

**International
Institute of
Social Studies**

Erasmus

**Exploring the implications of land grabs for local
food security and environment in Sierra Leone: A case
of oil palm plantation in Malen chiefdom, Sierra Leone**

A Research Paper presented by:

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

Agrarian Food and Environmental Studies
(AFES)

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The Hague, The Netherlands

December 2023

Disclaimer:

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

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List of Acronyms

ISS	International Institute of Social Studies
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
SAC	Socfin Agricultural Company Sierra Leone Limited
EU	European Union
SLIEPA	Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency
WFP	World Food Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
MLCPE	Ministry of Lands Country Planning and the Environment
MLHCPE	Ministry of Lands, Housing, Country Planning and the Environment
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
WFS	World Food Summit
ILC	International Land Coalition
CSO	Civil Society Organization
NSADP	National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan
MAFFS	Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security
LGAF	Land Governance Assessment Framework
ADHJUST S/L	Advocacy for Human Rights and Justice Sierra Leone
EPA	Environment Protection Agency
MALOA	Malen Affected Land Owners and User Association
NLP	National Land Policy
ASJP	Access to Security Justice Programme

Acknowledgment

Foremost, I would like to give honour and praise to Almighty Allah for His guidance and protection throughout my academic journey.

To my supervisor, Dr. Tsegaye Moreda Shegro, you have showcased a true sense of purpose in guiding me throughout this study. Your commitment and selfless effort are remarkable and will not go unnoticed.

A special thanks to the Dutch government for the Orange Knowledge Programme (OKP) scholarship to have studied at one of the best universities in the world. A plethora of thanks to the batch of the 2022/2023 academic year. You guys have been amazing all these years. The midnight calls, thought-provoking sessions, group assignments, and catch-ups have all been amazing.

To my parents, Sheik Gibril Kargbo and Fatmata Turay, I could not have asked for more. The torch you gave me has lit up my paths throughout life's journey, the best I could ever ask for. To my family and friends, you have been there through thick and thin all this while. Words cannot express how grateful I am to have you around. Thanks for the support, advice, and dedication.

To my lovely and amazing wife, you have carried this burden for a long time and have shown what it meant to stick together through challenging times. Your immense support, courage, and dedication towards this project are incredibly wonderful. Thank you for everything.

Abstract

The study emphasizes the need for balanced land-use laws, legal frameworks for land purchases and ownership, land tenure reforms, and enforcement of regulations through Environmental Impacts Assessments mechanisms. It also highlights the importance of assessing the long-term repercussions of land agreements on food security and the socio-economic wellbeing of vulnerable communities, most especially smallholder farmers who make up the majority population of the agrarian world. The study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on land grabbing, social justice, and preserving local livelihoods in the face of global economic pressures. Land grabbing is a significant issue in the Sahn Malen Chiefdom of Sierra Leone, causing environmental degradation and loss of natural resources due to corporate-driven industrial farming methods. This has led to reduced access to land and food insecurity, increasing vulnerability to poverty and social tensions. The absence of well-defined land access and ineffective land governance systems are significant factors contributing to land grabbing. Another influential aspect is the swift growth of industrial agriculture and extractive industries, propelled by investments from both domestic and foreign sources. Sahn Malen Chiefdom, situated in the Pujehun District of Sierra Leone, has been afflicted by land degradation problems in recent times. The Malen community has experienced substantial socio-economic and environmental repercussions as a result of this.

Relevance to Development Studies

The problem of land grabs, particularly in the context of large-scale agricultural projects such as oil palm plantations, has substantial consequences for local food security and development in the study area. Land grabbing has major implications on soil degradation, water contamination, deforestation, and biodiversity. The reduction in agricultural production and livestock efficiency leads to an increase in food insecurity and poverty in local communities. Furthermore, the reduction in biodiversity and destruction of the hydrological cycle have harmfully impacted natural resources, intensifying the vulnerability of the local population in terms of sustaining livelihoods. To solve the issue of land degradation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, an elaborate and multi-faceted strategy is needed. Mainly, it is important to improve awareness and education about sustainable land management practices among farmers. To deal with the adverse outcomes of land grabbing on local food supply and availability, it is imperative to highlight land rights and include the affected communities in the decision-making process.

The key factor that contributes to land grabbing in Sahn Malen Chiefdom is the presence of extensive commercial agricultural projects. Furthermore, conflicts are regularly deepened by the local population and insufficient acquaintance with land laws and regulations. The livelihoods and coping strategies of smallholder farmers in Sahn Malen Chiefdom depend on various factors such as resource availability, market dynamics, climatic patterns, and access to support services. Smallholder farmers commonly rely on oil palm agriculture. They also employ diversification as a coping strategy which includes farming both plants and livestock and engaging in other activities. Examining the impacts of land grabbing in the context of local food security connects this study's relevance to development studies. The intricate relationship between land grabbing and oil palm plantations has profound consequences on the livelihood of local communities. The consequences of land grabbing for the availability of food at the local level in Sierra Leone, particularly in the Sahn Malen Chiefdom, are complex and necessitate a comprehensive approach that considers economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects. This study enhances and broadens the discussion in development studies by emphasizing the difficulties and intricacies linked to extensive agricultural initiatives and their influence on local communities. This, in turn, helps to address the problems that surround access to land and ownership in relation to sustainable livelihoods.

Keywords

Land grabbing, food security, agribusiness, local food production, smallholder farmers, land governance, Sustainable Livelihood, Sierra Leone

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Context of the Study

Following the 2007-2008 global food and financial crisis, there has been a growing interest among investors in food and agriculture as potential avenues for financial accumulation in recent years (Clapp and Isakson 2018). This has led investors' interest in farmland to increase across many countries in the Global South subsequently resulting in the proliferation of large-scale land acquisitions or land grabbing for cultivation of food crops, biofuel, and other agricultural commodities. Over the years, the issue of land and resource appropriation, as well as climate change control, has prompted scholars and experts to find ways to minimize this growing concern. The study conducted by Borras et al. (2011), observed that “The land— and water and labour—of the Global South are increasingly perceived as sources of alternative energy production (primarily biofuels), food crops, mineral deposits (new and old), and reservoirs of environmental services” (Borras et al., 2011). Growing concerns about climate change have led to the global enclosure of significant land and forest resources, highlighting the need for mitigation efforts. In recent times, there has been a notable increase in the acquisition of extensive land areas, driven not only by the objective of achieving enhanced agricultural productivity and ensuring food security, but also by the aim of mitigating the strain on forest regions (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones, 2012). Over the past two decades, many governments and private investors have leased and acquired large areas of land for cultivating oil palm in various countries in the Global South, including Sierra Leone. Looking at the case of the oil palm plantation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, this study examines some of these urging concerns using the agrarian political economy perspective that works towards a balance and fair land rights and ownership in fostering sustainable livelihood in Sierra Leone.

1.2 The Case Study

In 2011, the Socfin Agricultural Company Sierra Leone Ltd (henceforth SAC) which is part of the French Bollore' multinational corporation, acquired a 50-year lease to utilize 6,500 hectares of productive land in the Sahn Malen Chiefdom (Mousseau and Schaefer 2012; ActionAid 2013). The lease has the possibility of being extended for an additional 21 years and an additional 5,000 hectares can be added to the original land acquisition (Yengoh & Armah 2014). Full compensation for lost land, economic investments, and jobs was pledged to the local residents as part of the project. However, just eight months after signing, local

leadership brought a long list of complaints against the company to the attention of the authorities. These included improper consultation, a lack of transparency, and an inability to compensate for land loss, in addition to corruption, horrendous working conditions, pressure to sign lease agreements, and intimidation (Brima, 2022). Human rights breaches were substantiated by the Oakland Institute and other NGOs, who also concluded that the lease did not comply with federal statutes and regulations.



Figure 1: Map showing the location of the SAC oil palm plantation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District Sierra Leone. Source: China Dialogue.

Source: <https://chinadialogue.net/en/food/sierra-leones-conflict-palm-oil-certified-as-sustainable/>

1.3 Research Problem Statement

The terrain of Malen Chiefdom has changed during the last ten years. The bushlands and subsistence farms that were once common in this area are no longer there. Thousands of hectares of oil palms now stand in their place (Brima, 2022). As the transformation of small-scale food crop farms into large-scale oil palm monocultures commenced, local communities and civil society organizations highlighted a range of issues that required attention to guarantee social, economic, and environmental sustainability in the land acquisition process

(Yengoh & Armah, 2014). The acquisition of economic assets (such as economic trees) led to numerous issues, including land loss compensation, fair compensation for these losses, corruption, and intimidation of local people to sign land lease agreements, as highlighted by Mousseau and Schaefer (2012). More than a hundred landowners who had lost their properties protested against the corporation at the beginning of October. This led to 40 arrests and drawn-out legal proceedings for the individuals involved. On December 7, 2011, there was yet another protest regarding delayed salaries; nonetheless, the demonstrators were fined. Protests and oppositions to the SAC land conflict are based on several acquisitions including the socio-economic, environmental, and health impacts of the plantation in Malen Chiefdom. The environmental justice atlas lists increased crime and violence, loss of livelihood, militarization and heightened police presence, human rights violations, and land expropriation as some of the socioeconomic effects of the SAC land acquisition battles (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2022). The conflict over the SAC land acquisition has had negative effects on the environment, including loss of biodiversity (wildlife, agro-diversity), food insecurity (damage to crops), soil contamination, soil erosion, loss of vegetation cover, and deforestation, decreasing water quality (physico-chemical, biological), and groundwater depletion or pollution. The SAC land acquisition conflict has negative health effects that include exposure to complicated risks that are either known or unknown, malnutrition, occupational diseases, and accidents (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2022).

The study aims to understand the intricate socio-political context in which the implications of SAC land acquisition conflict on the environment, livelihood, and food security occur using an agrarian political economy lens.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

Objectives

The primary goal of this study is to understand the socio-political context in which land grabs by SAC oil concession have affected the food security, environment, and livelihood of smallholder farmers of Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun district.

The specific objectives include the following:

- i. To understand the implications of the SAC land acquisition conflict on the food security of locals of Sahn Malen Chiefdom
- ii. Examine the environmental consequences of SAC land acquisition conflict.

- iii. Examine the implications of SAC land acquisition conflict on the livelihoods of locals of Sahn Malen Chiefdom

This study aims to deepen the understanding of the connections between the environment, land grabbing, and local food security within the framework of agrarian political economy. It pays closer attention to the food security issue and underpins some of its recent benchmarks in improving the lives of vulnerable Sierra Leoneans.

Research Questions

The main research question that this study examines is:

How and to what extent has SAC land acquisition conflict affected local food security, environment, and livelihoods in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District of Sierra Leone?

Sub questions:

- i. How and to what extent has SAC land acquisition conflict influenced food security in Sahn Malen Chiefdom?
- ii. How have land grabs disrupted the livelihoods of Sahn Malen Chiefdom inhabitants?
- iii. What are the environmental consequences of the SAC land acquisition conflict?

1.5 Relevance and Significance of the Study

Oil palm plantations contribute significantly to the economy of several countries, including Sierra Leone, where Malen chiefdom is located. As a result, many communities have lost their lands to foreign investors looking for commercial and economic gains. These activities have left many communities in shock finding a better alternative to sustain their livelihood. The study can help to establish policy and governance frameworks in the oil palm sector as well as the agricultural domain. The research can provide recommendations for enhancing governance processes, ensuring transparency, and promoting responsible investment in the oil palm sector by examining the plantation's compliance with local legislation and international regulations. It can also aid in informed decision-making and promote dialogue among stakeholders and community members in the face of land grabbing in Sierra Leone. Because of the differentiated class, gender, and generation, the study will justify the social dynamics in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, such as the plantation's connection with the community, land rights concerns, and the social benefits or challenges linked with the plantation's presence. Understanding the social implications of the Malen community can help to handle potential issues, promote community engagement, and ensure equitable benefit sharing of land. This has caused an interest in researching the context and making additional recommendations by

involving local farmers and stakeholders in mitigating the issues of land grabs and fostering the tenets of sustainable livelihoods for the wellbeing of local communities in Sierra Leone.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Social Significance

Understanding the significance and environmental consequences of large-scale land acquisitions in Sierra Leone requires investigating the implications of land grabbing for local food security and the environment. It contributes to the identification of specific difficulties confronting impacted communities, supports the formulation of policies, and informs initiatives for creating a more inclusive and sustainable land governance system. By examining these implications, it is important to emphasize and identify some of the fundamental difficulties emanating from land grabbing, as well as to minimize the detrimental effects it has on local food production and prioritize the interests and rights of local communities in Sierra Leone. A more detailed understanding of the effects on the ground is made possible by the specific and localized viewpoint that focuses on Sierra Leone. Hence, the findings of this study may assist scholars and decision-makers in customizing interventions and remedies to the particular problems the nation faces, taking into consideration its socioeconomic background, history, and current state of affairs.

Academic Significance

Due to the fact that land grabs frequently entail massive land acquisitions by foreign governments, businesses, or investors, they have gained international attention. Comprehending their ramifications within the particular setting of Sierra Leone advances the wider scholarly conversation about the social, fiscal, and ecological aftermath of such land deals. The results of this investigation can support recommendations for evidence-based policy. This research can be used by governments, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations to create and carry out policies that safeguard local communities, guarantee sustainable land use, and foster equitable economic development. Applying an agrarian political economy method broadens the study's scope by taking the larger socio-political backdrop into account. This analytical decision made it possible to investigate historical context, institutional structures, and power dynamics, leading to a more thorough comprehension of the intricacies associated with the SAC land acquisition conflict.

1.7 Structure of the Research

This study discusses six chapters to examine the implications of land grabbing for local food security, using a case study of the oil palm plantation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District, Southern Sierra Leone. Chapter One begins with an introduction, followed by a background and significance of land grabs in Sierra Leone, the research problem statement, justification, and relevance of the study, research objectives and questions, and the structure of the research. Chapter Two presents an introduction, overview of land grabbing and its implications for local food security in Sierra Leone, land rights and tenure system, land grabbing and inheritance, local food and agricultural sector in Sierra Leone, the linkages between land grabbing, oil palm plantation and local food security, theoretical framework, and agrarian political economy. Chapter three presents the theoretical framework employed in the study and explains its relevance to this study. Chapter four employs the research methodology and methods, which include, an introduction, research rationale, and design, description of the study area, sampling techniques and structure, Sources of Data, limitations, and ethical considerations. Chapter five discusses the findings of the data analysis. It mostly explains the impacts of land grabbing and access to land; and its effects on environmental degradation, it further unravels community disputes among community members and stakeholders in the study region, employment and its implications for the youth, and livelihoods, and coping strategies of smallholder farmers in the chiefdom. Chapter Six draws up the conclusion.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses land grabbing and how it affects food security in Sierra Leone using relevant literature. It focuses on the local food and the agricultural sector, the links between land grabbing, local food security, and oil palm plantations, as well as land rights and the land tenure system that underpins Sierra Leone's customary land rights. It also explores the theoretical framework and provides a historical review of land inheritance in Sierra Leone.

2.2 Overview of Land Grabbing in Sierra Leone

Over the past decade, poor rural populations in developing countries have become more vulnerable due to environmental and climate change impacts, land grabs by corporations and states, and a rural economy with limited livelihood opportunities (Moreda, 2020). This study explores the implications of land grabs for local food security in Sierra Leone focusing on the oil palm plantation in Sahn Malen chiefdom, Pujehun district, Southern Sierra Leone. A "land grab" refers to the acquisition of land that has resulted in the relocation, loss of ownership, and deprivation of rights of individuals (Scoones, 2009). Alternatively, it can also encompass the large-scale purchase of agricultural lands by multinational corporations, as defined by the Institute of Development Studies.

In recent years, Sierra Leone has witnessed a surge in large-scale land grabbing, especially in the form of oil palm plantations, which has raised concerns about their potential effects on local food security. The term "land grabbing" refers to large-scale land acquisitions by corporate entities, often for economic reasons, without the consent of residents or adequate compensation for displaced communities. As a result, the displacement of farmers and other rural residents who rely on the land for their sustenance and agricultural output faced instability, poverty, and reduced food production. According to Borras and Franco (2010), various economic sectors, including oil and auto, mining, forestry, food and chemical, and bio-energy, are acquiring or planning to acquire large areas of land for their extractive and agro-industrial enterprises (Borras and Franco, 2010). Large-scale land grabbing often results in the denial of land access and land ownership, thereby causing conflict among community members and stakeholders. To understand this complex situation, this study aims to examine the implications of land grabs surrounding local food security in Sierra Leone specifically the oil palm plantation established in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District.

There are several accounts of land grabs for agri-business in Sierra Leone ranging from the North to the South, where land grabs are predominantly dominant. Farmlandgrab.org (2015) reported that Sierra Leone Agriculture Limited (SLA), leased 41,582 hectares of oil palm in the Port Loko district; Addax Bioenergy (SL) Limited, leased 44,000 hectares of sugar cane for ethanol in the Tonkolili and Bombali districts. The Socfin Agricultural Company (SL) Ltd (henceforth SAC) secured a 50-year lease for 6,500 acres of agricultural land in Sahn Malen chiefdom, Pujehun district, in March 2011. SAC, a subsidiary of the Socfin Group of companies owned by a Belgian tycoon businessman, planned to develop the area for oil palm and rubber plantations (Oakland Institute, 2011). The initiative guaranteed \$100 million with complete compensation to residents for lost land, development investments, and the creation of job facilities (Oakland Institute, 2011). However, they failed to meet corporate social responsibility, leaving the remainder of the population in turmoil. An assessment carried out in 2011 by the Oakland Institute stated that there would be no limit on the amount of water removed by SAC from rivers, other waterways, wells, and boreholes across the community, and surrounding residents have already expressed concerns about the health effects of working with fertilizers in the nursery (Oakland Institute, 2011).

Oil palm is the vegetable oil with the fastest growing demand throughout the world, and it is cultivated in tropical regions of Asia, Latin America, and tropical Africa (Hoyle & Levang, 2012). The scarcity of land has encouraged many investors to seek out opportunities to invest in cash crop production. The oil plantation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom is a case study of several years of land acquisition in Pujehun District, Sierra Leone. With the rising demand for food, there has been an increase in concern about land grabs, with foreign investors looking for alternative ways to purchase land for food production and other economic activities. Several studies have shed light on the effects of land grabbing or land acquisition on local food security in Sierra Leone, hence rendering smallholder farmers vulnerable to challenges about food production and economic sustainability. However, the majority of this research has not successfully established the connections between land grabs and the subsequent displacement of smallholder farmers. Consequently, the implications for local food security and the sustainable livelihood of local communities in Sierra Leone remain unexplored in these studies. Furthermore, several studies have indicated that land grabbing or land acquisition has adverse implications for individuals' means of livelihood. However, limited attention has been given to the extent of the effect experienced by impacted populations (Bottazzi et al., 2018). The impact made on the household has been emphasized by Fatoma E.T. (2017); on urban and peri-urban agriculture (Lynch K. et al., 2013; Maconachie et al.).

Other studies argued about the land rights of impacted communities and smallholder farmers more especially women who constitute about 60 percent of this population have been denied rightful ownership of land, hence has a detrimental effect on their livelihood (Millar 2015, Johnson 2011, Unruh 2018).

The increase in land grabs in Sierra Leone can be attributed to several factors. First is the country's abundant land and natural resources. Sierra Leone has over seven million hectares of farmable land, yet only a portion of that is being used. The Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA), emphasizes that "Sierra Leone has significant amounts of arable land, most of which remains uncultivated, with up to 4 million hectares of arable land still available for cultivation" (SLIEPA, 2007). This makes the country an attractive spot for investors looking to expand their agri-business operations. Second, the inadequate land governance system in Sierra Leone is also a contributing factor. Investors can easily purchase land in the country without the knowledge or agreement of local communities due to weak governance and land regulations. For example, the 1972 Protectorate Land Ordinance made provision for "a non-provincial may not acquire a greater interest in land in the provinces than a lease for fifty years, but renewal is allowed for up to twenty-one years", (see Johnson, 2011). Last but not least, the government of Sierra Leone has encouraged land seizures. To encourage foreign investors to establish agricultural plantations in the country, the government has provided substantial tax reductions and other benefits leverage on the side of the investors. A report from the Finance Act 2021 indicated that, the reduction of the corporate income tax rate for manufacturing companies outside the western area (capital city) from 25% to 15% (Finance Act, 2021). This has caused many investors in the agri-business sector to exploit the country's arable land for commercial and agricultural purposes. In this study, I contend that although agriculture plays a central role in the economy of Sierra Leone but should be focused on the smallholder farmers who make up large amounts of the agricultural population in Sierra Leone.

2.3 Overview of land grabbing and its implications on food security in Sierra Leone

Large-scale land grabbing typically creates winners and losers, with their effects being unequally distributed due to socioeconomic differentiation among rural populations based on factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, and generation. White (2020) argued that the idea of generation is an important one to use for analysis if we want to add time to our knowledge of how class and gender relations change over time in rural communities. The acquisition of

land in Sierra Leone has considerable implications for both the country's development and its population. With devastating consequences, this method of large-scale land acquisition by foreign investors has resulted in the forcible relocation and displacement of numerous indigenous communities. Not only has it resulted in the displacement of local communities and the sustenance of their livelihoods, but it has also caused damage to the environment, destroying vital ecosystems, and causing biodiversity loss. The appropriation of land resources has caused significant disruption to traditional agricultural methods and has resulted in the displacement of smallholder farmers, depriving them of the financial means to support their families. Consequently, the nation's food production capabilities have been significantly undermined, thereby worsening the situation of hunger and malnutrition.

Food insecurity remains a prominent and recurring issue in sub-Saharan Africa, which is consistently at the center stage in the discourse of development debate (Moreda, 2020). Land grabbing, as defined by the International Land Coalition, refers to the acquisition of land that violates human rights, lacks the consent of indigenous land users, and fails to consider the broader social and environmental consequences (Yang & He, 2021 p. 2). Whereas, the FAO in the World Food Summit (1996) defines food security "as the availability of sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life, both physically and economically" (FAO, 1996). In this context, land grabbing in Sierra Leone relates to the acquisition of vast amounts of land, frequently by foreign corporations or wealthy people, without the free, prior, and informed consent of the local communities that rely on that property for a living. Long-term leases or purchases of property for agricultural, mining, or commercial interests are common mostly in rural areas where smallholder farmers lack access to land and resources. Oxfam (2011) report indicated that the estimated amount of land in the developing world that was either sold, leased, or licensed to foreign firms, or is now being negotiated, between 2000 and 2011, is 227 million hectares. This is equivalent to the size of Northwestern Europe. In 2009, companies purchased 50 million hectares of land from farmers. A portion of this land has been acquired by purchase, while the remaining portion has been leased for periods ranging from 25 to 99 years, with the bulk of leases being eligible for renewal. This accounts for 63% of the arable land in Cambodia, 30% of the arable land in Liberia, and 20% of the arable land in Sierra Leone. Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Laos are among the nations that have seen a loss of over 10% of their agricultural land due to foreign investment (Oxfam, 2011).

The government controls land governance in Sierra Leone, including smallholder farmers' land. In 2009, during the transformation of the Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum

in London the then President Ernest Bai Koroma declared a business-like approach to managing the state. The Sierra Leone Import and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) aimed to attract investors to invest in agriculture, focusing on oil palm and sugar cane as biofuel resources. This led to investors seeking better ways to use the country's arable land for agriculture and commercial purposes.

According to David Nally from The Geographical Journal report indicated that the International Land Coalition (ILC), an alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organizations, made five observations that land grabs differ from 'ordinary' land acquisitions in the following aspect: "first, they do not entail the free, prior and informed consent of the dispossessed; second, investors seldom conduct impact assessments on the likely social, economic and environmental consequences; third, the contract that seals these deals are either vague or non-binding; fourth, land deals often go hand-in-hand with violations of human rights, especially the right of women and minority populations; and fifth, the most deals are secured without democratic participation or independent oversight" (Anseeuw et al., 2011, pp. 11,18).

In Sierra Leone, the context of land grabbing is closely linked to the question of local food security, as to why "smallholder farmers" are denied access and right to land. This frequently impedes their livelihood status hence renders them vulnerable to acute poverty. Agriculture is important to the country's economy because it employs the majority of the population and contributes to food production. According to the World Bank development indicators, agriculture, forestry, and fishery remained the dominant sectors in terms of GDP, comprising 61.29% in 2020. The United Nations Food System Summit Dialogue (2021) indicated that more than 70% of the existing workforce is employed in the agricultural sector in Sierra Leone. However, about 70% of Sierra Leone's population is poor, with 26% unable to satisfy the minimal intake of 2,400 kilocalories a day (GoSL, 2013). Most of the country's population resides in rural areas, where they are stuck in a cycle of low agricultural output and malnutrition. This indicates that scaling up the productivity of the food system is essential for a sustainable transformation of the Sierra Leonean economy and a considerable poverty reduction.

The country is confronted with various challenges in guaranteeing food security, including poverty, restricted access to resources, and the effects of climate change. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Organization (FAO) report, the hunger burden in Sierra Leone remains high in both absolute and relative terms (FAO, 2015). The study by Yengoh and Armah (2015) on land grabs and food insecurity in Sierra Leone

reveals that households typically eat rice, cassava root, leafy greens, and beans, with local fish, chicken, or bush meat. Palm oil, a staple in Sierra Leonean cuisine, is sourced from local plantations for economically valuable cultivation. This local diet is consumed as a staple food in almost every household in Sierra Leone as a means to sustain livelihood. The utmost attention should be given to guaranteeing food and nutrition security for extensive land projects in regions where agriculture serves as the predominant economic activity. Agriculture plays a pivotal role as the primary economic and social activity in numerous communities. Therefore, it should be granted utmost importance and provided with access to land, as it directly contributes to food production and sustenance. Typically, smallholder farmers rely directly on the land they cultivate and their agricultural labour to meet their food needs, without depending on revenue from alternative sources. Households that primarily engaged in subsistence farming prioritized their own food need above all other factors. In his 1986 work, Hopkins asserts that food security is a fundamental prerequisite that is crucial for the proper functioning of society and the satisfaction of all human needs. The supply of vital nutrients is not only crucial for existence but also for the preservation of a stable and sustainable social structure (Hopkins, 1986).

The implications of land grabbing in Sierra Leone rendered many communities vulnerable to land access and food security, as well as a lack of access to essential resources like water or forest resources, resulting in adverse consequences (Yengoh & Armah, 2016). This can also disproportionately damage smallholder farmers, alter agricultural practices, impede access to land and resources, and cause damage to the ecosystem - as humans are not the only species living on earth.

2.4 Land Ownership and Land Tenure System in Sierra Leone

During the colonial era, Sierra Leone's land tenure was characterized by a dual ownership structure, with the British governing the Western Area, covering the Freetown Peninsula, and the protectorate was governed indirectly through traditional authorities under the British policy of Indirect Rule (Asiama, 2006). Communally owned land does not exist in the Western Area. Most agricultural land is held in communal ownership under customary tenure, controlled by traditional rulers. Land is considered a divine heritage, and the responsibility to preserve it rests on the shoulders of the community in general. The absolute interest in land lies with families, with the Paramount Chief being the custodian of the land on behalf of the community in accordance of customary with customary principles and usage (NSADP, 2010)

In the colonial period, the Colony was inhabited by the freed slaves, the rest of the country consisted of 14 tribal groups, each with its own language, traditions, and customs. The main tribes were the Mende, located in the southeast and bordering Liberia, and the Temne, the original inhabitants of the western region. Southern tribes, such as the Krim, Galina, and Bullom, engaged in arable agriculture, while northern tribes, like the Limba, Koranko, and Yalunka, engaged in cattle-rearing activities (Asiama, 2006)

In Sierra Leone, land can be obtained through two methods: Western acquisition (private land) and Provincial acquisition (community land). The Western Area follows a freehold system for land acquisition, wherein the land is sold through negotiation and agreement between the landlord and the buyer. This process consists of multiple steps, including negotiation, agreement, and validation. The province (communal land) is divided into two factions: townlands and farmlands. Townland is obtained through a formal request made by the heads of families. They convene and reach a consensus over the planned use of the land. Once an agreement is reached, the further steps for its utilization are initiated. The land is not permitted to be sold or leased without obtaining the prior agreement of family members. Farmland, however, is obtained through the heads of families. Before commencing cultivation, it is customary to obtain approval for the farming season, often within a one-year planting term. This system is transmitted from one family to another.

The reform of Sierra Leone's customary land tenure system is a major institutional transformation that will help to release the country's huge economic growth potential in tourism, agriculture, and industry (Johnson, 2011). This reform would need to address issues related to customary law and the question of statutory strangers' introduced in the 1927 Protectorate Land Ordinance Act. The 1927 Protectorate Land Ordinance could be repealed, with related laws amended as appropriate. The Customary Land Right Act 2022 was approved by parliament on October 8th, 2022. It specifically ensures the safeguarding of customary land rights, the eradication of discrimination based on customary law, and the management and administration of land subject to customary law (GoSL, 2022). However, the fundamental question of customary law relating to land rights in Sierra Leone raises more difficult challenges. Johnson (2011) contends that reforms of customary land tenure in Africa frequently prioritize a romanticized notion of communal ownership, disregarding the actuality of chaotic privatization and disparities in land rights and access among the supposed landowners under communal administration.

Sierra Leone's land tenure system is a blend of customary and statutory arrangements, with customary tenure dominating rural areas and statutory tenure more prevalent in urban

centers. This dual system often leads to conflicts between customary and statutory land ownership rights, compounded by factors like rapid urbanization, population growth, and increasing pressure on land resources. To address these challenges, the government has introduced policies and legal frameworks to enhance land governance and clarify land rights. The National Land Policy, launched in 2015, aims to harmonize customary and statutory land management systems, establish clear land tenure rights, and strengthen land administration institutions. The Ministry of Lands, Country Planning, and the Environment (MLCPE) oversees land administration, while the National Land Commission serves as an independent regulatory body for land allocation and dispute resolution. However, challenges persist in ensuring widespread land rights security in Sierra Leone, such as limited resources, weak institutional capacity, and inadequate land registration processes. This increases the vulnerability of local communities to land grabbing, forced evictions, and land-related disputes. For instance, the oil palm plantation in Sahn Malen's chiefdom has been the cause of multiple conflicts, leading to the unfortunate deaths of two community members, as reported by various tabloids in the country. According to a report published by Green Scenery in 2011, the Government of Sierra Leone, under the Ministry of Lands Country Planning and Environment (MLCPE), acts as an intermediary in the land deal between SAC and the communities in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District. The terms and conditions raised by the community members were not adequately negotiated in this instance, resulting in a conflict of interest between the company and the community members.

To mitigate land issues in Sierra Leone, sustained endeavors are required to enhance land governance, access to justice, and develop community capacity. Promoting public awareness and involvement in land governance procedures is essential for safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups, including women and marginalized communities. Sierra Leone's land tenure system, a blend of customary and statutory systems, requires continuous improvement in governance, land access, and protection of landowners, especially smallholder farmers in local communities.

2.5 Land Grabbing and Land Inheritance in Sierra Leone: A Historical Overview

Sierra Leone is a small African country on Africa's West Coast, bordered by Guinea, Liberia, and the Atlantic Ocean. Its seacoast spans 212 miles and covers 71,740 square kilometers. The country, which was a former British colony, gained independence on April 27, 1961. The Freetown Peninsula is dominated by hills, while a low-lying coastal plain is 80 kilometers

deep. The country's land area is approximately 45,000 square miles, while its seacoast is 212 miles long.

Sierra Leone's history is marked by a complex relationship with land, involving issues of land grabbing and land inheritance. Understanding the historical context of land ownership and its control within the country is crucial to grasp the current dynamics and challenges faced by its population. In the Sierra Leone context, land grabbing refers to the act of claiming ownership of a piece of land without following appropriate procedures recognized by statutory or customary law in Sierra Leone (National Land Policy, 2015). Or the procurement of land by external actors, government officials, or influential individuals, frequently through coercive or corrupt methods, to the detriment of local communities. Numerous pivotal epochs in Sierra Leone's history have contributed to the formation of the country's present land ownership structure.

Throughout the colonial period, Sierra Leone was ruled by the British, and the colonial administration exercised extensive control over its territorial integrity. With the increasing demand for agricultural production, specifically for export commodities such as rubber and palm oil, the British colonial administration initiated the process of allocating land to foreign corporations. The corporations obtained extensive portions of arable land for commercial exploitation, thereby marginalizing the indigenous communities. In 1808, the British established the Sierra Leone Peninsula, which included Freetown and its environs, as a colony under the British Crown Colony. However, it was not until 1896 that the remainder of the country was proclaimed a protectorate and British authorities assumed control over its administration. This property alienation persisted following Sierra Leone's 1961 independence. Currently constituted of indigenous elites, the government retained authority over the distribution and administration of land. In this sense, the political elite utilized land as a tool to consolidate power by allocating substantial tracts of land to their supporters. This practice sustained a recurring pattern of inequity, as affluent and politically influential individuals accumulated extensive land tracts, frequently resulting in the displacement of native landowners.

Moreover, the civil conflict that afflicted Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002 further compounded the problem of land appropriation. The process of property reclaim for displaced communities and refugees returning to their ancestral territories was faced with significant challenges and obstacles. However, elites and powerful individuals in the country used this as an opportunity to leverage the rights of poor landowners by acquiring lands without going

through due process. This post-war land grabbing contributed to ongoing conflicts and disputes over land ownership and usage.

The dynamics of land tenure in Sierra Leone have been notably influenced by land inheritance practices. Land inheritance is regulated by customary laws and traditional practices, whereby land is conventionally transferred along patrilineal lines. Consequently, land ownership rights have frequently been denied to women, thereby perpetuating gender disparities and constraining their economic agency. For instance, in Sierra Leone, one of the most difficult issues for women and girls, for example, is the loss of land if a husband dies without the customary marriage being properly recorded (Women, Land, Plantations and Oppression in Sierra Leone | World Rainforest Movement, n.d., 2021). However, in relation to land tenure disputes, for instance, village chiefs are commonly entrusted with the responsibility of resolving conflicts. In the context of matrimony, which is virtually universal, customary marriages appear to hold dominance despite lacking legal recognition under the statutory law of Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, there have been recent endeavours to contest these patriarchal conventions and advocate for legislation that ensures land inheritance is equitably distributed among landowners. Continual endeavours are being made in Sierra Leone to tackle the problems of land appropriation and land inheritance. Legislation aimed at bolstering land governance and safeguarding the rights of indigenous communities and smallholder farmers has been introduced by the government under the National Land Policy 2015. Additionally, international partners and civil society organizations have actively advocated for the protection of vulnerable populations and enhanced land tenure security. Access to Security and Justice Programme (ASJP), is one of the leading international organizations that advocate for women's land inheritance in Sierra Leone.

The history of Sierra Leone is characterized by the appropriation of land and inheritance practices, which have led to socioeconomic inequalities and conflicts over land ownership. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of this context is essential for formulating efficient policies and interventions aimed at promoting sustainable land management.

2.6 The Local Food and Agricultural Sector in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a small country located on the North Atlantic coastline of West Africa. The nation's food sector predominantly relies on the cultivation of various crops, including tubers like yams, cassava, potato, leafy greens, rice, and hot peppers. Palm oil is commonly used for cooking, which makes it the widely used ingredient in Sierra Leone. The majority of Sierra Leone's population engages in subsistence agriculture, wherein farmers operate within an

informal and unstable system without possessing any legal titles to their farms. It has been proven by numerous actors that the Sierra Leone economy's long-term sustained macroeconomic growth and development rely heavily on agriculture, which serves as its backbone (NSADP, 2010). Agriculture, covering fisheries and forestry, serves as a fundamental pillar of the economy, making an approximate 46 percent contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing around 75 percent of the populace, with women comprising the majority of the labour force (NSADP, 2010). Agriculture has the potential to generate more wealth and employment, as well as stimulate industrialization and services. This, in turn, can lead to a substantial improvement in food security and poverty reduction. The sector currently contributes over 46% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), represents more than one-fourth of export earnings, and is the largest employer, employing nearly two-thirds of the workforce (NSADP, 2010). Therefore, its progress yields a favourable stance for the majority of the population as well as for various sectors of the economy. As of 2015, agricultural households comprised 732,461 households at the household level, which accounted for 57.9 percent of the comprehensive household population in the nation. 625,679 (85.4%) agricultural households are involved in crop cultivation, 539,304 (73.6%) in animal husbandry, and 245,957 (33.6%) in fishery, (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2015). However, it should be noted that this figure does not include the current population of agricultural households in the country.

A huge obstacle in Sierra Leone's food system is to provide universal access to an ample supply of high-quality food, thereby ensuring food and nutrition security for all individuals. The agriculture and fisheries sectors are the primary drivers for tackling this situation (Leone, 2021). However, they lack adequate measures to produce food for the population, leading to insufficient access to cost-effective, nutritious, and safe food throughout the country. To achieve economic transformation and reduce poverty, it is essential to boost food system productivity, especially in the local sector.

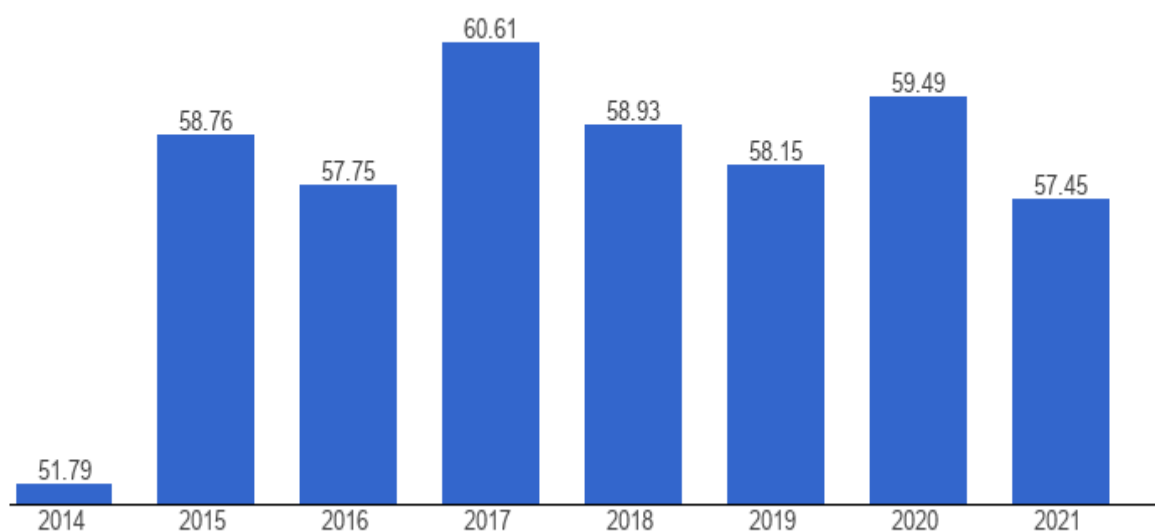


Figure 2: Sierra Leone: GDP share of agriculture - Recent values

Source: The World Bank

Chart 2.4 shows the percentage of GDP, and agriculture-added value in Sierra Leone from 1964 to 2021 as shown in Chart 1. Sierra Leone experienced an average value of 43.39 percent during that period, with a minimum of 25.99 percent in 1970 and a maximum of 60.61 percent in 2017. The most recent figure, obtained in 2021, is 57.45%. In contrast, the global mean for 2021, as determined by 173 countries, is 10.10 percent (TheGlobalEconomy.com, 2023)

The country possesses a wealth of resources, including fertile soil, minerals, and a diverse range of food and cash crops, which have the potential to contribute to its economic growth and sustainable development. The country is open to opportunities to stimulate the market economy by cultivating cash crops such as cocoa, and ginger as well as rice and timber for export. NSADP (2010) indicated that the crop share of Agriculture GDP is about 67%, thus making it the major contributor to the economy. Cocoa, coffee, ginger, palm kernels, pias-sava, rubber, and rice were just a few of the agricultural products that Sierra Leone used to export at a net positive rate. As a result of the eleven years of civil conflict and subsequent structural adjustment programs, Sierra Leone is presently a net importer of rice and other food crops (NSADP, 2010). Shifting cultivation is the predominant method of farming, with mixed cropping being the most prevalent pattern, although substantial variations exist based on the specific characteristics of the land. Mixed measures typically consist of rice as the primary crop, along with cassava, maize, sorghum, sweet potatoes, millet, sesame, groundnut,

and maize. Incentivization should be implemented to discourage shifting cultivation by encouraging the transition to permanent, higher-value cropping and more sustainable tree crops that incorporate intercropping with food crops.

Sierra Leone is classified as a fragile state with persistent food insecurity due to recurring disruptions in our food systems caused by natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and socio-economic reasons (Leone, 2021) In addition, our food systems lack resilience as a result of the growing number of vulnerable individuals experiencing significant food poverty over the past 15 years, as indicated by the Comprehensive Food Security Vulnerability Analysis studies in 2010 (45%), 2015 (50%), and 2020 (57%), these variables all lead to the elevated prevalence of malnutrition among children below the age of five years (Leone, 2021).

2.7 The Linkages Between Land Grabbing, Oil Palm Plantation, and Local Food Security

The questions of land grabs and oil palm plantations are linked and have significant implications for communities in terms of their access to and sustainable production of food. Gaining insight into these interrelationships is essential for tackling the challenges encountered by smallholder farmers and promoting food security at the community level. Land grabs denote the extensive acquisition of land by governments, corporations, or individuals typically for agricultural-driven purposes. According to the research conducted by Mutopo et al. (2011), the concept of land grabbing has been associated with several usage-related terms, including "water plunder," "green colonization," and "new land colonization." They emphasized that the expression "land grabbing" is considered to be more inclusive and applicable in the African context (Mutopo et al., 2011). Land resource management comprises a range of operations, including but not limited to exploration, negotiations, leasing or acquisition, settlement, and exploitation. Its primary objective is to ensure energy and food security by exporting to the countries of investors and other global markets (Mutopo et al. 2011). These purchases can affect local communities, as they often result in the displacement of people from their lands without sufficient compensation or alternate means of making a living. The phenomenon of land grabs particularly, for the establishment of oil palm plantations, has become increasingly prevalent in many developing countries, posing numerous challenges to local food security. The rapid development of land grabs for biofuel has caused 'frictions' and 'conflicts' amongst communities in the global south (Borras et al. 2010). Similarly, the work of Franco et al (2010) highlighted a critical analysis of the surge of biofuel in the face

of the global south, “as such administrative ordering has encountered many obstacles and conflicts” (Franco et al., 2010).

Oil palm plantations are highly desirable investments due to the significant demand for palm oil, which is utilized in diverse sectors like food, and cosmetics, and the use as a biofuel feedstock (Khatun et al. 2017). Nevertheless, the growth of these plantations frequently results in the reduction of local communities' ability to acquire land for agricultural purposes. Smallholder farmers experience land dispossession, leading to the loss of their primary source of food production. As a result, this leads to increased vulnerability in terms of food sustenance and livelihoods. This issue has resulted in the degradation of natural habitats and poses a significant threat to biodiversity preservation. Palm oil production is also linked to an increase in human-wildlife conflict, as its expansion disrupts natural ecosystems, forcing vast animal populations into smaller and more isolated places. The establishment of oil palm plantations also has adverse environmental effects. This frequently leads to deforestation, biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, deterioration of natural habitats, food chain disruption, soil property changes, water, and air pollution, and a severe risk to biodiversity (Khatun et al., 2017). As a result, local communities face challenges about food security, given that forests often function as a vital source of sustenance and means of livelihood. Oil palm cultivators frequently employ pesticides and fertilizers, which can contaminate water supplies and degrade soil fertility, adversely affecting subsistence farming. This leads to water scarcity and contamination of soil and water bodies. Monocultures, characterized by the cultivation of a single crop over a vast area of land, are vulnerable to pests and diseases, hence posing a risk to food security. In addition, oil palm plantations may prioritize export-oriented agriculture, diverting resources away from diversified food production, compromising local food security, and increasing dependence on imported food.

Energy obtained from plant materials, such as sugarcane and oil palm, is a potentially viable solution to meet energy needs without increasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Savilaakso et al. 2014). nevertheless, oil palm plantations have been found to have a significant and negative impact on a wide range of plant and animal species. The rise of oil palm agriculture has been linked to the negative implications of habitat loss, which is mostly caused by deforestation and pre-planting fires. Palm oil extraction has been acknowledged as a major cause of deforestation, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. According to Koh and Ghazoul (2008), increased biofuel farming can result in deforestation and the degradation of natural ecosystems through direct or indirect land use change.

The management of land is crucial for local populations' rights and livelihoods. Enforcing rules to protect land ownership rights, providing equitable compensation, and offering alternative livelihoods are essential measures to reduce the negative effects of land grabbing. Advocating sustainable agricultural methods among smallholder farmers can enhance local food security by expanding crop variety, advocating for agroecology, and providing access to education and resources. Land grabbing for oil palm plantations often leads to the eviction of smallholder farmers and the eradication of essential food-producing resources. A comprehensive strategy is needed to balance economic progress with environmental conservation.

Chapter 3 : Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

The study employs the theory of agrarian political economy, which focuses on the intricate relationship between agriculture, politics, and the economy. It emphasizes the significance of land ownership and the allocation of agricultural resources in influencing power dynamics within agrarian communities.

3.2 Agrarian Political Economy

The agrarian political economy examines the social dynamics of production, reproduction, property, and power in agrarian formations, and their historical and contemporary changes (Bernstein, 2010). It plays a pivotal role in posing the agrarian critical questions about the dynamics in the agrarian society. The agrarian questions of who owns it, how it is controlled, and for what purpose it is controlled will determine and reflect the distribution of power, property, and privilege in the rural areas, as well as capital's ability to overcome these constraints (Akram-Lodhi et al. 2012). The Agrarian Political Economy approach is a theoretical framework the study employed to understand the interconnection of agriculture, politics, and the economy. Bernstein's identification of the "agrarian question of labour" and "agrarian question of capital" distinguishes between capital and labour. The latter may still hold analytical significance for developing nations, whereas the former has become irrelevant due to globalization and its related processes (Kumar, 2017). Bernstein's (2010) four political Economy questions are demonstrated in this study. Who owns what (signifies property right in terms of production and reproduction). Who does what (talks about the social division of labour between production and reproduction). Who gets what (signifies the distribution of income). Lastly, what they do with it (emphasizes social relations of consumption, reproduction, and accumulation). This approach examines the impact of agricultural activities, such as farming, land ownership, and resource access, on social interactions, power dynamics, and political institutions in a society. The imbalanced allocation of land and resources in Sierra Leone among rural farmers is a significant problem to investigate the mechanisms by which authority is acquired and preserved within the agricultural industry. Akram Lodhi et al. (2012) provide further elaboration on Kautsky's concept of agrarian political economy in their research. Given that Agrarian Political Economy aims to "clarify the fundamental principles that govern the operation of modern capitalism and its connection to rural regions;

specifically, it investigates whether capital is altering the dynamics and connections of production in the agricultural sector at large, and among property owners and controllers in particular" (Akram-Lodhi et al. 2012, cited Kautsky, 1988).

Chapter 4 : Research Methods and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This section discusses the research methods and techniques used in carrying out this study. This includes the research rationale and design, description of the study area, sources of data, methods of data analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations.

4.2 Description of the Study Area

Sahn Malen Chiefdom is one of twelve chiefdoms located in the Pujehun District, which is situated in the Southern Province of Sierra, a West African country. It is located in the country's south, near the border with Liberia. The chiefdom is mostly rural, with lush green scenery, dense forests, and isolated communities. Malen Chiefdom is found in the steep and mountainous region of Sierra Leone. The region is recognized for its diversified ecosystem, which includes tropical rainforests as well as savannah grasslands. Several rivers and streams run through the area, supplying water for agriculture and other activities. The Mende ethnic group, which makes up the majority of Sierra Leone's population, dominates the local population of Sahn Malen Chiefdom. According to a report from Statistics Sierra Leone (2021), the estimated population of the chiefdom is about 42,654 with 10 sections overall (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2021). The people of Malen Chiefdom are well-known for their traditional agricultural practices, with farming being the primary source of income for the majority of the population. Similar to other rural regions in the country, the practice is adopted by and employs approximately 97% of the population (WFP 2008). Rice, cassava, yams, cocoa, and palm oil are among the crops grown in the chiefdom. Although rice is the primary food crop grown in this area, it is also well-known for its production and supply of palm oil and various other tree crops to both local and national markets. The local population engaged in low-input agriculture. The Chiefdom achieved near self-sufficiency in meeting its basic food requirements by integrating food crop cultivation with local stream fishing (Yengoh & Armah, 2014). The Chiefdom has undergone some changes in recent years as a result of economic operations, particularly those related to agriculture.

4.3 Research Approach

The study relied on secondary data to gather information related to the research and to answer some of the motivating research questions posed in this study (Panke, 2018). Analyzing

and interpreting data that already exists is a component of secondary research. It may be more efficient and economical to use a secondary research strategy rather than gathering fresh data if comprehensive and pertinent material is already available (Largan & Morris, 2019). This is especially true in cases where gathering original data is time-consuming, costly, or unfeasible. For this study, secondary data was employed to capture some of the instances of land grabs for local food security, using sources from journals, publications, and literature among others with a focus on the issue that surrounds land grabbing on the availability of local food security, and how this, in turn, impacts local communities in sustaining their livelihoods, predominantly the establishment of oil palm plantations in Sahn Malen Chiefdom. The secondary data collected focused on impacted communities and local populations who are mostly connected with the issues of land grabbing focusing on the oil palm plantations established in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District, Southern Sierra Leone.

4.4 Research Strategy

The integrative literature review strategy was employed in this study. This approach embroils a review that goes beyond merely summarizing and synthesizing the body of existing research is called an integrated literature review. It entails a thorough analysis of all the literature that is currently accessible on a certain subject to integrate various viewpoints, methodology, and conclusions to produce a more thorough understanding (Souza et al., 2010). The integrative literature review is often conducted in five phases to systematically work through conducting including identifying the problem, conducting a literature search, evaluating, analyzing data, and eventually presenting the findings generated from the data analysis (Torraco, 2016). This research strategy was appropriate for this study because, while an integrative literature review aims to use methodologies similar to those of a systematic review, it also permits the inclusion of primary research studies and other documents not included in a formal systematic review, such as opinions, discussion papers, and policy documents (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). An Integrative Literature Review offers fresh perspectives and condensed information about a particular subject, enabling researchers to move beyond the analysis and synthesis of primary research findings.

4.5 Data Collection

The study uses qualitative data analysis to capture some of the implications of land grabbing surrounding the nature of local food security with a specific focus on the establishment of the oil Plantation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom Pujehun District, Southern Sierra Leone. Sources

from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MASF), Ministry of Lands Country Planning and the Environment (MLCPE), Statistics of Sierra Leone (2015), National Sustainable Agricultural Development Plan (2010), Oakland Institute (2011), Christian Aid Sierra Leone, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) the Customary Land Rights Act, 2022 and Sierra Leone Annual Country Report, 2021 (the right to Free Prior Informed Consent) and National Land Commission Act are among the documents gathered for this research. This will enhance and create a better understanding of the study and will provide thought-provoking information that can be useful in examining land grabs and their implications on local food security, thus helping to mitigate the emerging concerns surrounding its nature and finding a plausible solution that will boost the well-being of common Sierra Leoneans more especially those living in rural communities.

4.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the data collected in this study. This method was chosen because Thematic analysis aligns with an interpretive paradigm, allowing researchers to explore meanings and interpretations embedded in the data. This is particularly valuable when studying subjective experiences or cultural phenomena (Terry, et al, 2017).

The first step embroiled the researcher familiarizing himself with the data by reading through the collected data to gain an initial understanding of its content. Take notes on potential patterns and interesting features that may emerge. The second step was generating initial codes by identifying and labelling interesting features and patterns. The codes were kept closely tied to the data and be open to the emergence of new codes as you progress. The third step was grouping related codes into potential themes based on similarities (Joffe, 2011). Through looking for overarching patterns and connections within the coded data. The researcher then reviewed and refined themes in the fourth step by engaging in a thorough examination of the identified themes, refining, and clarifying them as needed. The researcher ensured that each theme captured a meaningful aspect of the data. The themes were then defined and named in congruence to the research questions. Finally, the researcher presented the findings in a narrative format to answer the research questions.

4.7 Limitations

Sierra Leone faces the obstacle of having insufficient data resources, primarily from government department sections. This has resulted in restricted availability of resources from the government archives and gazettes about land and food security issues. Due to the lack of contemporary documentation in the government archives on the research topic, I have resorted to gathering relevant information from journals, articles, books, and newspapers published by scholars, and local and international organizations. The issue of land grabs and their influence on local food security is a delicate subject that necessitates the inclusion of both primary and secondary data collection. The latter is utilized in this study. However, there are missed opportunities to gather first-hand information from impacted communities through the collection of primary data. The use of secondary sources limits the ability to gather first-hand information from impacted communities. For example, the facial expressions, signs and gestures, and perspectives of the participant could have been observed during the collection of primary data, for example, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Typically, corporations engaged in land grabbing frequently neglect to provide accurate information regarding the situation on the ground. Consequently, this might restrict the scope of the research and the ability to gather relevant information.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

When examining the effects of land grabbing on the availability of local food for the population in Sierra Leone, specifically Sahn Malen Chiefdom where an oil palm plantation has been established, it is crucial to consider many ethical factors. The phenomenon of land grabs can exert substantial effects on residents and the environment, and it is of utmost importance to include ethical concerns when evaluating the situation. The study employs the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of Erasmus University (EUR) research ethical guidelines. By using secondary data and literature, it is necessary for ethical consideration requirements to be obligatory and self-evident, to prevent any additional comment or ambiguity (Rani & Sharma, 2012). The study adheres to all procedures and ethics in relation to data accuracy and reliability, the use for the intended purpose of the research, respect for the social and cultural sensitivity of the topic, privacy, and confidentiality, and all other ethical considerations that the study must maintain.

Chapter 5 : Findings and Discussions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on analyzing the data findings by using relevant literature to investigate the consequences of land grabbing on local food security in Sierra Leone. It specifically examines its implications on smallholder farmers and impacted communities, particularly the Sahn Malen community where an oil palm plantation has been established. The chapter is divided into six sections that provide additional clarification on its influence on the environment as well as the socioeconomic welfare of the local population. Section one examines and evaluates the process of land grabbing and its impact on land access and ownership in Sahn Malen Chiefdom. Section two delves into the implications of land grabs on local food access and availability. Section three examines the phenomenon of land grabbing and its subsequent impact on environmental degradation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom. Section four discusses the community disputes and conflicts that have arisen due to the establishment of an oil palm plantation in the study area. The adverse impacts of land grabbing on youth employment in Sierra Leone, particularly in the study area, are further explained in section five. Section six examines the livelihoods and coping strategies of smallholder farmers who are primarily impacted by the consequences of land grabbing in Sahn Malen Chiefdom.

5.2 Land Grabs and Access to Land

Land access and ownership have been a complex and difficult topic in Sahn Malen Chiefdom for many years. The area's colonial history, followed by a decade-long civil war, has resulted in a fragmented and frequently complicated system of land access and ownership (Baxter, 2013). As a result, many people and communities have faced disputes, confrontations, and a lack of security. The area has a dual land tenure system, i.e. customary and statutory land ownership (Borras & Franco, 2010). Customary land ownership refers to land that is owned and managed according to traditional customs and conventions, whereas statutory land ownership is based on legally recognized rights and title deeds.

The persistent problems of land grabs and land access in the area provide formidable obstacles to sustainable development and the well-being of local communities (Bottazzi et al., 2018). The absence of well-defined land access and ineffective land governance systems are significant factors contributing to land grabbing. Women, children, and young people face disproportionate discrimination and denial of land rights under customary law, as

acknowledged by the National Land Policy (2015). Traditionally, land has been mostly owned and managed according to local customs, with shared rights and often lacking legal documentation. This has facilitated the ability of external entities to exploit vulnerabilities or manipulate the system for their advantage.

Another influential aspect is the swift growth of industrial agriculture and extractive industries, propelled by investments from both domestic and foreign sources. Extensive land tracts are necessary for large-scale agricultural projects, such as palm oil plantations or mining operations, which often result in the displacement of local communities that depend on the land for their livelihoods (Brima, 2015). In their study, Yengoh & Armah (2016) emphasize the necessity of establishing a minimum allocation of agricultural land for each community affected by land grabbing, to guarantee food security. Essentially, the minimum need should be enhanced by conducting a requirements assessment at the local level in order to fulfil the increased demand for agricultural land caused by demographic changes (Cochrane, 2011). Land acquisition through coercion or unlawful means has profound and far-reaching effects on the environment, the economy, and society. As a result, community displacement, endemic poverty, and conflict can be the aftermath (Koroma, 2015). For instance, the acquisition of land by SAC for the establishment of an oil palm plantation in the Sahn Malen region contradicts the laws outlined in chapter three, section 21 cap 4 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone:

“ Any such property of whatever description compulsorily taken possession of, and any interest in, or right over, property of any description compulsorily acquired in the public interest or for public purposes, shall be used only in the public interest or for the purposes for which it is taken or acquired” (Sierra Leone Constitution, 1991).

According to numerous studies foreign investors have been able to extend their land leases beyond the legal 50-year limit, extending them to 99 years (Koroma, 2015; Baxter, 2013; Oakland Institute, 2011). For example, MAFFS executed a land lease agreement in Malen Chiefdom, which was later subleased to SAC. This contract violated the country's land law by offering a renewal option for 25 years instead of the required 21 years (Koroma, 2015). Community members expressed dissatisfaction with the agreement, claiming they had no knowledge of their land being leased or sold to foreign investors. The majority of the population in the chiefdom perceives land transactions as permanent relinquishment, leaving nothing for future generations. Tensions arose between community people and stakeholders in attempting to establish the true purpose of the agreement for the establishment of an oil

palm plantation (Baxter, 2013). They registered the wrongful means of acquiring their land without prior procedures and protocols being fully observed by SAC.

In his FAO report on the Land Governance Assessment Framework (LGAF), Kaindaneh (2015) asserts that the Constitution of 1991 acknowledges the existence of Sierra Leone's dual legal system and the right to the enjoyment of property is conferred, but, the issue of land access and ownership is not addressed. It upholds the rights and liberties of individuals, including safeguarding against expropriation without fair payment or appropriate compensation, and ensuring protection against deprivation of property, including compulsorily acquisition but fails to make mention of the rights of individuals' access to land and ownership (Kaindaneh, 2015).

Displaced communities are confronted with the loss of their homes, agricultural land, and means to utilize natural resources, which contributes to an escalation in both poverty and food insecurity. Additionally, local communities are frequently faced with property ownership disputes, human rights violations, and labour exploitation (Leone, 2019). Therefore, normative standards established by human rights could be used to assess the outcomes and processes of transnational land acquisitions (Wisborg, 2013). The rural populations in Sahn Malen Chiefdom have a crucial challenge regarding land access, given that the majority of the population relies on subsistence farming. Inadequate land tenure security impedes agricultural output, rural development, and poverty alleviation endeavours. Moreover, it weakens the capacity of smallholder farmers to allocate resources towards sustainable methods, obtain finance or insurance, and engage in value chains. Mcleod (2003) recommends that governments should create a new and expanded comprehensive strategy that supports agricultural extension and communication for rural development (Millar, 2015). This supports the framework that would enhance and create a better space for rural and vulnerable communities to achieve their sustainable development goals agenda.

The process of acquiring land in Sahn Malen Chiefdom differs from one place to another due to historical and legal differences. Both individuals and corporations can acquire land for various purposes, however, the uncertainty surrounding ownership rights may impede potential investments (Alliance, 2015). The complexities that surround the land tenure system in Sahn Malen Chiefdom impede the effective utilization of land, particularly for agricultural endeavours. Instruments that represent ownership of land are not dependable and necessitate clear registration (Kaindaneh, 2015). In most cases, farmers and landholders encounter limitations when using their land as collateral, which hampers their capacity to secure credit loans and funding.

Moreover, Sahn Malen Chiefdom predominantly consists of customary land, which holds great cultural and societal importance for local communities. Nevertheless, numerous customary land rights lack legal recognition or documentation, rendering them susceptible to encroachment and displacement (Yengoh, & Armah, 2015). The absence of a comprehensive and transparent land record system has caused the rise of land disputes and conflicts among local communities and stakeholders (chiefs, government officials, council representatives, etc). Disputes over land ownership often arise among multiple parties, resulting in protracted legal conflicts and, in some cases, acts of violence.

In response to these difficulties, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) has implemented measures to enhance land governance and guarantee the security of land rights. The National Land Policy, implemented in 2019, seeks to provide a comprehensive structure for land management, encompassing protocols for land procurement, distribution, and conflict resolution (Bottazzi et al., 2018). The government has also implemented land mapping and registration initiatives to establish and safeguard land ownership and access rights. International organizations and civil society groups are actively engaged in advocating for land rights and access and providing support to local communities (Borras et al., 2010). Their services encompass legal aid, advocacy for land governance concerns, and the advancement of community-driven land management frameworks, examples of such local and international organizations are the Legal Aid Board of Sierra Leone, Advocacy for Human Rights and Justice Sierra Leone (ADHJUST S/L), Christian Aid Sierra Leone, among others.

Nevertheless, there remains a significant amount of work that needs to be undertaken to address land grabbing and guarantee fair and equal land access in Sahn Malen Chiefdom. Enhancing land governance, promoting transparency, and engaging local communities in decision-making processes are critical measures for attaining sustainable land management and safeguarding the rights of marginalized communities (Fairhead, et al., 2012). However, the execution of the land policy has been slow and faced with several obstacles for instance, a lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure and capability, and opposition to change among some traditional leaders and communities. Hudson et al. (2019) argue that the success or failure of implementation policies is not solely attributable to their merits, but rather to the implementation process itself. The coexistence and frequent competition between customary and legal land tenure systems in Sierra Leone add complexity to the issue of land access and ownership (Johnson, 2011). The preservation of customary land rights and the implementation of comprehensive land reform remain critical objectives in ensuring the wellbeing and fairness of the Sahn Malen community.

In the Malen Chiefdom, it is the families that own land and there is a chieftaincy structure playing a key role in administration and custody. There is a major pervasive idea of the inalienability of land from the landowning families and chiefdoms. Therefore, land is mainly allocated and not leased (Alliance, 2015; Kaindaneh, 2015). Statutory law has a procedure for people who are not natives to get leaseholds which need the permission of the local councils and chiefdoms. Investors are allowed to either lease land directly from the owners of land or sublease it from the government as the primary leaseholder. In Malen Chiefdom, the SAC investment was made to look like a far smaller deal than was the case (Kaindaneh, 2015). Local people who own land and land users were informed only after the making of the decision by the tribal authorities and were required to thumbprint or sign without understanding the facts of the agreement. When the agreement was made, some local people expecting to get employment and opportunities for education agreed to the terms imposed (Alliance, 2015). However, the opportunities they expected did not materialize.

5.3 Environmental Degradation as a Consequence of Land Grabbing in Sahn Malen Chiefdom

The occurrence of land grabbing in Sahn Malen Chiefdom has been progressively expanding, resulting in severe environmental consequences. The increase of land grabbing in Sahn Malen Chiefdom by foreign entities has triggered a discussion on the phenomenon known as the 'global land grab' (Maconachie, 2019). There is a debate about whether foreign investments in land will enhance agricultural economies and foster sustainable development. However, there are concerns raised by some regarding the adverse social effects, such as the infringement on indigenous land rights and the possible risks to livelihoods and food security (Cotula, 2012). This discussion has ignited a contentious discourse over the consequences of foreign land acquisitions in the region of sub-Saharan Africa.

The Sahn Malen Chiefdom is still on record as one of the country's agricultural-driven regions, accounting for a rich resource area covered with mangrove forests and fertile soil, making it rich for agricultural production. Sahn Malen Chiefdom, situated in the Pujehun District of Sierra Leone, has been afflicted by land degradation problems in recent times (Khatun et al., 2017). The Malen community has experienced substantial socio-economic and environmental repercussions as a result of this. Land grabbing can have far-reaching implications on deforestation, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and water contamination, specifically focused on the establishment of the oil palm plantation in the Sahn Malen community in Southern Sierra Leone (Koroma, 2015). Consequently, this situation leads to food

insecurity and the deprivation of livelihoods for local communities that depend on agriculture for their survival.

Deforestation

Deforestation is a significant and complex environmental issue in Sahn Malen Chiefdom (Mihaylova, 2023). According to expert estimates, the initial forest coverage of the area was approximately 60%. During the past two centuries, a significant portion of primary forests, amounting to over 97%, and a substantial portion of the overall forest cover, amounting to over 70%, have been destroyed (Blinker, 2006; IUCN, 1993). An important point of contention in the discourse surrounding the origins of tropical deforestation is whether one accepts the population approach, which attributes the phenomenon to poverty and population growth, or the property rights market approach, which attributes it to market forces including prices, access costs, and property rights (Angelsen et al, 1999) This raises the question of whether the responsibility for deforestation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom should be attributed to the local population or to the property rights market approach (that has to do with land rights and access). The latter has been contended in the current regional context, where the rights of landowners and the community have been denied. Angelsen et al., (1999) contend that the decision-making process regarding agricultural expansion and deforestation in various developing regions should be treated as an investment decision. This is because forest clearing often grants farmers ownership rights over the cleared land (Angelsen et al. 1999). The primary causes of Sahn Malen Chiefdom's rampant deforestation include mining activities, agricultural expansion, the conversion of land for urban development, and the high demand for firewood and charcoal, which serves as the main energy source for 95% of the population (Blinker, 2006, UNEP, 2010).

Land grabbing in Sahn Malen Chiefdom involves the illegal or morally questionable appropriation of land for industrial agriculture, particularly oil palm plantations. This process leads to deforestation, which depletes forests, essential for reducing climate change impacts and providing habitat for various plant and animal species. Deforestation not only contributes to heightened greenhouse gas emissions (Angelsen et al, 1999) but also has profound consequences for local communities and indigenous populations who depend on forests for sustenance. The World Bank reports, that more than 1.6 billion individuals depend on forests for basic needs, and 300 million reside in forested regions. Forests cover nearly one-third of the earth's land surface or about 3.9 billion hectares of the world's land is covered by forests (Chakravarty et al., 2012), and provide numerous environmental benefits such as a significant

role in the hydrologic cycle, soil conservation, climate change prevention, and biodiversity preservation (Sheram, 1993). According to Bryant et al., (1997), estimated that the original forest reserve accounted for 6 billion hectares. Forests are crucial for attaining sustainable development (Okia, 2012). The forest product industry fosters economic expansion and employment opportunities, with global trade valued at \$327 billion Okia (2012) claimed. Deforestation leads to the annual loss of 130,000 square kilometers of forest area worldwide, as reported by the Food and Agricultural Organization. Forest products are effectively utilized and contribute to long-term progress through the implementation of sustainable forest management (Okia, 2012). Empirical data from around the world indicates that forests can generate enduring economic advantages for nations. The destruction of forests can have adverse effects on their social and traditional structure, as these communities often have profound cultural and spiritual ties to the land. Deforestation also leads to soil erosion, depletion of soil fertility, reduction in biodiversity, and depletion of water reserves (Jackson, 2015; IUCN, 1993; Thomson Reuters, 2019)., resulting in a decline in agricultural productivity over time. Environmental degradation is a major consequence of land grabbing in Sahn Malen Chiefdom. Extensive land acquisitions frequently include deforestation, as corporations clear huge tracts of land to facilitate agriculture, mining, or infrastructure endeavours. The unselective deforestation leads to the loss of natural habitats, poses a threat to biodiversity, and disturbs delicate ecological support. Deforestation causes soil erosion by diminishing the stability of the soil by the elimination of trees and plants. In the absence of tree roots anchoring the soil, it becomes vulnerable to erosion caused by wind and rain. This leads to the loss of nutrient-rich topsoil and the deterioration of agricultural land. Consequently, this situation leads to food insecurity and the deprivation of livelihoods for local communities that depend on agriculture for their survival.

The Impacts on Water Quality

Land acquisition can also result in significant repercussions for water resources. Chemicals used by the company can enhance the depletion of vegetation and can disturb the hydrological cycle, resulting in diminished water supply in rivers and streams (Lynch et al., 2013). The process of using chemicals frequently entails the application of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, which have the potential to pollute water sources and inflict damage upon aquatic ecosystems. This contamination not only impacts the indigenous plant and animal life in the area, but also presents significant health hazards to the inhabitants who rely on these water sources for consumption, bathing, and agricultural purposes. Woodhouse & Ganho (2011)

assert that the significance of water access in land grabs should not be underestimated. This has an underlying effect on local communities in obtaining access to water resources and ensuring sustainable water usage (Cochrane, 2011). Research carried out by Brima (2022) assessing the impacts of chemical waste through SAC pipes dumped into the rivers, streams, and lakes of nearby communities where the plantation is located. Salia Lebbie, a resident of Massao village, 1.5 kilometers from SAC's mill on the banks of the river Malen, describes how their river is polluted: "There are times when we see dead fish floating and the water changes colour to brown," he says. Lebbie accuses the company of polluting the river by dumping mill waste into ponds and pipes that empty directly into rivers and swamps (Brima, 2022). A report from key findings by Leone (2019) in partnership with FIAN on the establishment of SAC oil palm plantation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom filed that:

SOCFIN's agro-industrial operations in the Chiefdom pose a significant risk to the local water supply. There is a concern that water sources may become polluted and water usage, including for future generations, may be disrupted. These concerns arise from an agreement between the company and the Government, which permits SAC to extract unlimited amounts of water for its activities in Malen at an extremely low cost of \$0.00012 per cubic meter (Leone, 2019; Cochrane, 2011). Local communities filed a complaint to the EPA in 2013, reporting significant pollution levels in the Malen River, as well as a substantial number of deceased fish. MALOA made multiple efforts but failed to provide any public report or findings to the community (Leone, 2019).

Water has been the source of livelihood for many communities in Sahn Malen Chiefdom. Been able to use it for both domestic and agricultural purposes. The contamination of water by the waste of chemicals has a detrimental effect on the lives of the local population and, erstwhile, local communities in this region (Brima, 2022). The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) of Sierra Leone is manned with the responsibility to maintain and protect environmental issues in the country. However, they prove futile in addressing the issue of environmental degradation caused by the establishment of the oil palm plantation in the Sahn Malen community (Leone, 2019). It should be noted that the impacts of this underlying problem have raised concern among journalists, local and international organizations as well and community members, who shared their dismay towards this issue.



Figure 3: Picture showing chemical waste from SAC pipes. Photo credit: Abdul Brima <https://earthjournalism.net/stories/socfin-and-the-palm-oil-business-how-industrial-plantations-are-costing-west-africa>

Figure 3 depicts chemical waste from SAC pipes to swamps in one of the impacted communities. This process causes pollution that affects food security by depleting important sources of livelihood, such as fish, crops, and drinking water for livestock. It also has adverse effects on the health of local residents, leading to an increase in illnesses and contributing to the loss of biodiversity and other detrimental environmental consequences (AFRICA, 2022)

Another notable impact is the prevalence of women subjected to do house chores by fetching water in nearby streams and often spending multiple hours a day, maybe more, for use in their homes (Millar, 2015). The disruption of women's caregiving roles and social networks can also force young girls to forego education in favour of gathering water for their families.

The Effect on the Soil

Alongside water supply, soil health is the most valuable resource for humans, as their very survival is dependent on its fertility (Gomiero, 2016). As a consequence, soil degradation presents a threat to food security due to its detrimental effects on crop productivity, increased input requirements for farmers, and potential abandonment of the soil. The notion of soil is emphasized in the work of (Gomiero, 2016), where he maintained that "Regrettably, the soil has consistently been linked with the concept of "dirt", while "culture", which emphasizes

knowledge and appreciation of literature, arts, philosophy, and the development of humanist ideas, has been regarded as superior to the essential role of providing food, feed, fiber, and fuel to sustain human existence”. The degradation of soil health in Sahn Malen Chieftdom has been exacerbated by improper agricultural practices, specifically the excessive application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides by SAC (Gomiero, 2016). The local farmers that were employed by SAC do not go through technical training on organic and modern farming techniques and, therefore lack the technical skills and proper understanding to employ organic farming methods in the soil. This in return has inadvertently exhausted soil nutrients, damaged beneficial soil organisms, and contaminated water bodies with agrochemical runoff.

Harm to Biodiversity

Large-scale land acquisitions result in the displacement of local inhabitants and the disruption of their traditional lifestyles. These communities relied on wood and land for many generations, employing sustainable practices that protected natural resources and preserved biodiversity (Mousseau & Schaefer, 2012). Nevertheless, when external entities assume authority over the territory, they frequently adopt unsustainable methodologies that favour immediate financial gains at the expense of long-term ecological and societal welfare.

To sum up, some of the main causes of land degradation in Sahn Malen Chieftdom are the implementation of unsustainable land management practices, including deforestation, the waste of chemicals by SAC, and improper agricultural techniques (Okia, 2012). The chieftdom primarily depends on agriculture as the main source of sustenance, with smallholder farmers playing a vital role. Regrettably, the dearth of knowledge and resources on sustainable farming techniques and the improper use of fertilizers and chemicals has led to the occurrence of soil erosion, diminished crop yields, and a decline in the quality of farmland (Podder, 2023). In the absence of a sufficient reforestation plan, deforestation has resulted in the depletion of biodiversity, disturbance of hydrological cycles, and heightened susceptibility to climate change effects such as floods and droughts.

The consequences of land degradation in Sahn Malen Chieftdom are significant. The decrease in agricultural output and livestock efficiency has led to an increase in food insecurity and poverty among the local population (Alliance, 2015). Moreover, the decline in biodiversity and disruption of hydrological cycles have adversely impacted the availability of natural resources, heightening the vulnerability of the community in terms of sustaining livelihoods.

To tackle land degradation in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy is necessary. Primarily, it is imperative to enhance awareness and education regarding sustainable land management practices among local farmers. These objectives can be accomplished by implementing training programs, workshops, and the widespread distribution of knowledge regarding agroecology and organic farming methodologies (Podder, 2023). Additionally, it is imperative to implement strategies that support the restoration of forests and the establishment of new forests in the chiefdom. Examples of such efforts encompass reforestation projects, programs aimed at conserving water resources, and the creation of forests managed by local communities (Thomson, 2001). Promoting sustainable forestry practices and enforcing regulations to combat illegal logging can effectively contribute to reducing deforestation (Savilaakso et al., 2014). Finally, the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS) should transition to sustainable practices that prioritize soil conservation and subsistence farming methods.

5.4 The Implications of land grabs on local food access and Availability

The right to food is recognized as a fundamental human right by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (United Nations 1948; United Nations, 1990). Although land acquisitions may boost economic growth and agricultural output in some instances, they can also impact local food access and availability. When such acquisitions occur in places of conflict, post-conflict, and/or weak governance there is less monitoring and control and even greater negative effects (Cochrane, 2011 cited Mabikke, 2011).

One of the main issues of land grabbing is the eviction of smallholder farmers and indigenous populations from their ancestral land. These populations frequently rely on the land for their livelihoods and food production (Cochrane, 2011). When their land is taken away from them, they lose a source of food and income, resulting in food insecurity and poverty. This can lead to a greater reliance on external food sources, limiting local food access and availability. Moreover, land grabbing sometimes prioritizes financial gain at the expense of local food production (Mutopo et al., 2011). Large-scale agri-businesses prioritize the production of export commodities rather than basic food crops for local consumption when they acquire extensive land tracts (UNEP, 2010). This practice sometimes referred to as "cash cropping" might result in a decline in the yield of conventional food crops, hence reducing the variety and accessibility of locally cultivated foods.

Communities have been deprived of their ability to access farmland, hindering their capacity to cultivate food and cash crops (like cocoa, ginger, and coffee). The establishment of SAC's oil palm plantation has caused the Sahn Malen communities to experience a significant decline in both the variety and the standard of food they consume (Alliance, 2015). There has been a decrease in the number of meals consumed each day in numerous households, with the average dropping from 2-3 meals to 1-2 meals per day (Leone, 2019). As a result of a lack of local foodstuff and cash crop sales, increased commodity prices in local markets, and increased food purchases, Leone (2019) argues that a drop in household income has led to a decline in purchasing power.

The assurances provided by SAC to alleviate the negative impacts are insufficient or disregarded altogether. Community members have expressed their dissatisfaction with several issues. Firstly, they are unhappy with the inadequate size of the 'buffer zones' or 'green belts' that separate plantations from villages, as these areas are not meeting the promised 500m requirement for gardening (Alliance, 2015). Additionally, the inland valley swamps that are allocated to communities for cultivation are unsuitable due to chemical pollution. Furthermore, the smallholder out-grower scheme, which was allocated a budget of \$2,608,000, has never been implemented. Lastly, the company's corporate social responsibility program, specifically the 600-acre rice project and the construction of fishponds, do not provide sufficient means for communities to adequately feed themselves (Leone, 2019)

Land acquisition can also have a significant impact on local food supply systems. Conventional farming methods that are ecologically sustainable and harmonized with local ecosystems and markets are often being replaced by monoculture farming systems that heavily depend on machinery, chemical inputs, and external markets (Alliance, 2015; Leone, 2019). As conventional small-scale agricultural methods are forsaken, the dynamics of regional food production and accessibility undergo alterations, potentially exerting an adverse impact on food security.

In the past, the Malen Chiefdom was a farming community with a significant level of self-sufficiency. Currently, it has become a quasi-landless society that depends on indeterminate and irregular demand for labor leading to suffering and the anxiety and uncertainty that accompanies with such dependency (Alliance, 2015). Upon taking the land by SAC, farmers were given only a one-time payment of to 1 million leones (SLL) (about US\$220) for each acre of oil palm plantation lost. They got no compensation for other crops. This money is relatively less compared with the yearly income farmers would get from their crops. In a smallholder farming system, every family member contributes to the success of the farm

(Leone, 2019). However, today, large-scale plantation needs less labor, and former farm families must depend on the income obtained by individual family members. Jobs are mainly casual, and labor is recruited on a daily basis. Although the plantation has many laborers from outside the Chiefdom, no room is available for the employment of the people who leased their land (Peeters, 2009). Although the levels of payment on the plantations are in tandem with similar investment projects in other parts of the country, a daily wage of US\$2.20 (SLL 10,000) is inadequate to cater for the food needs of a household, especially in considering the rising consumer prices (Alliance, 2015). With the declining level of self-sufficiency, and the rising prices of food access is now a major problem for many people. The quality and quantity of food available to many people in the Chiefdom after the SAC deal has considerably gone down (Wisborg, 2013). For example, the quantity of bushmeat consumed has dropped considerably because large tracts of forested land have been cleared for large-scale cultivation (Yang & He, 2021).

To mitigate the adverse consequences of land grabs on the local food supply and accessibility, it is imperative to emphasize land rights and involve affected communities in the decision-making process. Governments must establish policies that safeguard the rights of smallholder farmers and indigenous communities, foster sustainable land management practices, and support the adoption of different farming systems (Yengoh, & Armah, 2016). Additionally, boosting local food markets and agroecological practices, as well as investing in infrastructure and support services for smallholder farmers, can enhance local food access and availability while fostering a more sustainable and inclusive food system.

5.5 Influence of Land Grabs on Community Disputes in Sahn Malen Chiefdom

The concerns of land grabbing and community disputes in Sahn Malen Chiefdom are complex matters that have persisted for 12 years to date. The Sahn Malen Chiefdom, situated in the Pujehun District of Sierra Leone, has had challenges with land tenure and the exploitation of resources, resulting in disputes among various factions within the community (Blinker, 2006). In October 2011, protests were held against the SAC's activities in Kortumahun village, which was home to its nursery with 750,000 oil palm seedlings, marking the first instance of localized resistance (Podder, 2023). According to various sources, the police crackdown and arrest of 40 protestors prompted the villagers to form the Malen Affected Landowners and Users Association (MALOA) (LandJustice4WestAfrica, 2014).

The primary factor contributing to land grabbing in Sahn Malen Chiefdom is the existence of extensive commercial agricultural ventures (Baxter, 2013). However, SAC, a subsidiary of the Belgian corporation SOCFIN invested a whopping sum of \$100 million for the cultivation of palm oil and rubber with approximately 18,473 hectares of arable land in Pujehun District in 2011 (Green Scenery, 2011). These projects frequently promise economic development and employment possibilities to the local population. For example, the government minister and the SAC officials pledged a total of US\$19 million for local investment in hospitals, new roads, schools, and housing, as well as the generation of 10,000 local employment opportunities (Podder, 2023). As a result, they fall short of meeting their corporate social responsibility by failing to keep their promises.

The implementation of these extensive agricultural initiatives, coupled with the corresponding land procurements, has resulted in tensions and conflicts within the community. Numerous residents perceive a disregard for their traditional land entitlements, resulting in demonstrations and widespread tensions within the community (Borras & Franco, 2010). The absence of adequate consultation and compensation methods exacerbates these issues and frequently results in a deterioration of trust between the SAC and the impacted community. The communities of Sahn Malen Chiefdom have traditionally depended on customary land tenure arrangements, which are established by traditional rituals and verbal agreements (Alliance, 2015). Nevertheless, the growing demand for purchasing commercial land has led to a situation where the lack of official land titles has caused disputes and disagreements regarding land boundaries.

Moreover, these conflicts are frequently intensified by the local population's inadequate knowledge of land laws and regulations. Numerous communities are deficient in their understanding of their entitlements and the procedural aspects of settling land conflicts (Leone, 2019; Alliance, 2015). The lack of understanding in this area results in an unequal distribution of power and opens up the possibility of being taken advantage of by external entities.

To tackle these problems, it is important to guarantee more community involvement and consultation in decision-making procedures for land purchases and resource utilization (Bottazzi, 2018). This entails the implementation of transparent and inclusive procedures that enable impacted communities to express their concerns and engage in negotiations for equitable compensation and agreements on sharing benefits.

In addition, enhancing land governance institutions and fostering the documentation of land ownership through comprehensive land registration systems can effectively mitigate conflicts related to property boundaries and offer legal certainty to all stakeholders (Brima, 2015).

Effective capacity-building programs and legal education initiatives are crucial in empowering the local population with the necessary knowledge and skills to safeguard their land rights and interests.

5.6 Land Grabs and Local Employment

In countries experiencing an economic expansion, the presence of an expanding workforce can effectively keep labour costs at a minimum and perhaps stimulate labour-intensive growth and development (Alemu, 2016). Sahn Malen Chiefdom is currently emerging from a phase of post-conflict reconstruction, which precipitated a decade-long civil war that commenced in 1991 and inflicted extensive damage upon the nation's economic, social, and physical infrastructure (Peeters, 2009). According to a report, 11 years of civil war resulted in the relocation of many people, many deaths, and immense suffering, particularly for unprivileged youth in rural areas who lack educational access and subsistence means (Peeters, 2009). The National Youth Policy of Sierra Leone and the National Youth Commission Act of 2009 define youth as all Sierra Leonean females and males between 15 and 35 years old. Over 80% of Africans rely on agricultural, extractives, forestry, and fishing activities for their livelihoods (UNESSEC, 2011). Harnessing the country's vast potential through the utilization of its abundant natural resources can enhance its human, economic, and social assets by optimizing long-term expansion and advancement of employment opportunities.

A finding from Leone (2019) in partnership with FIAN reported that SAC actions in the Malen Chiefdom are anticipated to impact about 32,842 villagers. However, SAC only provides 1,178 permanent job posts (Alliance, 2015). In addition, a limited number of individuals from the Chiefdom communities hold roles in administration or supervision. SAC asserts that, apart from providing permanent contracts, it also presents an additional 2,500 career prospects for temporary employees, who are subjected to highly uncertain employment circumstances (Leone, 2019). Typically, they lack a formal contract and are subject to being terminated without notice. Compensation is based upon the successful execution of daily assignments, which are characterized as highly challenging to achieve. Supervisors have the authority to assess completeness, and workers frequently report instances of corruption (Brima, 2015). Consequently, the corporation paid seasonal local workers an average salary ranging from around 150,000 to 250,000 Leones per month, significantly lower than the minimum wage in Sierra Leone, which is 500,000 Leones per month. Employment opportunities for elderly community members are entirely disregarded (Leone, 2019). The frequency

of workers' strikes in 2018 escalated, resulting in heightened tension and additional instances of human rights breaches and abuses.

The youth in Sierra Leone can be significantly impacted by land grabs, mainly due to the frequent acquisition of lands. When extensive tracts of land are procured for commercial endeavours such as agriculture or mining, towns and local people who rely on that land for their sustenance are frequently compelled to relocate (Alliance, 2015). The act of displacement can significantly affect the lives of young individuals, leading to the loss of their residences, ancestral territories, and the ability to obtain necessary resources. And yet the question arises as to whether they are ready to inherit the land for farming. Many youngsters tend to overlook farming as a main objective and focus on relocating to big cities in search of greener pastures. And also, the question posed by White (2020) is, will this pattern of smallholder farming continue? Posed serious concerns about the smallholder farmer populations in relation to age, and in some regions, mostly in Africa smallholder farmers appear to have no successor (White, 2010). An additional problem pertains to the reasons and extent to which young men and women, despite their interest in farming, encounter growing restrictions and even total denial of land access, as well as other obstacles hindering their involvement in agriculture (White, 2010).

The Sierra Leone government must prioritize the rights and interests of local communities, including the youth, in land deals. Transparent and participatory processes, involving consultation and consent from affected communities, will safeguard their rights (Botazzi et al., 2018). Investment in youth-focused programs like vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and agricultural initiatives can enhance local employment prospects and empower the youth.

5.7 Livelihoods and coping strategies of smallholder farmers in Sahn Malen Chiefdom

The livelihoods and coping strategies of smallholder farmers in Sahn Malen Chiefdom are shaped by a multitude of factors including resource availability, market dynamics, climatic patterns, and access to support services. Small-scale farmers in this area commonly depend on agriculture as their main means of income and sustenance (Alliance, 2015). Oil palm is a primary crop grown by small-scale farmers in Sahn Malen Chiefdom. These farmers frequently participate in the cultivation and harvesting of oil palm fruits on a modest scale, mostly to produce palm oil. The oil palm sector offers employment opportunities to

members of the community, enabling farmers to generate revenue by selling their oil palm products (Brima, 2015).

Smallholder farmers in Sahn Malen Chiefdom not only cultivate oil palm but also practice subsistence agriculture, cultivating a diverse range of food crops including rice, cassava, maize, and vegetables (Brima, 2015). These crops function as a primary food source for the farmers and their families, and can also be sold in local markets to generate supplementary revenue.

Smallholder farmers frequently utilize diverse coping techniques to effectively manage risks and uncertainties in highly unpredictable agricultural markets. An effective approach is diversification, wherein farmers plant a variety of crops and participate in additional income-generating endeavors such as livestock husbandry, poultry farming, or artisanal activities (Alliance, 2015; Leone 2019). This diversity serves to alleviate the effects of agricultural failures or market changes.

To deal with obstacles, smallholder farmers also use the strategy of collaboration and collective action. For example, the 'osusu' or money lending scheme offers farmers financial assistance to purchase seedlings, with the remainder utilized to care for their families (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones, 2012). Farmers often organize cooperatives or organizations to promote and sell their products collectively, engage in more favorable pricing negotiations, gain access to financial institutions, and share information and resources. This collaboration gives them a more powerful market position and improves the farming community's overall ability to endure adversities (Cochrane, 2011). Smallholder farmers in Sahn Malen Chiefdom can improve their productivity and ability to handle challenges by seeking support from agricultural extension agencies and non-governmental organizations like Feed Salone, CARE, and ActionAid among others. These organizations offer instruction, expert guidance, and opportunities to utilize enhanced agricultural methods, technologies, and resources (Leone, 2019). Smallholder farmers rely on access to finance and financial services to make investments in their farms and manage unforeseen costs or losses.

Ultimately, the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Sahn Malen Chiefdom are reliant on agriculture through subsistence farming, and microfinances. They utilize a range of coping mechanisms, including diversification, collaboration, and obtaining support services, to effectively handle the dangers and uncertainties that come with agricultural activity (Brima, 2015; Cochrane, 2011). Smallholder farmers adopt these tactics to enhance their ability to withstand challenges and maintain their livelihoods. According to Alliance (2015) some locals have many debts because they depend on loans to buy food and other essential items

Chapter 6 : Conclusion

Land appropriation and the establishment of oil palm plantations has a substantial effect on food security in the Malen Chiefdom. This phenomenon, which is frequently instigated by multinational corporations or foreign investors, entails the acquisition of expansive areas of property without obtaining local consent or engagement. Existing food production systems and livelihoods were disrupted by the eviction of indigenous communities and small-scale producers, resulting in a loss of local food security. The loss of ecosystem services and biodiversity, which are vital for agricultural productivity and food security, is exacerbated by deforestation. The study demonstrated the repercussions of land grabbing on local food security in the Sahn Malen Chiefdom of Sierra Leone, with a specific focus on the oil palm plantation located in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun District. The study regularly employs the words "local food security" and "land grabbing" to explore their complex relationship with the livelihood of vulnerable communities.

This research investigates the implications of land grabbing on the environment. It also focuses on the relocation of indigenous communities, the degradation of arable land, a decline in local food production, human rights violations, environmental hazards, and most significantly, the disruption of livelihoods for smallholder farmers and local communities, all of which contribute to the expansion of SAC oil palm plantations in the study area. According to some data analysis, land grabbing worsens food insecurity in the regions they affect. The Sahn Malen Chiefdom case exemplifies the true nature of marginalized communities, in which the Sierra Leonean government and local authorities reached an agreement that was detrimental to the community's welfare. This occurrence provoked conflicts and tensions among various factions in the community. The displacement of smallholder farmers, who often depend on subsistence farming, undermines their livelihoods, and deprives them of their main food source. Moreover, the transfer of agricultural land to extensive plantations reduces the availability of land suitable for the cultivation of locally sourced foods. The large tract of oil palm plantations contributes to the depletion of natural resources. Land conversion frequently results in the degradation or loss of forests and water sources, both of which are critical to the local food supply and livelihood for local communities. Deforestation and soil degradation can have a negative impact on the productivity of remaining agricultural land, putting local food security at risk.

Furthermore, the study underscores the involvement of multinational corporations like SAC in land acquisitions causes power imbalances and makes local populations more vulnerable. Impacted communities' rights are jeopardized by limited access to information, lack of transparency in negotiations, and inadequate legal protection, resulting in marginalization and exclusion from decision-making processes.

To address this emerging concern, the government of Sierra Leone should give priority to ensuring food security and safeguarding the rights of smallholder farmers. The 1927 Protectorate Land Ordinance must be repealed and the Customary Land Right Act 2022 must be strengthened to have just and fair land usage and access for the sustainable development of Sierra Leone. Robust land tenure security and efficient land governance systems must be enforced to protect the interests of smallholder farmers and local populations. Before approving large-scale plantation projects, it is imperative to conduct discussions that are transparent and inclusive, to adequately address the needs and aspirations of local residents.

The advocacy for sustainable agricultural practices and the expansion of income-generating activities can enhance the state of local food security. Providing training, funding, and market possibilities to smallholder farmers can help restore their livelihoods and improve local food supply.

In summary, this research emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive and inclusive approaches to land governance in Sierra Leone. Policymakers can advance an equitable and enduring agricultural ecosystem that safeguards the welfare and entitlements of local communities by considering the implications of land grabs on local food security.

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