Rural transformation and multi-stakeholder alliances: the case of Senjeh District in Liberia.

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• Based in the Department of Geography at Aberystwyth University and led by Prof Mike Woods;
• Funded by the European Research Council (ERC);
• Five year project (2014-19) investigating the impact of globalisation on rural communities across the world.
Case Studies

- Newfoundland
- Wales
- West of Ireland
- Sardinia
- Liberia
- Brazil
- Sweden
- Southern Africa
- China
- Taiwan
- Australia
- New Zealand
Outline

• Key question and subsidiary questions;
• Background to paper;
• Methodology;
• Key arguments;
• Conclusion.
Key and subsidiary questions

• What forms of local, national and transnational alliances of rural people and other actors are taking shape in Liberia as a result of land grabbing propelled rural transformation and, with what consequences?

• Subsidiary questions:
  • What has driven land grabbing in Liberia?
  • How are local residents responding?
  • Characteristics of actors and typology of alliances?
  • What are the outcomes?
Background to the paper

• Long history of land grabbing which began in 1822 with the arrival of first freed slaves;

• Exacerbated by the speed and reach of globalisation 2.0 (Friedman 2007);

• In all of this the agency of rural communities eroded with support from US military and then legal frameworks;

• Contributed to years of instability from 1980 to 2003;

• By 2010 over a third of Liberia’s land awarded to concessions without consent of those living on the land;

• Complaint by the residents in affected communities in western Liberia to round table on sustainable palm oil (RSPO) in 2011.
Methodology

• Ethnographic approach;

• Three months of fieldwork in Senjeh District, Liberia between April and June 2017 following a scoping visit in December 2016;

• Worked with a research assistant familiar with that part of Liberia;

• Conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 residents and 7 key informants;

• Qualitative analysis using Nvivo and thematic approach;

• Write up.
A Actors and typology of alliances

• Three layers of alliances:
  • Local – Senjeh Land Committee (SLC);
  • National – Sustainable Partnership Initiative (SPI);
  • Transnational – Civil Society Working Group on Land Reform (CSWGLR).
Each with its own outcome

• SLC:
  • Successful complaint lodge with RSPO in 2011;
  • Getting a seat at the table (voice);
  • Contributed to the debate on land rights and resources rights;
  • Implementation of FPIC compensation.

• SPI:
  • Investigation into the compensation process;
  • Forum for holding the concession company accountable;
  • Developing framework for oil palm companies nationwide;
  • Amplify the land rights debate.
Each with its own outcome

• CSWGLR:
  • Land Rights Policy 2013;
  • Land Rights Act 2014 (Proposed);
  • Land Rights Authority 2016;
  • International spotlight on the issue of land rights for indigenous rural communities in Liberia.
Caution

• Still work to do in terms of local agency;

• Other factors have contributed to a ‘perfect wave’:
  • Globalisation 3.0 (Friedman 2007);
  • Rise of civil society (Routledge 2003);
  • UNDRIP and other related global/regional action (Champagne 2013).

• Local voice could diminish as more national and international actors join the struggle.
Conclusion: restating main arguments

• Land grabbing for plantation and extraction is a prominent dimension of globalisation and everyday lived experiences of rural Liberians;

• Exacerbated by the freedom of movement of capital frontiers;

• Which has led to local people partnering with national and transnational actors to resist;

• The alliances are generating results. For example proposed Land Rights Act 2014 to recognise customary land rights;

• However, there are other factors which have contributed to the gains and more needs to be done to give local people more voice in debate.
Thanks for listening