



Governance in urban and peri-urban vegetable farming in Tamale, Northern Ghana



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ABSTRACT

This article uses the example of Tamale, Ghana, to examine urban food system governance, with a focus on food production. Urban and peri-urban agriculture is common in West Africa, and supports food security and livelihoods globally. The analysis is grounded in the notion of everyday governance as a process co-performed by governors and subjects. Ideas from the conceptual tools of forum shopping and institutional shopping will be used to explain the dynamics inherent in urban food governance. We focus on data pertaining to land and water, major points of contention in this context. Examples are drawn from a database comprising interviews, focus group discussions, observational records and secondary data. They show how actors take advantage of gaps and ambiguities in governance to make selections between different institutions and the governance modes they represent, for example using administrative law to challenge a chief's prerogative to sell land. They may also select the forums in which they do this, supporting the forum shopping and institutional shopping models as presented in the literature. Our data also show situations involving partial elements and extensions of forum shopping and institutional shopping. These include institutions shopping for the support of actors; strategic inconsistency, where actors present alternative arguments within an accepted forum, and hybrid governance, where multiple institutions and actor groups co-govern while acknowledging each other. Our work explains the way in which subjects and governors co-construct governance. The confirmation of subjects' agency, and therefore the potential power of advocacy, is salient for governors as well as governed actor groups. Another relevant implication is that transparency is essential, especially in the co-construction of hybrid governance.

1. Introduction

1.1. Urban food system governance

Urban food systems comprise food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management (Zeeuw and Drechsel, 2015). The array of individual and institutional actors involved in these activities in cities makes urban food systems particularly complex. In addition, the remits of various institutions overlap, creating ambiguity about which rules and norms govern parts of the food system (Havinga, 2012). Actors exploit such situations to bolster their agendas, deciding to obey sets of rules that favour them. Governance of such systems is therefore complex and requires an understanding of what actors do in situations of plurality. During the process of governance, the actions of governed subjects become part of the making of a governance system (Blundo and Le Meur, 2009; Sending and Neumann, 2006). There is, therefore, a practical imperative to understand them in detail. This paper will examine such processes within the urban and peri-urban

vegetable farming setting in Tamale, Northern Ghana, West Africa. Urban agriculture is just one facet of the urban food system, which comprises multiple nodes, not just production but also marketing, waste management, processing, and consumption. There is increasing recognition that urban food systems have a role to play in supporting food security and urban livelihoods (Nchanji et al., 2017; Smit, 2016). This article draws mainly on data collected on the production side of urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA), with a particular focus on irrigation and land.

1.2. Objectives

We aim to show how individuals, organisations and institutions interact in food systems characterised by governmental plurality and ambiguity. We show that multiple actors, each to some extent as governors or governed subjects, are active in shaping how governance functions in different situations and at different levels. We intend to produce an analysis of governance with particular practical relevance

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to urban agriculture as a component of the urban food system.

2. Conceptual frameworks

2.1. Conceptualising modes of governance in African food systems

Various frameworks have been used to analyse food systems governance, so, we start by explaining what we mean by governance. Two bodies of literature are most relevant to our case study: those on food system governance in general and on governance in Africa. In African contexts, the term ‘governance’ is often related to the concept of ‘good governance’, a normative idea about the conditions that encourage and prevent corruption, where the state has a specific role (Söderbaum, 2004; Blundo and Le Meur, 2009). The ‘good governance’ approach includes consideration of how governors should account for their responsibilities, including public service provision (Bouju, 2009). We, however, are using a more descriptive and processual approach to governance, drawing on the work of development anthropologists and of authors who have examined urban governance in our study setting. Of the latter, the work of Obeng-Odoom (2016) in particular describes urban governance as a realm where normative and descriptive definitions coincide. He argues that an emphasis on the role of state governments has led to a focus on accountability and that this has encouraged some analysts to overemphasise the correlation between decentralisation and accountability, in the wake of the neoliberal agenda to roll back the state. Yet, he declines to perceive the implementation of non-state governance, and thus its analysis, solely as a neoliberal project. Instead, he prefers to conceptualise urban governance as “a cluster of interlocking meanings of decentralisation, entrepreneurialism, and democratisation” (Obeng-Odoom 2016: 6). This approach is more amenable to a view of governance that incorporates multiple state and non-state actors. It is still, to an extent, normative, emphasising the use of the notion of governance as a development paradigm. We move even further towards the descriptive work of development anthropologists by focusing not only on static outcomes but also on the development of rules and the way would-be rulers enforce them (Olivier de Sardan, 2009).

Such authors have examined the fine-scaled processes through which pluralist governance systems function in West Africa. Lund (2006), for example, describes the complex interaction of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) domain with the state. He shows how non-state actors such as traditional chiefs or youth organisations position themselves as separate from state institutions, yet at the same time use concepts of state formality to legitimise themselves. For example, they may use titles and organisational structures, similar to those implemented by the state, to achieve a particular outcome, usually related to the acquisition of power and legitimacy. This shows how subjects of governance are active in shaping how governance is enacted (Sending and Neumann, 2006). Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2003) show how governance happens through the actions of various actor groups that are interlinked, yet try to demonstrate their autonomy. Thus, interactions between governance institutions are not always straightforward cases of cooperation or conflict, but more like processes of mutual reshaping and co-construction. A multi-actor, processual approach is thus warranted at the local scale.

Through such processes of enacting governance, different institutions propose and negotiate over various governmental and bureaucratic systems. For example, ‘judicial’ governance is largely enacted by courts and associated institutions such as the police. ‘Traditional’ or ‘customary’ governance is the domain of chiefs and their elders. Market governance mechanisms have assumed a particular centrality, including for institutions that have not traditionally been tied to markets. States now govern alongside market actors or through market mechanisms, or may outsource regulation to market-based institutions (Oosterveer, 2006). Governance also happens through generalised norms, such as social norms, that are not necessarily attached to a

formal institution. Olivier de Sardan (2015) contrasts formal legal and social norms with what he terms ‘practical norms’. These describe the everyday behaviour performed by bureaucrats and professionals in alternative consensual operationalisations of governance that, in practice, supersede formal rules. This is supported by Prové et al. (2016) who ask for context-specific elements to be considered in work on the governance of urban agriculture. Dealing with our data, we found need for a concept relating to the implementation of social norms and rules at the local, personal level; a less formalised domain of society than that characterised by the phrase ‘civil society’. Sundaresanös (2016) concept of vernacular governance was appropriate for this task. The notion of vernacular governance developed from the idea of vernacularisation (Levitt and Merry, 2009), which is the way that people in a specific context adapt global governmental norms to their situation. Vernacular governance has been illustrated in food systems elsewhere: in Barcelona, for example, elderly migrants farmed in unused and available patches by watercourses from the 1960s onwards, building sheds and improvised fences. This was discouraged by the local government but tolerated by the local community. In the 1980s the government established formal allotment sites, which residents could lease, but not build on. These two systems sit uneasily side by side, and individual actors have developed strategies that enable them to move between the two: the informal gardeners did not choose to move to the formal plots or resist eviction but often retained plots elsewhere in case they were evicted (Domene and Saurí, 2007). The idea of vernacular governance thus permits a conceptualisation of how social groups and individuals, as well as institutions, play simultaneous roles in defining how governance happens in a given context.

Negotiations between various actors and governance systems result in hybridity (Colona and Jaffe, 2016). Sending and Neumann (2006) present case studies in which research and NGO networks interacted with states to construct new international norms about population and land mines. The power dynamics within such constructs are complex: through negotiation of the rules, subjects recursively co-construct how one institution is able to govern others legitimately. So, taking into account this actor-oriented literature, we conceptualise governance as a process which has several dynamic outcomes, rather than as an idealised development paradigm. Within this process, multiple institutions and actors, often with different objectives, interact intentionally or non-intentionally. They attempt to exert influence on each other while resisting, changing or endorsing the attempts of others.

The literature on food system governance is congruent with this wide-ranging operationalisation of the concept. Globalization of food systems over the past seventy years (Pereira and Drimie, 2016) has necessitated an examination of the increasingly interlinked state, corporate and civil society bodies interacting at the various nodes of the food web. The food regime approach took this into account in a macrostructural fashion, stating that an understanding of different historical and political processes during particular periods can help explain the structures and governing principles underpinning a food system (Burch and Lawrence, 2009; Friedmann, 2005). With its global and decadal scale analysis, the food regime approach has been criticised for lacking a local focus. With increasingly multiscale processes, examinations of food system governance need to take account of local as well as global actors and processes (Oosterveer, 2006). This calls for an area-specific analysis, which is what we offer in this paper.

Regulation of food-related concerns increasingly involves organised consortia of public and private, but also informal and unofficial, constituencies (Barling et al., 2002; Havinga, 2012), such as those examined in this paper. Such heterogeneities are recognised by writers on urban agriculture, such as Prové et al. (2016) and Smit (2016), bringing contemporary work on food system governance into conversation with the processual, multi-actor approach of development anthropologists. In this paper, we concur that developments in the practical governance of food systems in the 21st century warrant such an approach. For example, Food Policy Councils (FPCs), which have proliferated in the

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