

# Political Ecology Network – Biennial Conference

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

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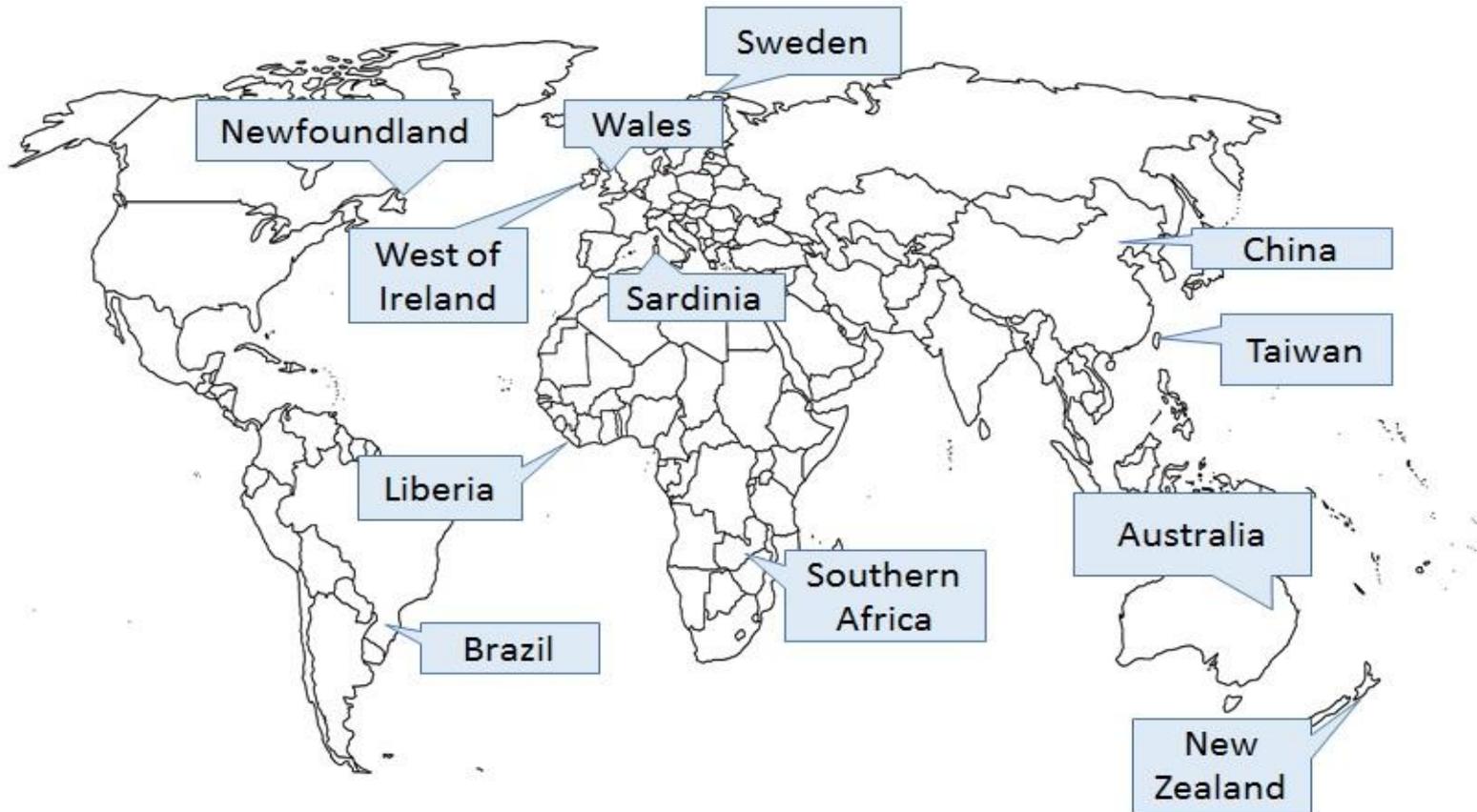
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- Based in the Department of Geography at Aberystwyth University and led by Prof Mike Woods;
- Funded by the European Research Council (ERC);
- Five year project (2014-19) investigating the impact of globalisation on rural communities across the world.

# Global-Rural Case Studies



# Outline

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

# Key and subsidiary questions

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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.







# Actors and typology of alliances

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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