Experiences and responses to land grabbing in rural Liberia

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Outline (Liberia case study)

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

• Globalisation is transforming rural places globally;
• 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;
• Countries in the Global South are considered to have abundant land;
• Land scale land deals (land grabbing) emerged as a by-product of globalisation and the everyday lived experience of rural communities in Global South;
• Emergence of a dominant narrative led my civil society and media (land grabbing is hegemonic, threat to livelihoods, identity and land tenure – passive rural communities).
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 Senjieh 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.
Experiences of land grabbing

• Jobs (on and off farm, distribution);
• Higher prices for basic livelihoods;
• Shift in power dynamics (consultation);
• Changed identity (landscape, language and faith);
• Eroded customary land rights (legal tools);
• Gendered dynamics:
  • Bias towards men (jobs);
  • Seat at the consultation table;
  • Pushed others further unto the margins.
Responses to land grabbing

• Alternative sources of livelihoods;
• Shifting cultivation practices;
• Political reactions from below - retained agency (RSPO complaint);
• Changed roles of women;
• Dual income homes;
• Land Rights Act (2018).
Implications of the findings

• Patriarchal nature of rural governance is under threat (women having larger roles);

• No longer business as usual for government and large concessionaires;

• Legal protection for land tenures in rural communities in Liberia;
Conclusion

• Land grabbing has threatened livelihoods, erode power, identity and land rights of rural communities in Africa (Liberia);
• Findings suggests a complex experience;
• Highlighted 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