign corporations have more access to financing and technology than local companies. As Kuusaana (2017) pointed out, the Ghanaian government has been promoting the leasing of land for commercial agriculture under its commercial agriculture project (GCAP) to attain national food security. Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Kerr (2017) emphasized that although foreigners have long engaged in land-based investments in Ghana, in recent times, the speed and rate at which land has been moved from smallholder farmers control to foreign investors is unprecedented in the nation's history. Interestingly, the current spike in large-scale land acquisitions in Ghana has primarily taken place on communal lands held by chiefs and other traditional leaders in trust for their subjects (Aha and Ayitey 2017). As Darkwah et al. (2017) noted, despite Ghana having a statutory and customary land tenure system that governs the acquisition and disposal of various land rights, the traditional practices and laws governing land acquisition have been severely affected due to the increased commodification of land. Similar findings were made by Yaro et al. (2018) who highlighted that recent land deals involve the transfer of communal lands by chiefs and other traditional authorities, with the community members receiving little to no benefit aside from the assurances of a happy life associated with the modernization that these projects are to provide. They noted that holders of allodial[1] titles prefer leasing vast tracts of land to affluent foreign investors for use in farming, fishing, tourism, and mining over selling them to smallholder farmers. These decisions are taken with the hope of increasing agricultural productivity

[1] Allodial tittles independent ownership rights to land

through large scale farming. Yet, hunger and poverty remain prevalent in the Global South. Schutter (2011) emphasized that the cause of hunger today in the developing world is not a result of natural disaster, rather the poor decisions made by African leaders in agriculture:

> "But hunger is not a natural disaster. It is a legacy of choices made in the past. It stems from a series of decision that, in retrospect, appear short-sighted, and were based on a wrong diagnosis of the cause of hunger, leading to incorrect prescriptions to remedy it. The single most important proximate cause of hunger today is that developing countries have either not invested sufficiently in agriculture or have invested in the wrong kind of agriculture, with little impact on the reduction in rural poverty" (Cordes and Schutter, 2011:.2).

Indeed, the bulk of the world's poor and vulnerable population, particularly in developing countries, live in rural areas where agriculture is still the primary source of income and subsistence. Access to vital resources like land, however, continues to be a substantial obstacle for those groups of people to effectively participate in agriculture.

Land grabbing is now widely recognized to be a serious issue facing the agriculture sector. According to Daniel and Mittal (2009: 1), land grabbing is defined as "the purchase or lease of vast tracts of land by wealthier food-insecure nations and private investors from mostly poor, developing countries in order to produce crops for export". Flintan (2012) asserted that the commercialization, commoditization, urbanization, and the rise in land demand from other stakeholders are all contributing factors to the rapid transformation of land into a scarce resource in many regions of the world. Also, Saka (2019) pointed out that while the issue of large-scale farmland acquisition is expanding to a worldwide scale, Africa is by far the location where large-scale land grabs for industrial agriculture investment are most prevalent. Similarly, Batterbury and Ndi (2018) pointed out that land grabbing is more prevalent in African countries with weak land tenure systems, and those governments take advantage of the lax land tenure laws to transfer land to foreign investors. According to Moreda (2016), most African governments view large-scale land investments as a "golden" opportunity that will enable them to modernize their agricultural sector, which is predominately made up of subsistence farmers, in order to guarantee consistent food supplies and national food security. As a result, since 2008, roughly half of all big international land acquisitions have taken place in Africa, where it is believed that agricultural land that is available or "uncultivated" is in great supply (Lisk, 2013).

1.1.1 Research Problem

In Agogo traditional area, there has been and continues to be a major transfer of cultivable land from the control of smallholder farmers to foreign and local private investors for large scale agricultural investments purposes. Boamah (2014) asserts that since 2005, a number of foreign investors have moved into Agogo and have acquired vast amounts of farmland for plantation agriculture, particularly biofuel production and forestry. Similarly, Kidido et al. (2015) highlighted that while large-scale farmland acquisition is taking place across the country, Agogo has emerged as the most targeted location and recently has attracted more foreign land-based investors than other areas in Ghana.

Furthermore, Bukari and Kuusaana (2018) stated that in addition to farming and tree plantation companies, Agogo has also become a major destination for Fulani herders and other livestock owners due to its conducive climate and abundance of pasture and water. A notable example of land grabs in Agogo is the 400,000 hectares of land acquisition in 2007 by the Norwegian company ScanFuel AS subsidiary. The Ghanaian-based subsidiary ScanFuel Africa Ltd. which acquired the vast land under a lease agreement for 50 years, intends to cultivate Jatropha to produce biodiesel. Similar kinds of land acquisitions have become prevalent in recent years in Ghana.

Although it has been widely assumed that such land deals may have been adversely impacting local communities, empirically grounded studies have been limited, at least in Agogo traditional area, which is one of the hotspots of large-scale land acquisitions in Ghana. Land grabs or large-scale land acquisitions often produce winners and losers. Local communities impacted by the land acquisitions are socially differentiated along class, ethnicity, gender and generation, livelihood types and other identities. Against this background, this research seeks to empirically demonstrate these processes by specifically looking at why land grabs/acquisitions are occurring in Agogo and how they impact the food security of smallholder farmers. Agogo is an important case study, as recent large-scale farmland acquisitions compound the already existing problem of smallholders' lack of access to land.

1.2 Research Objective and Questions

The main objective of this study is to examine the driving forces of land grabbing in Agogo and the implications of land grabbing for the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the area.

1.2.1 Research Question

The study seeks to answer the main research question: How and why do land grabs occur in Agogo, and how do these affect the livelihoods of smallholder farmers?

1.2.2 Sub-questions

1. What are the key drivers of land grabbing in Agogo, and how do they play out and why?
2. What are the implications of land grabbing on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Agogo?
3. How have women farmers in Agogo specifically been affected by land grabbing and why?

1.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Agogo Traditional Area. Agogo is located in the easternportion of the Ashanti Region of Ghana, and it is the capital of the Asante Akim North Municipal. It shares boundaries in the north with Sekyere Kumawu District, in the east with Kwahu East, in the south with Asante Akim South District and in the west Sekyere East District and covering an estimated area of 1,125square kilometers (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The area has a wet semi-equatorial climate and experience a double maxima rainfall pattern. Annual total rainfall ranges between 125 cm and 175 cm, with the first rains beginning in May to July and the second in September to November (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). According to the 2021 the population and housing census, the Asante Akim North municipal population stands at 85,788, with males constituting 49.0% and females representing 51.0%. About 66.2 percent of the populations live in urban areas and about 33.8 percent resides in rural areas (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The Akan ethnic group form the majority of the

population, but there are also some non-Akan migrant settler farmers from the northern regions. As of 2014, it was projected that migrants made up 21.7% of the municipality overall population (GSS, 2014). Fulani livestock herders and other migrants have been drawn to the area mostly because of its fertile agricultural land, pasture, and water availability (Bukari and Kuusaana, 2018).

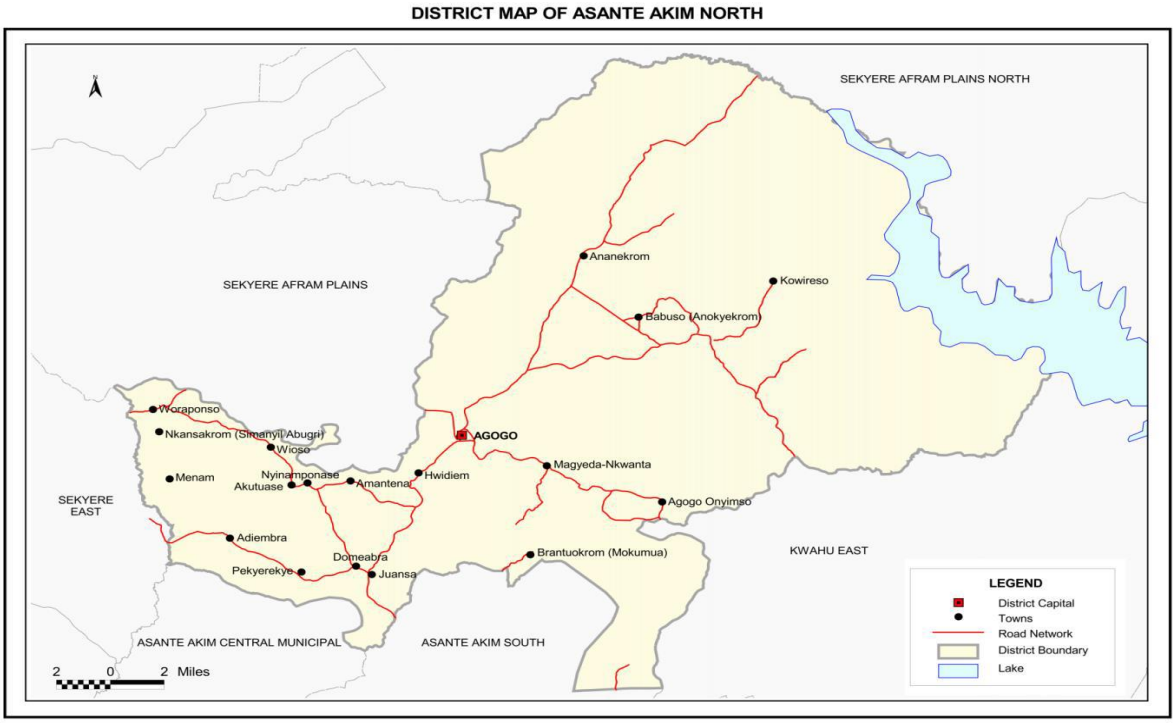
Like other parts of Ghana, the local economy is heavily dependent on subsistence rain-fed agriculture. About 72.7 percent of the population draw their income through subsistence farming. The principal food crops are maize, cassava, plantains, cocoyams, and yams (GSS, 2014). In terms of political organization, Agogo has two main parallel levels of authority. The highest political and administrative body, the Asante Akim North Municipal Assembly, which performs deliberative, legislative, and executive duties, comes first (Agyemang, 2020). The Agogo Traditional Council (ATC), which includes the chieftaincy institution performs tasks like allocating land, resolving disputes and conflicts, maintaining law and order, upholding traditional practices and customs as well as other duties, is the second structure of authority (ibid, 2020).

In addition, majority of land in Agogo is held by traditional leaders(chiefs), families, and the state (Kuusaana and Bukari, 2015). Agogo stool holds the allodial title and is responsible for managing the land in accordance with custodial law in the area. Furthermore, some families also own usufruct titles, granted to them by the stool to utilize land for agricultural activities, and the heads of the respective families manage these lands in trust for their members. Although community chiefs in each area are in charge of administering the land and have the authority to assign limited quantities (up to 5 hectares), the Omanhene, the Paramount Chief of the Agogo Traditional Area, is the only one with the final authority to lease land (Kuusaana and Bukari, 2015). Ghana, as agrarian society, agriculture constitute the major economic activity sustaining the lives of a vast majority of the population.

Agogo account for a large proportion of the food crops produced in the Ashanti region and Ghana as a whole. For instance, Agogo is not only a leading producer of plantain, (a major stable crop of the country) but also a major provider of vegetables such as cabbage, okra, onion, carrot and among others (MOFA, 2020). Also, the vegetation of Agogo constituting the moist deciduous type with its abundance of water has over the years attracted not only

local farmers but also many land-based foreign investors. This among other factors is the reason why Agogo has been chosen for this study.

Map 1.1 Map of Agogo



Source: Ghana Statistical service (2014) – Map of Agogo

1.4 Justification of the study

In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion on land grabbing across the developing world, especially among academics, decision-makers, governments, development partners, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders. Although the dynamics and effects of large-scale farmland acquisitions for the past few decades has raised considerable concerns and discussions, there is still limited empirically supported knowledge about the repercussions on local food security, particularly how it affects socially differentiated populations including the gender dimension. Even though the impacts of land grabbing are often considered to be generic, however the impacts are in many ways undifferentiated. For instance, men farmers more often do not experience the implications in the same way as women farmers. In terms of land access, the access structure does not favour women. The phenomenon of land grabbing has further complicated this issue. Thus, this is the reason why this study is crucial because it tackles women as a separate category with seemingly different challenges. For instance, it has been observed that despite women suffering most of the burden of communal lands' eviction, they are often not involved in negotiations and acquisitions of land (Agbley, 2019).

It is also crucial to investigate how the widespread farmland acquisitions in Agogo is affecting the livelihoods of smallholder farmers who heavily rely on land resources for their sustenance in the hope that findings of the study will serve as useful information to government, development partners and other stakeholders in understanding land grabbing and its implications for smallholder livelihoods in Agogo and Ghana as a whole. The findings of this study will also go a long way to contribute to the Ghanaian government's efforts in designing policies and interventions that would help to tackle the challenges faced by smallholder farmers, enhance food productivity, and ensure food security.

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the techniques and approaches used to conduct this study. The information included in this section comprises the research methodology and design, sampling

technique and procedure, data gathering methods, data analysis techniques, descriptions of the problems faced as well as ethical issues considered.

1.5.2. Research design and approach

Research design provides a plan or blueprint with regards to how a researcher intends to conduct a study. According to Creswell (2009: 20), it is "based on bringing together a worldview or assumptions about research, the specific strategies of inquiry, and research methods". Research methods constitute the various techniques, tools, and approaches employed in data collection and analysis (Wahyuni, 2012). Also, Dulock (1993) defines research design as a plan or blueprint purposely designed to address the study question as well control variance.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the driving forces behind large scale land acquisitions, and their impacts on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Agogo. Therefore, the qualitative research approach, which emphasizes in-depth understanding and processes, was employed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Malterud (2001:483) defined qualitative research as involving "the systematic gathering, arrangement, and analysis of textual material created from dialogue or observation.". In support of qualitative approach, Mason (2002, p.30) further states that "through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences, and imaginations of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses, or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings that they generate."

1.5.3 Sampling Technique and Procedure

Purposive sampling approach was used for selecting participants from the study location. This approach was adopted because it allows the researcher to obtain data from a pre-determined category of people with valuable information about the research topic (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling according to (Neuman, 2014), is employed when the study focus is to identify a specific type of cases for in-depth analysis. Maxwell (2012) defined it as a type of sampling in which, certain category of people or of events are selected based on the information that they can provide which may not be obtained from other persons. Robinson (2014) further states that researchers employ purposive sampling because they believe certain

groups of people may have an essential, distinctive, or unique perspective on the issue under consideration, and their inclusion in the sample should be ensured.

In line with this, the researcher's decision to use a purposive sampling method was influenced by the desire to include only individuals in the sample who are in engaged in farming and directly experienced the effects of land grabbing and could provide valuable information for the study. The criteria set out in selecting the study participants were that: (1) they had to be farmers (male or female) cultivating about one to two hectares in size and, (2) they had to have lived in Agogo for at least ten years. This was done to make sure that those who lacked sufficient knowledge or experience about land grabs in the area were not involved. In all, sixteen participants were engaged including twelve smallholder farmers (5 men and 8 women), one community leader, one representative from the lands commission, and one agricultural extension officer were interviewed.

1.5.4 Sources of data

The study used both primary and secondary sources of information. The primary data were collected from sampled respondents through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. Primary data mainly comprised interview data about land grabbing and how it affects smallholder farmers food production and livelihood sustenance. In addition, the study also makes use of secondary data. Secondary data were gathered from a variety of sources, including scholarly journals and articles, published reports of national institutions such as Ghana Statistical Service, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, and the Forestry Commission. Additionally, publications from international organizations like the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), World Food Program (WFP), and Action Aid International were used. The data gathered included information on the processes pertaining to land acquisition, the institutional engagement process, social intervention programs, as well as the livelihood support systems promised by foreign land-based investors for indigenous communities and populations. This broadened the researcher's perspective on land grabbing, and smallholder productivity, and livelihood sustenance.

1.5.5 Background of Research Assistants

Due to financial and other difficulties, I could not travel to Ghana and to the study site to gather data. Given this, the research was carried out with the aid of two field assistants (a male, age 35 and female, age 32), and both are natives of the study area. The male research assistant is presently pursuing a graduate degree in mathematics at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. And the female assistant is also pursuing a degree in education at the Jasikan College of Education. I got to know these two field assistants through my former lecturer at the University of Ghana who has trained and involved them in a couple of research studies in Agogo and other parts of the Ashanti region. Prior to the start of the study, I introduced and familiarized them about the objective of the study, data collection procedure, ethical principles, time frame as well as budget with regards to items needed for the data collection.

1.5.6 Methods of data collection

In qualitative research, there are various ways of obtaining primary data which include experiments, interview surveys, and participant observation (Hox and Boeije ,2005). In order to deeply understand how land grabbing was affecting the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions were used. According to Kvale (1983: 174), a qualitative research interview is "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena". DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) point out that the goal of this data gathering technique is to add knowledge, and that it does so by incorporating the meanings of the study participants' lived experiences. Similarly, Britten (1995) observed that interviews are used to delve further into the subject at hand, examine what people say in as much depth as possible, and reveal new areas or ideas that were not anticipated at the commencement of the research. Furthermore, Seidman (2006) asserted that the primary objective of in-depth interviewing is to be able to deeply understand other people's lived experiences and the meaning they assign to those experiences rather than to obtain answers to questions, test hypotheses, or do evaluations.

For this study, interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. Open-ended questions were used to provide participants the maximum possibilities to share their stories. Focus group discussions were held with women for them to share their perceptions,

knowledge and experiences of land grabbing and impacts on livelihoods within the study area. As Greenwood et al. (2014) note, focus group is most suitable when seeking to obtain information from vulnerable and other minority groups. Hennink (2008) also observes that it is most appropriate technique for conducting research when little is known about a research topic, for uncovering new or unexpected issues, and for gathering formative data to design a new social program.

Through the course of face-to face interview and focus group for this study, follow-up questions were posed based on statements made by participants. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes or other convenient places agreed upon by the participants and the research assistants, and each interview took 30-40 minutes. To allow participants to freely express themselves, interviews with respondents were conducted in Twi (the local language of the study area). Additionally, interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and this provided the field assistants a better opportunity to have a more direct contact with the respondents and to keep track of critical aspects or parts of the interview that was required for data analysis. Moreso, it was carried out to demonstrate that fieldwork was done and that information for this study was in fact acquired directly from the study participants.

1.5.7 Methods of data analysis

In qualitative studies, it is emphasized that qualitative data analysis is a vital stage that requires careful data management and organization. Triangulation was performed using data sources from several actors (i.e., agriculture extension officer, smallholder farmers, a chief, lands commission official). I used triangulation as a data analysis technique, to enhance and demonstrate the validity of my research findings (Mayer, 2015). Adams and Cox (2008) note that, triangulation allows researchers to overcome the drawbacks or inherent biases that emerge from qualitative methodologies where the data is collected from a small number of observations. Having lived in the Ashanti region particularly Kumasi for some years, has enabled me to have a good understanding of the 'Twi' language, which is the native language of Agogo. In light of this, the recoded interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed by me and my research assistants.

1.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in qualitative research and as emphasized by Arifin (2018), participants in qualitative research must be sufficiently informed about the study, understand the material, and have the freedom to choose whether to participate or not. Pietilä et al. (2020) asserted that any study that uses humans as research subjects must closely adhere to a set of ethical principles that specify the requirements for participant protection. Similarly, Donalek (2005) notes that because research interviews more often involve the exploration of sensitive information, the researcher is required to be especially conscious of ethical issues. In line with this, prior to the data collection, the research assistants performed what we called community entry thus they went to the study location with the assistance of an assembly member we had reached out to with the aid of a native of the area. As culture demands, they visited the chiefs and briefed them about the research. The chiefs were informed that this was academic research and that the research participants privacy and confidentiality would be respected. Also, we explained to the farmers and other key informants about the purpose of the study and further informed them that their participation was voluntary, and they had a right to withdraw at any point in time if they so wish. Permission to record the interview was also sought from them and, in terms of confidentiality, numbers were assigned to the respondents in place of their names in order to hide their identity.

1.7 Positionality

Positionality is considered a critical aspect of social research. Cuevas-Parra (2021: 3) for instance, noted that positionality entails "what researchers know and believe, and the position they take in relation to the social and political contexts of their studies, which influences every phase of the research process and outcomes". It also highlights one's worldview, the stance one takes regarding research and its social and political context (Holmes, 2020:1). Similarly, Fenge et al. (2019) state that positionality describes the way researchers conceptualize their responsibilities and the boundaries associated with the researcher-participant relationship in sensitive research. Parameswaran (2001:69) further add that "the process of conducting fieldwork involves the cultural biography of researchers and calls for negotiations of power relationships between researchers and people they encounter in the field"

I am a Ghanaian, and I was born and raised in the Builsa North District of the Upper East Region. I graduated from the University of Ghana with a bachelor's degree in geography and resource development. I started working with the Presbyterian Community Based Rehabilitation Program in 2014. During this period of my work, I have had the opportunity to participate in several agriculture and food security related workshops. In one of such programs which took place in Agogo, I had the opportunity to speak to some local farmers and visit several farm areas. During our conversation, they narrated to me how the agriculture and local economy is fast transforming due to significant land-based investments by foreign and local private investors. As an AFES (Agrarian, Food and Environmental Studies) student, whose research interests lie within the areas of Agrarian transformation in smallholder agriculture, I have developed an interest to examine the situation in Agogo namely, the 'how' and the 'why' many foreign businesses and local private investors are investing in large-scale land acquisition and how this trend is gradually transforming smallholder agriculture in Agogo.

My positionality as an educated male 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 Agogo, this facilitated the data collection especially on language basis as well as building a good rapport with "gatekeepers" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 49-52). In conducting this study, my research assistants and the assembly member made the community entry possible. They facilitated easy access to the participants because they were seen by the participants as their own and willing to share their opinions. If I had hired outsiders (non-community members) as research assistants, it would have been difficult for me to obtain the study participants' effective engagement. Even though I am from Ghana, my research participants thought or believed that because I am studying overseas, I am better equipped to help them with their challenges, which encouraged them to accept to participate in the study.

1.8 Limitations

In any given study, limitations abound to occur, and as highlighted by Ioannidis (2007)

> "All research work unavoidably has some limitations. Even the most important breakthroughs are unlikely to be devoid of them. Knowledge and discussion of limitations are

> essential for genuine scientific progress: they are useful for understanding a research finding, translating the importance of the potential errors involved, placing the current work in context, and ascribing a credibility level to it" (Ioannidis, 2007: 324)

This study is not an exception, it has also been confronted with some challenges. One critical challenge is that at the time of the field work, farmers were busy working on their farms. The reason is that our visit happened during the 'rainy season' and it was hard to get hold of them. The research assistants sometimes had to wait until they finished working on their farms or even go back and schedule another session which delayed the original timetable and increased costs as well. In addition, some respondents who had initially consented to participate in the study declined and expressed concerns about how they had been frequently utilized by researchers without receiving anything in return, and which led them to request financial compensation before participation.

The research team also faced the challenge of navigating the study site due to the poor road system and it was difficult to keep to the time arranged with the study participants. In addition, I had to reduce the number of respondents the study had initially planned because I could not meet all participant demands for financial incentives. Again, some of the interviewees (women farmers) in the focus group discussions were unwilling to talk for fear of being victimized. We were able to overcome this challenge by assuring them that this research was done strictly for academic purposes and that their identities will be kept confidential.

Additionally, due to my inability to be on the field, I also encountered the challenge of not being able to connect well with my research assistants and study participants due to poor communication network system of the study area. It took more than two hours to finish one of the online interviews I performed using Zoom with an agriculture extension officer who was one of the research respondents as a result frequent internet breakage. Again, this resulted in some expense for me because the interviewee demanded for financial reward for his time spend and data used, which I was compelled to give from my meagre resources. Moreover, my presence on the field would have been useful to ascertain a more vivid picture about critical r important insights like the social structure, power relations, as well as processes of access to land. Additionally, the research team did not get the chance to conduct interviews with the foreign plantation investors even though several attempts were made to involve them, they refused to participate. It is also to add that this study cannot be generalized

to the entire population in Agogo being the qualitative study and due to the use of purposive sampling approach (Neuman, 2014).

1.9 Structure of the paper

Chapter two reviews literature on important concepts related to the study. It discusses the general literature on land administration in Ghana, the food security situation, the role of smallholders and women farmers in agriculture and the implications of land grabbing on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Ghana. Chapter three presents the theoretical framework that this study builds on. Chapter four is the presentation of the findings based on the data collected. Chapter five presents a conclusion and provides recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The study of land grabbing and its implications on livelihoods is not new. There have been several studies on the subject across regional scales. This means that this study only seeks to continue and to add a small contribution to the work that has already been done on the subject. This section will unpack the existing arguments on the food security issue in Ghana, land administration and the implications of land grabbing on women and smallholder farmers.

2.1 Land Administration in Ghana

Generally, land ownership in Ghana comes under main forms, these include ownership under customary tenue and statutory ownership. It is estimated that approximately 80 per cent of the land in Ghana is held customarily, while the remaining is state owned (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001). Kasanga and Kotey add that there are two main categories of what Ghanaians refer to as "public lands": those that have been forcibly taken for public use or in the public interest in accordance with the State Lands Act of 1962 (Act 125) or another applicable law, and those that have been granted to the President in trust for a landholding community in accordance with the Administration of Lands Act of 1962 (Act 123) (ibid, p.1). Traditional Council, which comprise of a Paramount Chief and village elders of any given takes the responsible of managing customary land. As holders of "allodial title," they are vested with the authority to negotiate and approve customary land allocation (German et al., 2011).

According to Darkwah et al. (2017), "customary land" refers to all the various types of rights and interests that are held according to traditional systems, including family holdings, clan lands, stool lands[2], and skin[3] lands. Kugbega and Aboagye (2021) pointed out that under customary law, acquiring land generally happens through non-market processes such settlement, gifting, intestate succession, customary allocation, and borrowing. According to them, the majority of these allocations are made without any documentation of boundaries or allocations themselves.

[2] They are called stool lands because chiefs sit on specially carved stools as a symbol of chiefly authority

[3] Skin lands named after customary lands in the Northern part of Ghana where chiefs wear clothes made from animal skin as a symbol of chiefly authority.

In addition, customary land rights vary across the north and south of the country. In the south, particularly among the Akan and Ga communities, land is vested in stools and sub-stools whereas in the North it is vested in skins (Kassanga and Kotey, 2001). Takeuchi and Amanor (2022) have noted that while land during the colonial era in Ghana (then known as the Gold Coast) was solely under the control of paramount chiefs in the southern regions, colonial administration took control of land management in the northern territories because many of the societies there lacked central political authorities. Similarly, Kuusaana and Gerber (2015) note that although land management in Ghana is overseen by both customary and legal land tenures, increasing pressures from urbanization, population growth, and migration have caused significant changes in the informal system as it responds to market forces. Additionally, Yaro (2010) observed that the country's traditional systems of land tenure are fast shifting, particularly in peri-urban areas, due to increasing commodification and commercialization of land.

2.2 Food security situation in Ghana

In the last two decades, Ghana's economy has witnessed tremendous growth, with a recorded growth rate averaging 7% since 2005 (Lambrecht, et al., 2018). Moreover, this economic progress has enabled the country to achieve a reduction in the prevalence of poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition among its citizens (Ecker and Fang, 2016). For instance, the incidence of poverty decreased by 9% points from 55%in 2011 to 46% in 2017 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2020). Also, a 2015 population survey found that households facing moderate to severe hunger fell by around 20 percent while stunting among children decreased by about 23 percent in northern Ghana between 2012 and 2015(United States Agency for International Development, 2015).)

Despite major economic progress, food insecurity remains a significant challenge in many parts of. the country. Dinko (2017) stated that despite agriculture's considerable contribution to the Ghanaian economy, the sector is still underdeveloped, making it hard for the country to be self-sufficient in food production and ensure food security. The World Bank reported that while Ghana has attained significant progress, it highly depends on imports of basic foods such rice, poultry, sugar, and vegetable oils to meet its population's food

demands (World Bank, 2018). According to the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC, 2014), the number of people who are food insecure increased from 2.1 million people (7.6%) between 2014 and 2016 to 2.5 million people (8.4%) between 2017 and 2019. In a similar vein, The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2021) observes that, despite a significant rise in the food production index between 2015 and 2018, both moderate and severe food insecurity increased during that time. For instance, moderate food insecurity increased from 48.8% in 2015 to 51.1% in 2018 and the severe food insecurity rose from 7.6% in 2015 to 8.4% in 2018.

Additionally, a recent study titled "2020Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA)," found that 11.7 percent of the population, or 3.6 million Ghanaians were food insecure. Of the 3.6 million food insecure people, 1.6 million (5.2%) were identified be extremely or severely food insecure and 2.0 million (6.5%) were identified to be moderately food insecure (GSS, MOFA, WFP, and FAO, 2020). Additionally, it is noted that in both rural and urban areas, households with limited access to land are more food insecure (78.2%) compared those with access to land (75%). The report also shows that more people who are food insecure live in rural areas (78%) than in urban areas (22%) (ibid, 2020). Additionally, the Ghana Emergency Food Security and Assessment report in 2016 reported that 22.2% of households in Ghana that are smallholder farmers are typically net food buyers with the reason that they do not have enough land to produce adequate food (Dasori et al., 2016). The survey also finds that poor soils, adverse weather conditions, limited access to land and other needed inputs, and a lack of financial resources to increase output are some of the main obstacles hindering populations in rural and urban areas of the country from achieving food security.

2.2.1 Agriculture and the role of smallholder farmers in the Ghanaian economy

As it is the case of most African countries, Ghana is basically an agrarian economy, and agriculture drives the country's economy growth with its sub-sectors such as forestry; livestock (including poultry), fisheries, and crops other than Cocoa. The agriculture sector employs 45% of the workforce nationwide (World Bank, 2017), and its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated to be 23% as of 2012 (FAO, 2015). Additionally, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2022) noted that agriculture supplies more than 90% of the country's food requirements while also accounting for over 40% of export

earnings and 54% of Ghana's GDP. Also, the 2015 Ghana Labor Force Report revealed that there were 9.3 million people in formal employment in Ghana as of 2015 and agriculture alone employed 3.3 million people, or roughly 36% of the total (World Bank,2018).

Furthermore, like most other areas of sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture is dominated by smallholder producers. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA 2007) disclosed that smallholders who primarily employ traditional methods, generates about 80% of the nation's total agricultural production (MOFA 2007). Additionally, larger farms and plantations mostly grow oil palm, rubber, and coconuts along with small amounts of maize, rice, and pineapples. Around 90% of agricultural holdings are less than 2 hectares in size (ibid, 2007). In addition, the World Food Program (WFP, 2012) has also identified several issues facing smallholders in Ghana, including low input use, such as the use of fertilizers, insufficient access to land, credit, and irrigation, a lack of rural infrastructure, and issues related to the climate. World Bank (2018) identified that low incomes and underemployment in the agricultural sector is as a result of low productivity.

2.2.2 Women contribution to agriculture and access to land in Ghana

In Ghana, women have played and continue to contribute significantly to agriculture sector productivity and growth. For instance, Amu (2005) noted that while traditionally, women's roles and engagement in economic activity have been largely defined and constrained along biological and cultural lines, in the Ghanaian economy, their roles have not been confined to the home alone but cut across all sectors of the economy. Duncan (1997) asserted that women control the food chain in Ghana and are in charge of several duties, including shelling grains, storing them, processing them, and marketing them after harvest. It is estimated that women contribute almost 80% of the nation's agricultural output (Kuchar, 2020). ActionAid International in its report in 2014 indicated that women make up around 52% of the agricultural workforce in Ghana, 70% of the workforce that cultivates food crops, and 90% of the workforce involved in marketing agricultural products (ActionAid International, 2014).

Duncan (1997) however observed that despite the considerable contribution women make in agriculture, they still lack equal opportunities in terms of access to vital resources such as land and other needed agriculture inputs in agriculture. An FAO report (FAO, 2012) notes that most rural populations in Ghana are self-employed, largely in agriculture with 56% having a second job or more. The same report further reveals that very few rural Ghanaian

population participate or engage in paid labour and that when job opportunities exist, women are at disadvantage and men take part five times more in wage-employment compared to women (FAO, 2012). In addition, Ackah-Baidoo et al. (2022) assert that although women are legally allowed to own land, land governance in Ghana is still predominantly in the hands of men due to customary laws and societal norms around land ownership and access. Even in societies where women have access to land, they are denied the right to control and transfer lands instead they only use it under limiting circumstances and with insufficient security of tenure (Kuusaana et al.,2013). For instance, it is projected that only 3.5% of arable lands are owned jointly, whereas only 9.8% of female-only and 85.8% of male-only landowners respectively (Deere et al., 2013). A 2014 report by ActionAid International stated that most women in Ghana have access to land based on the goodwill of their husbands, sons or village chiefs and their land rights are best described as secondary because they typically claimed through husbands or lineages that are predominantly headed by men. Similarly, Awumbilla (2006) asserted that women's higher vulnerability to poverty in Ghana is largely due to their lack of access to and empowerment over land resources that are used for production and that marriage and divorce are important factors because in certain parts of Ghana, women's land rights are typically depending on their marital status. Further, a study in the Upper East Region also reveals that among the Builsa ethnic group in the Upper East of Ghana, a woman can only claim the right to own land if she is from the Tindana (landowner family) and if she is still residing in her father's home. When she chooses to be married, this temporary right is lost, and she cannot transfer it to anybody else in the event of her passing away or becoming incapacitated (Kaunza-Nu-Dem et al., 2016).

2.2.3 Land grabbing and Implications for the livelihoods of Smallholder farmers

Various studies have been conducted examining the implications of large-scale farmland acquisitions on smallholder agriculture (Daniel, 2011; Hall, 2011; Lisk, 2013; Balehegn, 2015). Hausermann and Ferring (2018) for instance, observed that massive land grabbing has given rise to new types of speculation and enclosure and that in sub-Saharan Africa, where subsistence agriculture feeds a vast amount of the populations, enclosures have displaced farmers, resulting in unstable food supplies and food insecurity. Also, Akanle (2017) reported that access to land by the poor today is critically endangered in many areas Africa, due to the forces of the market and privatization, as well as government efforts to attract foreign

investors in the agricultural sector. He added that in some countries, government cronies, tourists, foreign investors, and even real estate developers have seized possession of traditionally tenured areas used for farming and livestock grazing. According to Graham et al. (2011), since foreign land acquisition is profit-driven and primarily for exports, it will encourage the establishment an industrial agricultural mode of production in the host nations. Further, they point out that increased agricultural production however does not guarantee that local communities will have better access to food even if more food was produced. According to them, the development of cash crop monocultures has a major detrimental effect on the local food supply because it diverts labor and resources that would otherwise be utilized to produce food to the development of cash crops, which disproportionately affects women. Therefore, indigenous populations and smallholder farmers are forced to rely on the market and commercialization networks from outside the area for their vital needs.

Similarly, Daniel and Mittal (2009) asserted that the acquisition of large tracts of land in sub-Saharan Africa has the potential to result in an increase in the number of landless rural people, given that the majority of people particularly smallholder farmers in the subregion reside in rural areas without formal land tenure and other minority groups, such as women, indigenous people, and pastoralists who have traditionally been marginalized. Effossou and Cho (2022) claim that since 2000, the phenomenon of land grabbing, led to tension and extra-communal or inter-communal conflicts in some places in the developing regions. Furthermore, Kachika (2013) also notes that in some countries of sub-Saharan Africa, women's limited access to land and ownership is further hindered due to large-scale farmland acquisitions by foreign investors. In her study, Verma (2014:53) also highlights how land grabbing is hampering livelihoods of indigenous communities and populations in East and Southern Africa. She claims that as "powerful global forces and elite actors" were getting more and more involved in land grabbing, "social justice, gender equity, environmental sustainability" were being relegated. As a result, men and women are being "dispossessed of their land, livelihoods, and access to critical natural resources, thus experiencing acute hardship, loss of livelihoods, gender insecurity in tenure, and landlessness".

Additionally, a study by the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) on the impacts of land grabbing in some communities in Uganda discovered that the use of grabbed lands for oil palm plantations has had an effect on the local economy, which formerly depended on food crop farming, fishing, and timber harvesting for

sustenance. The study also noted that due to the enormous financial investments in grabbed lands, indigenous populations and smallholder farmers are now partaking in part-time, low-paying jobs. It also revealed that a number of land conflicts have also occurred between local communities and foreign investors following government allocation of land for oil palm development in Kalangala district in Lake Victoria (NAPE, 2012). According to Yaro and Tsikata's (2013) study, the acquisition of 13,600 hectares and 1,363 acres (552 hectares) of land in Kpachaa and Dipale in northern Ghana, by Biofuel Africa Ltd. and Integrated Tamale Fruit Company, has had a significant negative impact on indigenous communities and populations, particularly peasant farmers. The large-scale acquisitions, according to their analysis, have forced smallholder farmers who are unable to secure land to convert fallow fields into permanently farmed lands, which has reduced farm output. Also, they found that some residents who lost their ancestral lands were also compelled to relocate, some of whom ended up in areas unsuitable for food production and others who ended up in areas where the government had set aside as forest reserves. Additionally, they revealed that because of the enclosure of the commons, local male farmers were compelled to take back fallow land that their wives had been given before the project began, leaving women with smaller plots of land to cultivate and some of them giving up farming entirely.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

A political economy approach in agrarian studies plays an important role in investigating the

> "social relations and dynamics of production and reproduction, property and power in agrarian formations and their processes of change" (Bernstein 2010:10).

It helps us to understand the logic of smallholders' survival in an evolving capitalist world. This chapter discusses the political economy of land grabs as a framework to help analyze the situation of land grabbing in the context of this study.

3.1 Agrarian Political Economy and land grabs

In the context of this study, the political economy is a useful tool in analysing land grabs, and how it affects smallholders' food security in the face of growing globalization and capitalism, which are fundamentally altering the social and economic structures of countries across the world. The focus of political economy of agrarian change has been vividly captured in the journal of Agrarian change as the "social relations and dynamics of power production and reproduction, property, and power in agrarian in formations and their processes of change, both historical and contemporary" (White, 2020:24). With power relations, class formations, differentiation and these other dynamics being evident in the agrarian sphere, it is no longer a debate about whether the agrarian sphere is political or apolitical. Agrarian societies are very much now, politically driven (Beinstein, 2010). Using Agrarian Political Economy analytical approach to the study of land grabbing helps to capture the dynamics and scope of changes in land use and property relations. To understand agrarian change, Henry Beinstein (2010) in his book, "Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change," formulated four key questions for understanding and analysing the dynamics of social relations of production and reproduction: *Who owns what*? (Social relations of property regimes), *Who does what*? (Social divisions of labor) *who gets what*? (Social divisions of the fruit of labor) *What do they do with it?* (Social relations of consumption, accumulation, and reproduction). In the customary system, the agrarian structure is such that power is vested in chiefs and who act as custodians over land. Therefore, the acquisition of land is based on the traditional power structure, in which the Omanhene of Agogo holds the final authority over land thus performing the roles of both as a political ruler and landowner. Even though the Omanhene has what is called

"allodial tittle," which is the ultimate title to land, divisional and subdivisional chiefs are not excluded from this structure. These traditional leaders administer and regulate the allocation of land on behalf of the Omanhene. At the family level, the eldest and family heads have the power to allocate farmland. While it is becoming more challenging to gain access to land on permanent bases if you are not a member of the community or any family, it is still possible to obtain temporal access (Woodman, 2011). While obtaining access to land through rents or leases were scarce in the past, they are very much pronounced in current times. The main modes of access through the traditional structure is fast disappearing (Akateba, 2019). Similarly, Yaro (2010, p.201) posits that "land transactions have become an industry in itself with varying claims from chiefs, clan heads and individuals since the text of traditional land tenure systems are interpreted to suit current socio-economic conditions". This study is guided by the critical questions in Agrarian political Economy outlined by Bernstein (2010), which are briefly summarized above.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussions

In the previous chapter, I discussed the general debates surrounding land grabbing and its implications on women and smallholder farming. I will discuss the specific situation as it relates to Agogo based on the data gathered in the area**.** This chapter therefore presents the findings of the study.

4.1 Drivers of recent large scale farmland acquisitions or land grabs

A number of studies have been conducted examining the processes, and key drivers, of massive land deals across the developing world (Cotula and Vermeulen, 2009; Daniel and Mittal, 2009; Borras and Franco, 2012). Cotula and Vermeulen (2009) for instance, noted that the recent wave of large-scale land acquisitions is being driven in large part by investor countries' concerns about food security in the wake of the increases in food prices in 2007 and 2008. Other factors identified by Wytske et. al (2012) include increased food demand due to the world's population growth, competition for land because of urbanization processes, changes in food consumption patterns, a slowdown in the rate of agricultural productivity due to soil erosion, and the depletion of water sources as a result of climate change. According to Saka (2019), stricter regulations imposed on the use of agrofuels in the US and the EU is a major contributory factor for the current global land rush. As result, he claims that multinational cooperations are therefore in urgent need of enormous swaths of land to cultivate crops to produce biofuels. Daniel and Mittal (2009) identified that there are three main issues driving the land grab movement: the first is the rush by increasingly food-insecure countries to attain their food supply; the second reason is due to the rise in demand for agrofuels and other forms of energy; and the third is because of the sharp increase in investment in the markets for both hard and soft commodities. Woodhouse (2012) highlighted that Sub-Saharan Africa has become one of the most preferred destinations for foreign land acquisitions due to the region's weak institutional and legal frameworks, which fail to protect the interests of people who rely on land and related resources for their livelihood. Odusola (2014) also categorized the underlying factors accountable for land grabbing into internal and external factors. According to him, the quest of African governments to attract foreign direct investment into the agriculture sector to boost productivity and achieve food security is one of the key

internal factors. On the other hand, concern about foreign wealthy states' ability to meet their population's food needs through imports, and their populations demand for biofuels now and in the future, and their desire to gain access to and control of countries in Africa endowed with mineral deposits are some of the external motivating factors. Similarly, Bae (2021) stated that low population density, favorable climatic and soil conditions, uncultivated arable land dominant factors behind the rise in land grabbing in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, Yaro and Tsikata (2014) assert that one of the key catalysts for land grabbing in Ghana was the liberalization of the country's economy. They assert that the Ghanaian government has encouraged foreign investment since the global food price crises of 2007–2008 to modernize agriculture and improve food security. To attract international investors, the government has responded by offering a variety of incentives through the Ghana Investment Promotion Council (ibid). Also, Zoomers (2010) noted that the liberalization of land markets in Africa as a result of globalization was accompanied by sharp increases in foreign agricultural investments, which led to the emergence of new players in the control and use of land.

The data obtained from the field shows that the Ghanaian government has contributed in large part to the recent large scale land deals and acquisitions in Agogo. One of the government officials interviewed, an agriculture extension officer narrated the situation as such:

> "You may be aware that after the NPP party won power, the government established the Planting for Food and Jobs Program as part of a drive to draw in foreign investors to the agriculture industry. Agogo was one of the locations designated for the investment of agricultural land. The government owns all the forest land in Agogo, but in 1983, a large portion of the forest was destroyed by fire. For a very long time, smallholder farmers had been growing their own food on these fields. However, the farmers were forced to give up their holdings to the businesses when the investors arrived. Furthermore, because of the financial benefits, some chiefs are selling custodian lands to the foreigners" (Extension officer, interview, 29/08/2022).

It has been asserted that the Ghanaian government and traditional leaders (local chiefs) promoted the recent large-scale farmland acquisition with participation from foreign investors in commercial agriculture, highlighting that it will strengthen the agriculture sector, improve food security, and foster the overall economy growth (Schoneveld et al. 2011). This account also supports Moreda (2017) claim that majority of African governments have come to view large agricultural land investments as an opportunity to transform their agricultural sector, which is largely dominated by smallholder producers, to increase agricultural sector

production and achieve national food security. Also disclosed by Keeley et al. (2014), the Ethiopian government has implemented several incentives to entice international investors to make significant land-based investments in the nation, including income tax exemption for a period of between three and five years, depending on agricultural value added and the amount of exportable goods, as well 100% import duty exemption for most capital items.

Similarly, on the part of land custodians (chiefs, elders, traditional leaders), it was found that they engage in negotiations involving large scale land acquisitions without proper consultations. One smallholder farmer said, 'the chiefs have always bypassed us in the negotiation and allocation processes". The processes of negotiation and acquisition should involve some indigenes with usufructs[4] rights. However, this process has solely been carried out by chiefs. Chiefs are seen leading negotiation processes with foreign investors on their own personal terms excluding key traditional actors such as landowners who have the rights to decide and to influence these negotiations. This is contrary to land ownership in Ghana which posits land as a communal asset (see Ollennu 1962). Allodial tittle owners have by their action flouted the well-established principles regarding land alienation in Ghana particularly because some of the affected farmers hold usufruct rights and should be involved in the consultation processes. In many instances the courts of Ghana have emphasized that allodial tittle owners cannot arbitrarily dispossess usufructs without their consent and approval. In a study conducted in Bredi and Agogo, negotiations were concluded between the chiefs and investors completely without the involvement of smallholder farmers who held lesser rights to these lands (See Kiddido and Kuusaana 2014). Similarly, Boamah (2014) reported how populations of Agogo Traditional Area (ATC) including the youth and smallholder farmers have been opposing the leasing or allocation of customary land to foreign investors by their chiefs. He revealed this:

> "some "indigenous" residents made a petition to the King of the Asante to oust the paramount chief of ATC for leasing out many indigenous land areas. The petition stated: 'Recalling the Oath of Allegiance sworn before you, ..., and the entire Asante Nation by [name withheld] to protect the lands our forbearers fought for and left behind, and to protect and defend the citizens at all times, he has failed woefully and miserably to honour this Oath and thereby does not deserve to serve you and the people of Agogo" (Boamah, 2014:330)

[4] Having limited rights to land

The above account clearly suggests that indigenous populations and smallholder farmers are not fairly treated in the context of negotiations and acquisitions by chiefs and governments in large scale land deals.

An interview with an official of the Forestry commission working at the local office in Agogo complained about how it is difficult to stop people from invading the forest lands since most of the foreign investors come through with the assistance of politicians who interfere in the processes of land acquisition. While the initial policy target of the government through the 'planting for Food and jobs'[5] programme was intended to increase food productivity and attain food security, politicians have rather seized the opportunity to take individual possession over lands belonging to the smallholder farmers. The policy interventions include, supply of fertilizers, marketing opportunities for farm produce after harvest, digital agriculture (Tanko et al, 2019). These initiatives that are supposed to bring improvement in smallholder agriculture are rather being exploited by the 'big guys' (politicians) for their parochial interest. This is the reason why farming has become a more lucrative business for the elites as well as politicians and less of a livelihood venture for the rural populations.

4.2 The Implications of land grabbing for the livelihoods of Smallholder farmers in Agogo

The study's findings revealed that while there are some benefits to biofuels and large-scale land acquisitions by foreign investors in Agogo, the drawbacks vastly outweigh these benefits. For instance, participants confirmed the provision of social projects such as drilling of boreholes, schools, as well as employment opportunities. At the same time, they have had to deal with several drawbacks such as loss of land, polluting their water bodies, generating of conflicts due to struggles over land of lands. All the farmers interviewed, both male and female, spoke passionately about the way that the widespread invasion of Agogo lands by foreign investors is harming the local economy. In an interview, one male smallholder farmer said:

> "Farming is now a big man's business here in Agogo, what I mean is that only those with big money can now farm unlike it use to be. When you want land to farm, you should be ready to pay more, other than that, the landowner will not even turn to look at you. It used

[5] It is a policy by the Ghanaian government to enhance agriculture activities by subsiding farm inputs and supplying agriculture inputs for smallholder farmers

> to be the migrants who struggle to get land to farm but now we are all the same whether you are a native or a migrant. We were all producing on the forest lands, but the government have given them all to foreigners" (male interviewee, 28/08/2022)

From the extract above, large scale land investments have undifferentiated impacts among north migrant and indigenous people in Agogo. It appears the winners in such deals remains the few powerful ones who can pay for the lands at the market prices. Unfortunately, not many indigenes are among this group. Most people are foreigners who come into the community to engage in these large-scale land deals. What happens to the people who do not see farming as a business, but a source of livelihood is something that winners in such deals have not considered.

Another male farmer said:

> Since, I was born I have been living and doing farming all these years, but what l can tell you is that farming is no more something you can depend on to survive. All my three sons who used to help me on the farm have travelled to Accra to look for better jobs. When you even farm and get your things, the landowner will take everything and leave you because you don't have land. The big men have taken all the land, and the government is not also helping us. My son, let me tell you something, the foreigners have taken the lands and they are farming trees, do we eat trees? When we started seeing them coming into our land, we were thinking they will give our children jobs, but now we don't see the jobs, what we are seeing is the government and our chiefs giving our lands to them, and we have become strangers in our land (male interviewee, 28/08/2022)

Also, a migrant woman who originally hails from northern Ghana and has been farming for the past twenty years disclosed how the local food economy of Agogo is rapidly changing due to large scale land investments. She said, "when I first arrived, it was not so difficult to get land once you are married to a native, but these days, the situation is different, even the indigenes are now struggling". She added "we were made to believe that these foreigners are bringing us development, they have come to take all our good lands and leaving us with nothing."

The account above is also consistent with Acheampong and Campion (2014) study in Agogo, which revealed how 54.3% of the 234 respondents indicated that they have lost land to the Norwegian company ScanFarm. This company deals in jatropha and food crops production. However, the notion that Jatropha does well on marginal lands does not represent the truth since the land allocated to the company by the traditional authorities (chiefs) was a productive

or fertile land which previously had been engaged by the local farmers to produce crops like plantain, yam, maize and cocoa (Acheampong and Campion, 2014, p. 7231). The displacement of local food producers compelled them to relocate to much more marginal lands that are infertile or unproductive (ibid, p. 7232). The study also revealed that the loss of land and the reduced areas under cultivation and increasing cropping intensity, have a major impact on food security and household income and food security. The increasing cropping intensity which shortens the fallow period has also been found to cause land degradation and loss of soil fertility (ibid, p.7234). Also, Yaro and Tsikata (2014) found in their study that local farmers dispossessed of their lands migrate to less fertile areas or move to neighboring villages. They also found that the bulk of bushlands, which provide the community with grazing areas, medicinal herbs, economic fruit trees, bush meat, and other ecological benefits, have been lost. Schoneveld et al. (2011) have also revealed that large scale land acquisition for plantation development in the Pru district has also resulted in land dispossession, and 67% of households reported that a shortage of land due to plantation development was the biggest barrier to land recovery.

It also has indirect implications for the lives and livelihoods of rural people. Some indigenes in Agogo, have expressed the extent to which these deals have affected their way of life. They narrated:

> We often get firewood from the trees in the forest. Now that they cleared almost all the forest zones in our community, it is now very difficult to get firewood nearby. So these days we have to walk miles away from the village in search of wood to cut for charcoal burning and roofing our houses. Even because of that we get into fights with nearby community members when we step on their forest to cut their woods. (Indigene of Agogo 25.08.2022).

4.3 Implications of land grabbing for women farmers

Findings of the study shows that land grabbing is posing serious challenges to women farmers. This corroborates Kachika (2013) argument that large-scale farmland acquisitions by foreign investors worsen women's already limited access to productive resources such as land. Most of the women in the focus group discussion said that while it has always been difficult for women in Agogo to obtain land to cultivate, it is now even more challenging due to acquisition of arable farmlands by foreign and local private investors. During the focused group discussion with women smallholder farmers, one woman narrated that:

> "Before foreigners started coming to Agogo to acquire land, it was not so much difficult for women to obtain land for farming, and you did not also need to pay more for the land back then. Today, landowners are no longer ready to grant us lands because we cannot afford their price demands. When I first started farming, it was easy to approach any landowner and request land without being required to pay up front but just after harvest. But this is no longer the case; the moment you visit any landowner in Agogo, they will demand payment up front, and even at a price that you cannot afford" (female interviewee, 29/08/2022).

This quote above is consistent with the claim made by Behrman et al. (2012) that land-based investments that are promoted under the banner of "rural development" will fall short unless they take the needs of women into consideration.

Also, another female farmer talked about how she has resorted to other jobs to compliment her farming activities as a livelihood strategy:

> "For me, I am concentrating on my tailoring business because I can no longer depend on farming to make a living. I am saying this because in Agogo today, it is hard to make a living only through farming and you are not far from starving if farming is the only livelihood activity you are engaged. Because these days, everyone is eager to go and work with foreigners in the plantations where they think they can make more money. These days, even if you struggle to get land, getting someone to assist you becomes a big problem. I have decided to call it a quit farming, because I can't afford to raise money to meet the cost of land in this community. My son, we used to rent an acre of land for 100 Gh cedis a year, now is 200 Gh cedis, where can I get such money to pay when am just a mere subsistence farmer" (female interviewee, 29/08/2022)

While women farmers are interested in making long term investments in farming, farming to them have now become just another opportunity to sell their labour power for survival. The cost of rent of a plot of land has doubled, making it difficult, if not impossible for the majority of women farmers to pursue farming. The high cost of land has influenced decisions in farming, and they are now engaged in what White (2019) will call 'pluriactivity' - a reliance on diverse set of activities alongside crop production, as a key strategy in the social reproduction and survival of agrarian households today (Scoones 2015; White 2020). Moreso, in the study of agrarian change, livelihoods in the countryside are becoming increasing divorced from farming (Rigg, 2006). Though farming remains a major source of livelihood rural people have turn to growing possibility of off-farm activities as a major livelihood strategy.

For instance, in the study area women farmers are seen keeping other jobs like tailoring, teaching and then spending time on the farm as well. In most cases, farmers would plough back capital earned from off-farm activities to finance the growing expenditure on the farm. This is the only way some farmers are able to finance their farming activities which has become increasingly expensive. A woman farmer interviewed stated that, "I now travel to Mankessim to buy fish so that I can sell it in Agogo where fish is scarce. I get a lot of profit from this sale to support my family"

Although women in Ghana, like elsewhere in the developing countries around the world, have traditionally struggled with inadequate access to land, the current wave of large-scale land acquisition is making the situation of women farmers in Agogo even worse. This finding corroborates the observation made by Awumbilla (2010) that in Ghana women are more susceptible to poverty than men because they have less access to and control over land and that marriage and divorce considerably affects the land rights of women because these rights are mostly defined by their marital status. Similarly, Tsikata and Yaro (2014) study found that many women smallholder farmers in Ghana have been forced out of food production due to high cost of land resulting from land grabbing. They said, "the land losses suffered by male farmers were passed on to wives who had been using their husbands' fallow lands before the project. Some women now had smaller pieces of land to farm, while others had given up altogether on own-account farming*"* (Tsikata and Yaro, 2014:17). Also, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) found that land grabbing by foreign investors and local private investors in Agogo and other parts of the country are fast eroding the traditional means of subsistence for many women who rely on food crops production (AWID, 2012).

The frustrations of women farmers are very rampant in Agogo. Women encounter unfair negotiations not only with chiefs but with the foreign investors. Exploitations come in the form of low cost being paid for lands as well as total exclusion from negotiation processes. One woman expressed her frustration. She narrated how her land which she had been cultivating to sustain herself has been taken (grabbed) by ScanFarm without her consent:

> I am not happy at all. So these days a poor person cannot live again? I am saying this because we do not have a say about lands that our ancestors left behind to make a living. Can you imagine, our chief did not tell us that they were going to take over our lands but

> rather the grasslands? My seven acres land was left to fallow in order to gain its fertility but when they came, the chiefs just asked them to take over the forest lands including my own land. And not me alone. Other women farmers have also witnessed the same thing. I do not know what is happening in Agogo here. I just want my land back. But I may change my mind and allow them to keep my land if there is a good negotiation. How can they give me five hundred and eighty Ghana cedis (580gh) for my land which is my own means of survival? (Woman farmer, Agogo 29.08.2022).

Drawing from the above, the frustrations of women farmers are not only the result of land grabs, but also the unfair negotiations in the form of very low payments/compensations they often receive in exchange for their lands. It is clear that 580gh is not enough compensation for the kind of land the woman described. More so one that has been a source of livelihood for her and the entire family. Again, from the narrative, it appears farmers are not totally against foreign investments, they are more concerned about the absolute neglect and getting a fair share of the land deals. For instance, the woman farmer indicated that with a better compensation than what she was offered she could allow investors to keep her land. This is fair because once the land is taken, she is left nothing, and she must live by the amount of compensation she gets.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The main objective of the study was to investigate the triggering factors for land grabbing and implications for livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Agogo. The study was guided by the main research question: "How and why do land grabs occur in Agogo, and how do these affect the livelihoods of smallholder farmers?" A main theoretical framework that was drawn upon to provide direction for the study was the Agrarian political economy approach.

The findings of the study have shown that the Ghanaian government's policy goals of modernizing the agricultural sector and achieving a 10% biofuel (agrofuel) share of Ghana's total fuel content by 2015 have both contributed to the growth of interest in biofuel and the consequent rise in demand for agricultural land. The study also discovered that chiefs and other traditional leaders are major contributors to the massive participation and acquisition of farmland by foreign and local private investors in Agogo. The chiefs consider land allocation to domestic and foreign investors more financially rewarding than granting lands to smallholder farmers. Whereas the smallholder farmers who draw their source of livelihood from farmlands are excluded in many ways. The deals do not favor all stakeholders in the same way. There are losers and winners in these deals. At the same time, the perspective of smallholder farmers on this issue is different. In many ways, smallholder farmers continue to experience negative impacts. The findings of the study also show that weak governance and the customary land tenure system have allowed traditional leaders to abuse their authority over land management and allocation

The study also revealed important insights about the consultation processes. In order for large scale land scale land acquisition to adequately benefit the local population as well as the investors, there should be legally binding contracts that clearly specify mutually beneficial commitments that the land investment would bring into the local economy. However, this has not been the case in Agogo so far. These contracts in the form of negotiations and consultations are carried out only with chiefs and investors excluding smallholder farmers who are supposed to be key actors in the process. This supports the argument made by Vermeulen and Cotula (2010), who observed in their study of African land investments that

national regulations across Africa often do not align with international standards of the 'Free Prior and Informed Consent' (FPIC).

5.1 Recommendations

There is a need for the Ghanaian government and other land stakeholders to establish comprehensive guidelines to regulate the allocation or leasing of land by Chiefs and other traditional leaders. They could aim to increase inclusion of vulnerable groups in decisions regarding land-based investments so that women farmers for instance are included in the decision-making process.

Moreover, the government should put policies in place to ensure that promises made to local populations and communities by foreign investors are kept, as well as to ensure that all members of society share the benefits of large-scale land acquisitions.

Also, the government could adopt setting up cottage industries as a major strategy to provide livelihood alternatives to indigenous populations and smallholder farmers who are dispossessed of their land. This will also help address the challenge of youth outmigration to major cities of the country due to limited off-farm employment opportunities.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Description of Participants

Name	Age	Identifies as a	Occupation	Date of interview
Abubakar Issifu	50	Male	Farmer	29/08/2022
Adamu Isha	34	Male	Farmer	29/08/2022
Kwaku Ofosu	29	Male	Farmer	29/08/2022
Dansu	43	Male	Farmer	29/08/2022
Kwame	27	Male	Agric extension	29/08/2022
Abigail	43	Female	Farmer	28/08/2022
Boakye	35	Male	Farmer	28/08/2022
Amoah	31	Male	Farmer	28/08/2022
Adjoa	40	Female	Farmer	28/08/2022
Ama	37	Female	Farmer	26/08/2022
Akosua	48	Female	Farmer	26/08/2022
Lydia	32	Female	Farmer	28/08/2022
Ofosuwaa	38	Female	Farmer	26/08/2022
Maame	31	Female	Farmer	28/08/2022
Techiwaa	26	Female	Farmer	26/08/2022
Darkwah	45	Male	Chief	29/08/2022

Appendix 2 Interview Guide

Women Farmers

1. How long have you been farming?
2. What crops do you mainly cultivate?
3. How easy is it to gain access to farmland?
4. How many hectares do you produce your crops on it?
5. Do you get food all year round to feed?
6. What are the challenges you face being women farmers in Agogo?

Male farmers

1. Who are the people working for foreign investors in Agogo?
2. How long have you been farming?
3. What kind of agriculture activities do they engage in?
4. Do you own the land you cultivate?
5. How do you get land to farm?
6. How easy is it to get access to land for farming?
7. Do you produce to feed your family or to sell?
8. What are the challenges you face as a smallholder farmer in Agogo?
9. What form of assistance do you get to support your production?

Chief

1. What is the procedure for acquiring land in Agogo?
2. Is the land access procedure the same for natives and foreigners?
3. Which foreign companies are into land buying in Agogo?
4. When did they start buying land in Agogo?
5. How do foreign investors get to acquire land in Agogo?
6. What are these lands acquired being used for?
7. What procedure do women fulfil to gain access to farmland?
8. Do men and women have equal access to land in Agogo?
9. How has the mode of allocation of lands changed over time? (compared to previous years)
10. What has resulted in this change / what factors are contributing to this change?

Lands commission

1. Are there other people engaged in land buying in Agogo aside the foreign investors?
2. What happens to lands that have been acquired but are no longer put into production?
3. How has the mode of allocation of lands changed over time? (compared to previous years)
4. What has resulted in this change / what factors are responsible for this change?

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