

Global-Rural Project – Liberia case study findings

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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 Onyegahialam, 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 Senjeh 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