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Land conflicts between smallholders and Fulani pastoralists in Ghana: Evidence from the Asante Akim North District (AAND)



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ABSTRACT

Following the recent evolution in the demand for land due to population growth and urbanisation in Africa, there are rising contestations and conflicts over the ownership, access and use of customary land. The situation intensifies with increasing land values and scarcity as a result of commoditisation, individualisation and commercialisation of land within a new era of 'land grabbing'. Using qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, this paper examined the land tenure system in the Asante Akim North District of Ghana, and how it influences conflicts between Fulani pastoralists and smallholder farmers. The study found that despite a strong customary land tenure regime in Ghana, value-driven land market transactions have triggered conflicts between smallholders and Fulani herders. Conflicts with Fulani herders are largely linked to crop and water bodies' destruction, but underneath these is the citizenship construction of pastoralists. Conflicts in Agogo are therefore to some extent embedded in ethnicity because farmers construct Fulani identity as non-Ghanaian. There is also widespread perception by community members that chiefs sell lands indiscriminately and are corrupt. These perceptions have future implications for land conflicts. Hence, there is the need for more clarity in common property laws and deepened community consultations regarding stool land administration. There is also the need for approaches that promote improved win–win outcomes for both herders and smallholders.

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1. Introduction

Constraints to agricultural productivity in Africa have generally included weak linkages to product and inputs markets, and poor extension services. In recent times, limited access to adequate and secure land is a major problem for smallholders' sustainable production in Africa. Smallholders' limited access to land has been heightened by the commoditisation, commercialisation, competition and high demand for land by other stakeholders (Flintan, 2012). Due to pronounced tenure insecurity associated with land commoditisation, investment in agriculture (Toulmin, 2006) and sustainable soil management is reducing (Goldstein, 2008). Generally, insecure parcels are unattractive parcels for agricultural investments due to the hazards of expropriation (see Jacoby et al.,

2002; Peters, 2004). The status of land tenure has implications for investment, environmental sustainability and eventually productivity (Holden et al., 2009). In this regard, Place and Hazell (1993) and Deininger and Jin (2006) in their study of land investments in Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana and Ethiopia, found a positive relationship between tenure security and land investment in these countries. Similarly, Goldstein (2008) notes that people who are 'politically powerful' (within the traditional political set up) have more secured tenure to land, and hence, invest more in soil fertility and have substantially higher outputs.

In the Savannah and Sahel grasslands of West Africa, both smallholders and pastoralists suffer land tenure insecurity in times of agricultural diversification and expansion, conflicts and land grabbing (Flintan, 2012; Campion and Acheampong, 2014). Generally, land commercialisation transforms land tenure from communal towards individualised rights (Besley, 1995). The individualization of land rights, however, limits the use of common spaces without conflicts. For example livestock mobility and use of grazing lands, create tensions between nomads and smallholders.

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Beyene (2014) maintains the diversification of land use practices have significant effects on rangeland management, and sustainable use of natural resources in dry regions. Also, transnational land transactions have caused conflicts among farmers, pastoralists and leading to potential loss of arable land by smallholders in Ghana (Tsikata and Yaro, 2011, 2013). According to Acheampong and Campion (2014), large-scale land acquisitions for *Jatropha curcas* sometimes lead to violent conflicts between the biofuel investors, traditional authorities and smallholders. It is expected that when functioning land management institutions are established, they will be able to deliver on land tenure security (see Migot-Adholla et al., 1994; Kasanga and Kotey, 2001 and Anyidoho et al., 2008:1). Customary tenure systems have been praised for their ability to efficiently deliver land to all segments of land users at the community level, even in its largely informal nature. They are also promoted as being fluid and dynamic (Juil and Lund, 2002).

Notwithstanding the advantage of customary land institutions to adjust to changing conditions, they have failed to deal completely with land tenure insecurity in Africa and to reconcile the multiplicity of overlapping rights and interests – especially between smallholders (crop producers) and pastoralists. It is believed that the nature of the prevailing customary land tenure system in Ghana itself has exacerbated land tenure insecurity experienced all over the country (Tsikata and Seini, 2004:4). Similarly, Whitehead and Tsikata (2003), Amanor (2006), and Quan and Antwi (2008) have insisted that the social relations of local political power, inherent in customary land institutions will not improve land delivery to socially disadvantaged groups. The activities of herders and smallholder croppers have always had different dimensions of complementarity. Typically, herders gain access to harvested crop fields to feed their animals on free range basis, while the animals dropping fertilize crop fields. This complementarity between herders and farmers, however, has broken due to the growth in population in Africa and the continuous allocation of land and labour between large cattle herders and crop producers (Cotula et al., 2004). This broken relationship has tended to increase resource conflicts among herders and croppers.

A large migration of people seeking land to settle and farm is also a factor underlying land disputes in Africa (Yelsang, 2013). From these positions, land conflicts are essentially linked to the increased scarcity of land caused by demographic pressures and higher land values. Relations between pastoralists and indigenes are often tense, with few common social and cultural value interactions (Cotula et al., 2004). According to Yelsang (2013:387) uncertainties surrounding land scarcity and marketization, generates fears and suspicion between neighbours, and even within families. In 2006, two Ghanaian and two Fulani cattle owners were reported to have acquired a total of 190 acres of land and paid Gh 5000 as 'drink money'. Since 2009, Fulani pastoralists (Fulbe/Fula)¹ have moved into the Afram Plains of Ghana in search of grassland for grazing. This period also coincided with the acquisition of 13,058 ha of land by ScanFuel (Gh) Ltd² for *J. curcas* for which \$23,000 was paid as 'drink money'. Subsequently in 2012, many Fulani pastoralists who acquired pasturelands in the Asante Akim North District had their lands confiscated due to the demand for land for large-scale commercial agriculture. In their desperation for

alternative lands, Fulani pastoralists have come into conflicts with neighbouring smallholders.

It is against this background that this study examines how land tenure arrangements in the Asante Akim North District influences conflicts between Fulani pastoralists and smallholder farmers amidst recent trend of 'land grabbing'. The paper also studies the institutions and the actors in the management of land, and how a foreign corporation's demand for land for commercial agriculture, has influenced access to land by smallholders and pastoralists. This study is essential to understand the dynamics of pastoralists – smallholder conflicts in an area where agricultural land commercialisation has gained significant prominence. This study could form the basis for building channels for peaceful co-existence between smallholders and pastoralist in order to enhance their mutual benefits and to arrive at win–win outcomes. It contributes to the literature on smallholder-pastoralists' land conflicts by exploring the new dimensions of risks posed by 'land grabbing'. The paper is organised in seven different sections including the introduction above. The second, third and fourth sections of the paper reviews general literature on landholdings and land allocations systems in Ghana, nature and causes of land conflicts, and pastoralism and the activities of Fulani herdsmen in Ghana. The fifth section discusses the study area and methodology, while the sixth presents findings and discussions. The last section of the paper presents the general conclusion and makes recommendations for policy implementation.

2. Landholding and land allocation systems in Ghana

Ghana operates a hybrid system of land tenure – comprising both customary and statutory land tenure systems (Ubink and Quan, 2008). The customary land tenure system operates under the customs, rules, norms and traditions of the community, and differs from community to community across the country. Statutory tenure relates to lands owned by the state for public purposes or acquired through the state's powers of eminent domain in the interest of the public. Statutory tenure also refers to vested lands owned under customary tenure, but which are held and managed by the state for the beneficial enjoyment of the owners. It is estimated that about 80% of all landholding in Ghana is under customary tenure while the remaining 20% is held by the state for public purposes (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001; Mahama and Baffour, 2009). The various types of interests that can exist in Ghana are: allodial title, freehold title (customary freehold or common law freehold), leasehold; and a lesser interest created through sharecropping e.g. *abunu*³ and *abusa* tenancies (Ollennu, 1962; da Rocha and Lodoh, 1999; Government of Ghana, 1999).

The allodial interest is the highest land title in Ghana and is held by stools (skins),⁴ sub-stools, clans, families, as well as individuals

¹ Fulani is derived from Hausa and used in English to refer to these pastoralists. Fula is derived from the Manding languages and is also used in English. Fulbe is the original term for the people. This has been adopted into English, often spelt Fulbe. Available at: <http://www.africaguide.com/culture/tribes/fulani.htm> (Accessed on 21/12/2012).

² The name was changed from ScanFuel (Gh) Ltd to ScanFarm (Gh) Ltd in 2010 following a shift of the company's focus from *jatropha* in 2009 to food crops largely maize, soybeans, sorghum (with plans for rice production in the future).

³ In the case of *abusa*, the sharing proportions are two-thirds to the tenant farmer and one-third (1/3) to landlord. Under the arrangement, the tenant farmer bears the expense of clearing and cultivating the virgin forestland allocated by the landlord. The tenant is then rewarded with a two-third share of the returns for his investment in the land. Under the *abunu* system, the farm proceeds are shared equally between the tenant farmer and the landlord (da Rocha and Lodoh, 1999). With this tenancy, the landlord does not only provide the land but also contributes to the establishment and management of the farm. It suffices to mention that, under the *abusa* or *abunu* system, the farm itself may be what is shared and not the produce.

⁴ The use of the terms stool and skin represents the symbols of authority of chiefs in Ghana. Whilst the stool is the symbol of authority for chiefs in the southern part of Ghana, the skin (of an animal) is the symbol of authority for chiefs in the Northern part. There is often the tendency in Ghana to refer to the chieftaincy of a particular area as the stool or skin. There are even verbal forms created: to enskin, to enstool; and derived nouns: enskinment and enstoolment.

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