Impact of land grabbing on rural 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.
Global-Rural Project team

• **Project Leader**: Michael Woods

• **Co-investigator**: Jesse Heley

• **Post-Doc Researchers**: Francesca Fois, Laura Jones, Anthonia Onyeahialam, Samantha Saville, Marc Welsh

• **PhD Candidates**: Fidel Budy, Beth Saunders

• **Project Administrator**: Reuben Knutson

**GIS assistant**: Jack Cook
Outline (Liberia case study)

• Points of departure;
• Research questions;
• Methodologies;
• Key arguments;
• Conclusion.
Points of departure

- Rural places are being transformed within the framework of globalisation;
- The speed and scope of globalisation created some by-products; for example climate change and food insecurity;
- Efforts to mitigate these global challenges include increased food production and greener alternative fuels;
- All of those strategies are dependent on land, increasing the demand for land;
- Land grabbing emerged as a by-product of globalisation and the everyday lived experience of rural communities;
- Emergence of a dominant narrative led my civil society and media (livelihoods, power relations, identity and land tenure).
Key and subsidiary questions

• How are rural communities in Senjah District, Bomi County in western Liberia experiencing or addressing the conversion of subsistence farmland into large scale oil palm plantation to meet global demand?

• Subsidiary questions:
  • Impact on livelihoods?
  • Power relations?
  • Identity?
  • Land rights?
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. Snowball sampling;

• Qualitative analysis using Nvivo and thematic approach;

• Write up.
Impact on livelihoods

• Jobs (on and off farm, distribution);
• Higher prices for basic livelihoods;
• Alternative sources of livelihoods;
• Shifting cultivation practices (limited in literature);
• Gendered dynamics:
  • Bias towards men (jobs);
  • Changing roles for some women;
  • Pushed others further unto the margins.
Impact on power relations

• Historic power relations: governance from afar, local powers eroded and centralised to Monrovia;
• Consultation as power;
• Spotlight on land grabbing contributed to voice for affected residents, FPIC, RSPO and UNDRIP;
• Retained agency (SPI);
• Gendered dynamics (women given a seat at the table).
Impact on identity

• Re-enforced given and self-identity as poor;
• Lack of basic amenities stretched the characterisation of backwardness;
• Changed social identity (Education; health centres and brick building);
• Changed rural landscape;
• Language;
• Livelihood identity;
• Strong sense of place attachment.
Impact on land rights

• Eroded customary land rights;
• Legal conundrum;
• Global focus on land grab led to focus on land rights;
• Pressure on land rights of rural women;
• Land Rights Act.
Conclusion

• Land grabbing is a dimension of globalisation which has threatened livelihoods, erode power, identity and land rights of rural communities in Africa (Liberia);

• Findings suggests a complex experience;

• Highlight the resilience of rural Liberians in Senjeh;

• Gendered and generational dynamics limitation, needs future researchers to take forward;

• Not entirely passive and victims; winners and losers.
Thanks for listening