



Customary land allocation, urbanization and land use planning in Ghana: Implications for food systems in the Wa Municipality



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ABSTRACT

Food insecurity remains persistent in the Global South due to constraints in food production capacities and intricate land tenure systems that stifle investment in agriculture. In the urbanized regions, uncontrolled urbanization and non-compliant land use systems have further worsened the potentials for urban food production. This research is based on a case study of the Wa Municipality in order to assess the influences of customary land allocation and peri-urbanization on land use planning and food systems in Ghana using explorative and narrative research approaches. The study identified that customary stakeholders responsible for allocating such lands in the Wa Municipality were indiscriminately converting large tracts of hitherto agricultural lands to urban land uses. Statutorily prepared land use plans are hardly enforced and the planning priorities are on residential and commercial land uses that command higher land values to the detriment of agricultural lands. Weak institutional linkages also characterize the mandated planning and land administration institutions, with a planning system that is reactive rather than proactive in addressing development control challenges across the country. There is the need for planning authorities to adopt participatory land use planning together with customary landholders and educating them on the essence of comprehensive land use planning approaches. Based on the findings, local governments need to partner landowners to identify and reserve high potential agricultural land for sustainable urban food production.

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1. Introduction

Shocks in the food prices in the last 5 years have re-awakened new paradigms in food research. The world continues to battle food insecurity due to persisting constraints with food production, distribution, storage, processing, consumption, and waste management. There is the need for efficient and effective systems that ensure access to affordable food. The food price hikes that began in 2007/2008 have further ignited concerns regarding food security. According to Tacoli et al. (2013), food security is the product of effective food systems. The food system refers to all the processes involved in putting food on the individual's table beginning with food production or farming, through distribution and acquisition until consumption (Cassidy and Patterson, 2008). Within this food

system, planners and planning interventions have the potential to stimulate significant changes in the quality of resources that go into food production particularly, land and labor. For an efficient food distribution system, urban planners have to create room for appropriate and effective transportation, storage and processing infrastructure. Effective food acquisition comes with ensuring easy accessibility to food outlets including market centers and supermarkets. Hence, the food system goes beyond farming; it requires proper land use and infrastructure planning. The effectiveness of the food system is vastly dependent on efficient spatial and infrastructure planning, in order to make spatial allocation for farms, storage and transportation networks. Therefore, the role of land use planning in designing spatial policies and plans is indispensable in facilitating the efficient functioning of food systems.

Although available policies for curbing food insecurity globally have focused mainly on food production, optimum productivity remains a mirage in developing countries. Slowing agricultural productivity has been criticised as one of the key factors responsible for the recent food crises (Tacoli et al., 2013). To improve food production in developing countries, productive spaces are essen-

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tial. Yet, in the current land use planning dispensation of Ghana, rapid-uncontrolled urbanization and unsustainable land use practices threaten local efforts toward increasing food productivity. In much of peri-urban Ghana, vast portions of viable agricultural land within the peri-urban fringes are indiscriminately converted into residential and other urban infrastructure. Typically, peri-urban areas remain unplanned and customary landowners in response to high demand for land are altering the few land use plans available in order to create non-existent 'sellable' spaces (Yeboah and Shaw, 2013). Even though these challenges are attributable to the general indiscipline in the land market, and institutional weaknesses in enforcing land use plans, the persistence of these trends, if left unchecked, have dire consequences on urban food supply. Uncontrolled urbanization has consumed agricultural lands the peri-urban interfaces and has dispossessed many farmers of their productive agricultural lands. In Ghana, customary landowners are converting agricultural lands into building plots. While some persistent farmers are relocating farther into the hinterlands, others have exited from farming as a livelihood, and are pursuing non-existent non-farm jobs in the cities and small towns. This unfortunate trend can be blamed on the customary tenure system, which puts landowners at the forefront of land delivery (Yeboah and Shaw, 2013; Eledi, 2013; Eledi and Kuusaana, 2014).

With this background, uncontrolled urbanization and inefficient land use planning systems have implications for food systems and food security. Urbanization in Ghana is dislocating smallholder farmers to farther villages where they are confronted with severe agricultural challenges like bad roads, lack of access to storage systems, difficulty to access technology and extension services. With these persistent challenges, peri-urban farmers are unable to meet their own food needs and that of the urban population. There is cause for worry; since food insecurity among the Ghanaian population is increasing, together urbanization and urban population growth. As of 2009, approximately 5% of the entire Ghanaian population were said to be food insecure (World Food Programme, 2009). Also, 34% of the food insecure population live in the Upper West region. In addition, it is estimated that 12% of the entire population do not have access to adequate, affordable, safe and nutritious food. We acknowledge there are other difficulties that may potentially stifle food production such as technology, water, post-harvest losses, marketing and poor distribution systems, however, we argue in this paper about the indiscriminate manner in which viable agricultural land in peri-urban Ghana, is replaced by 'concrete'. Locating farms closer to the city would invariably improve access to technology, markets and transportation. Even though according to Boamah (2013), customary land is efficiently allocated to competing users and uses, it is doubtful that the evolving social-political relations inherent in customary land institutions will improve equitable land delivery to disadvantaged urban peasants. In our view, if the status quo persists, then agricultural land will continue to be dissipated. According to Larbi (1996), approximately 2100 ha of agricultural land was converted into urban uses on an annual basis in Accra between 1990 and 1993. In Ghana, these trends are attributed to the existing customary tenure system, which allows landowners to virtually decide which uses they desire for their parcels, and hence dictate the composition of land use plans.

Already, the Ghana Ministry of Food and Agriculture (2007) declared that available agricultural land is declining due to population pressure and urbanization. A population census conducted in 1960 revealed that 23% of Ghana's population lived in urban areas (Ghana Statistical Service, 2005). Subsequent censuses in the years 1970 and 2000 revealed that, 29% and 44% respectively of the populations in these years lived in urban centers (Ghana Statistical Service, 2005). Today, more than half of the entire Ghanaian population live in urban centers. According to the 2010 Population and

Housing Census (PHC), 51% of the entire Ghanaian population is urbanized with an annual growth rate of 3.4% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). This rate of urbanization has serious implications on current and future land use systems and ultimately on agricultural production and rural land capture. Even though agriculture remains subsistent in Ghana, the total population engaged in agriculture has reduced considerably since the 1960s. In 1960, a total of 61% of the Ghanaian population were farmers (Ghana Statistical Service, 2005). This reduced marginally to 60% in 1984 and by the year 2000, it was 51% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2005). In 2008, the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) revealed that, a total of 56% of the working population between 2005 and 2006 were employed in agriculture (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). These figures reinforce the relevance of agriculture as a source of livelihood in Ghana.

The Ghana Statistical Service (2005) also revealed that, agricultural production has not kept pace with the growth in population since the 1990s. According to the World Food Programme (2012:2), "large numbers of households are relying on the market to provide at least part of their food needs, with rates ranging from 69% in the Northern Region through to 96% in the Upper West Region." Amanor (2008) attributes this development to the fact that, the youth are migrating from farming areas into the urban centers, while the aging farmers are not energetic enough to increase agricultural production significantly. As demand on farmland for infrastructure in urban and peri-urban areas increases, many people are diversifying from agriculture to non-farm livelihoods. For younger people, this pressure on agricultural land use has led to migration to inner cities (see 'deagrarianisation' in Bryceson, 2002; Yaro, 2006; Hesselberg and Yaro, 2006). A rapidly urbanizing society also implies a diversification of employment, leading to fewer people working in agriculture while a majority work in other sectors (Cohen and Garrett, 2009). It is also acknowledged that urbanization can present a number of opportunities for affected farming communities in terms of improvement in social infrastructure and non-farm job opportunities. For example, it is often observed in Ghana that farmers living close to urban areas are able to engage in supplementary income generating activities to support their income from the farm, unlike their counterparts in the distant villages. Furthermore, Crowley (2012) highlighted farm employment as the key to reducing poverty and food insecurity. So long as agriculture remains the largest employer in sub-Saharan Africa, we emphasize the promotion of agriculture in all forms, especially keeping farmers closer to the cities as best as land use plans can make spatial provision for their production needs.

It is generally acknowledged that there is disconnect between planning theory and planning practice (Abukhater, 2009; Baffour Awuah et al., 2014). Baffour Awuah et al. (2014) have tried to fill in this gap and proposed capacity development of planners in order to address practical planning challenges within specific contexts. However, in the context of Ghana where majority of the land remains under customary tenure, traditional authorities play lead roles in the planning process. Though the government finances planning projects (Asiama, 2008), in the interest of the entire society (Rakodi, 2001), the land is owned under customary tenure. According to Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom (2010), planning is predominantly a spatial activity and the mode of land alienation, and the existing tenure systems have far-reaching implications for effective planning. It is also stated that whoever controls landholdings, controls the land market and determines the nature of urban planning (Gareth, 1991; Kivell, 1993; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom, 2010; Asiama, 2008). Yeboah and Shaw (2013), also studied the relationship between customary land tenure and land use delivery in Ghana, and found that traditional authorities were preparing their own land use plans without the authorization of state agencies. They attributed the failure of the statutory agencies to human resource shortages, funding constraints and ineffective legal frame-

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