

# Tree Plantations and Access of Smallholder Farmers to Land and Natural Resources in the Transition Zone of Ghana

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# Recent policy initiatives on charcoal

- Frame charcoal production as a major source of deforestation in which charcoal producers denude natural forests.
- In future charcoal should be produced sustainably on plantations.
- Introduce a system certification on sustainable plantation charcoal and tax naturally occurring charcoal.
- Current production of charcoal is exploitative of producers – state facilitated charcoal will both be environmentally sustainable and more equitable.

# Scope

While we cannot examine state interventions within the charcoal sector (since only just beginning) we can trace the development of tree plantations within the transition zone.

Since the development of charcoal production is built upon previous models of tree plantation development in the transition zone, this provides a framework of the likely trajectories that the development of charcoal plantations will take.

This presentation traces:

- the development of the tree plantations sector in the transition zone of Ghana;
- its relationship to processes of commodification and accumulation;
- Impact of these processes on smallholder farmers.

# History of Commercial Agriculture in Brong Ahafo

From the 1960s the Ghanaian state began developing modern commercial food production within the Brong Ahafo transition zone and Northern Region (low populated areas). Main state farms: Wenchi, Branam, Ejura

After overthrow of Nkrumah commercial private agriculture promoted. Around state farms a large number of estate maize farms developed. The owners of these cleared large tracts of land with earth moving equipment and tractors.

Late 1970s and early 1980s - the large maize and rice farmers became bankrupt and the state farms and large commercial farms declined.

1990s - investors from Kumasi moved into tree plantations of teak, for which there was a large demand following the policy of national electrification, mango and cashew.

In 2001 and 2010 National Forest Plantation Development Programme launched centres on transition zone to promote farmed timber following declines of timber resources in forest reserves.

# Commodification of land

Investments in agricultural commercialisation have not only been for agricultural accumulation but also involve land speculation.

During 1970s and 1980s land cleared with tractors led to claim of ownership and speculation in land.

Tree plantations allowed speculation in land, since they create a clearly demarcated piece of land that is evidence of an investment in labour. Tree plantations also require relatively low investments in labour to maintain the plantation (rather than to gain optimal yield).

Since chiefs cannot sell land to locals (who have user rights) in land, they can only gain significant revenues from land by selling them to outside investors. Therefore chiefs have been willing to sell large pots of land to external investors (both national and foreign) before these lands are taken up by local farmers.

# Expansion of smallholder food production and charcoal

- The opening up of commercial agriculture in 1960s transition zone resulted in migration of labour from North. This labour enabled yam farmers to expand their acreages. The expansion of yam also encouraged the preservation of large numbers of trees on farms, which were used to stake yams.
- Yam produced under rotational bush fallowing with a system of fallows of over 6 years. Rapid regeneration of trees from live coppices.
- After yam harvest tree stakes used for fuelwood and charcoal. By 1970s and 1980s charcoal in urban areas largely sourced from transition zone. charcoal burners gained concessions from chiefs.
- . As local farmers learned the craft of charcoal burning disputes occurred between farmers and charcoal burners over control of their fallow and farm resources, leading to a major shift towards control of charcoal burning by farmers and sourcing of charcoal from farm wood.





Trees in an old yam farm: ready for charcoal production



# Commodification of land within the communities

- Recent government policies on land seek to facilitate land registration within communities.
- Forestry Departments provide certification of plantations and through various projects free support for farmers to plant tree seedlings.
- In recent years there has been a significant expansion in cashew and mango plantations and medium scale investors from surrounding small towns are becoming increasingly significant, acquiring areas from 20 ha and above for development.
- While allocation of large land areas to external investors land is sometimes opposed within the community and by youth, many farmers are also participating in the growing scramble for land, including smallholder farmers trying to secure access to some land for themselves and their children.
- Increasing disputes over land as elders allocate them to investors. Elders often transact land of youth and women and migrant farmers to investors since these are less able to protest. Sometimes migrants are 'chased away' to make way for land sales.



# Impact of tree plantations on bush fallowing

- These developments are increasingly disrupting the cycles of bush fallowing as more land gradually is taken out of the bush cycling process and transformed into tree plantation.
- Fallowing is declining as a result of a process of agrarian and land commodification, rather than from population pressure.
- Fallowing intervals are declining most rapidly in those settlements in which cashew and mango cultivation is becoming more popular.

# Impact of tree plantations on gender relations

- In the recent past in the Kintampo area farming structured by a gender division of labour:
- men cleared farms and specialised in yam cultivation (the first crop on newly cleared land).
- In following years women cultivated groundnuts and vegetables while the men opened up new lands.
- Currently men plant cashew in their old yam fields and women tend their food crops among the cashew, providing labour to manage the cashew. As the cashew matures less land is available for food cultivation, gradually resulting in land shortage for women.
- As husbands allocate less land to wives women become more dependent upon their parents for their own land.

# Pressures of plantations on smallholder farmers

- The pressures on smallholder farmer are larger than on large farmers, since smallholders have insufficient land for both development of plantations and food crops. However, some smallholders give preference to tree plantations rather than food, because of fear of losing their food cropping land, or because they do not have sufficient land to farm.
- Plantations give more stable rights in land. Farmers also develop plantations to secure land for their children in the future.
- Land shortage is increasingly confronting youth.

# Stella Donkor at Asantekwa

- She has two acres from her father which she planted with cashew – she doesn't want to lose control of land.
- In addition her husband has given her 3 acres to grow food crops in, in which he has planted cashew. He has not given her the land.
- Thus in future she is likely to end up with a lack of land on which to plant food crops (unless her husband gives her further land on which the same process will be repeated or she leases land).

# Land-leasing

- Farmers with surplus land are hanging on to surplus land by developing it into cashew. Sometimes they lease it out to land hungry farmers and plant cashew within the farm to secure their claims on the land. In a variant of the *taungya* system (that farmers have adapted from forest department) the tenants are responsible for weeding and tending the fruit crops and plant food crops until the trees begin to establish a canopy.
- Increasingly difficult for migrants to gain access to land outside of this 'modified taungya' system.



# Returns to plantations

- The prices gained for plantation crops are often not favourable.
- Cashew has declined in last six years from GHS 800 per bag to GHS 200.
- Teak has also declined and farmers are being offered GHS 4-5 for a teak tree. Timber contractors can offer poor prices for teak since they control a monopoly trade - it is illegal for farmers to process or trade in timber.

# Potential for charcoal plantations?

- It is unlikely that charcoal plantations will promote more equitable development Given the general processes of commodification and increasing social differentiation within the existing plantation sector.
- Likely exclude smaller farmers.
- Require considerable land to be able to provide a viable sustainable income.
- Likely to further exacerbate inequitable land distribution with an overburden of planted trees.
- Promote the interests of aspiring commercial farmers rather than the rural poor.

# Potential for charcoal plantations?

- Attempts to create a licensing/certification scheme likely to monopolise trade for a handful of large urban charcoal traders, resulting in similar practices to what occurs in Sahelian countries (Ribot 2009) and the capture of value by urban traders (as occurs in Ghana teak).
- Banning charcoal production from naturally occurring trees in (unlicensed) fallows and farms will prevent the trees preserved on farms and fallows from providing farmers with value - for the sake of enabling the corporate forestry sector to control charcoal production.
- Promotion of charcoal plantations form part of an ongoing framework of commodification that uses environmental discourses to justify controls and appropriation of resources of smallholders by emerging corporate sector.
- Alternative framework: Active support for yam agroforests.

# References

- Ribot, J. (1999) “Decentrilisation, Partcipation and Accountability in Sahelian Forestry: Legal instruments of political-administrative control’ *Africa* 69(1): 23-65.