

Historical Context of Agricultural Commercialisation in Ghana: Changes in Land and Labour Relations

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Abstract

This paper provides a broad review of agrarian change in Ghana by highlighting the major developments in the agrarian political economy and their implications for agricultural commercialisation and its modifying influence on land tenure systems, livelihoods, production systems, social relations, and labour relations. While current land tenure arrangements and labour relations in Africa are often explained in terms of globalisation, we argue that the historical context of agricultural commercialisation in Ghana shows continuities and discontinuities in agrarian relations from the colonial period to the present. We also argue that changes over the years have blended with globalisation to produce the distinct forms of labour relations that we see today. The commercialisation of agriculture in Ghana has evolved progressively from the colonial era aided by policies of coercion, persuasion and incentives to its current globalised form. The expansion in the range of commodities over time necessarily increased the demand for more land and labour. The article contributes to the literature by providing great insights into changes in land and labour relations due to increasing commercialisation, and how these enhanced wealth accumulation for the richer segments of society and global capital to the detriment of the poor throughout Ghana's agrarian history.

Keywords

Ghana, commercial agriculture, social relations, land tenure systems

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Introduction

As is the situation in many African countries, agriculture is the major economic activity in Ghana, contributing about 23% to the gross domestic product (GDP) and employing about 60% of the population (GSS, 2012). Although agrarian structures in Ghana have become more commercialised in recent years, the country has historically not been able to achieve very high growth rates in agriculture. A renewed growth spurred by structural adjustment policies lost steam in the 1990s. Large-scale agricultural land deals of the late 2000s fit into the discourse of 'foreign investments to the rescue' of agriculture characterised by cheap labour, abundant land, foreign markets and therefore high profitability. The profitability of these ventures is premised on the political economy of state support, open-door neoliberal policies, impoverished countryside, high and rising international and local food and fuel prices and the poor performance of economies in advanced countries.

A number of studies have emerged examining the processes, drivers, dynamics and impacts of these land deals (Ahwoi, 2010; Amanor, 2010). However, only a few researchers have tried to locate the current processes, dynamics and outcomes within the wider historical political economy that defines the evolution of the commercialisation of agriculture in Ghana. Consequently, there remains a lack of understanding about how contemporary agrarian forms, processes and dynamics are shaped by the past political economy, cultural and institutional arrangements. To fill this gap, we emphasise the interplay of socioeconomic and policy changes since the colonial era that define and shape agrarian relations of production especially around land, labour and markets. Our analysis focuses on the question 'How does this history shape current commercialisation processes of large-scale land deals in Ghana?' This paper provides an analysis of:

- a) The major developments in the agrarian political economy at different periods.
- b) The policies and pieces of legislation about land and agriculture.
- c) The implications of a and b for agricultural commercialisation and its particular features; land tenure systems; production systems; social relations, particularly labour relations.

We argue that changes in agrarian relations and form in Ghana have been a result of the interplay of tradition and modernity. The state of agricultural commercialisation reflects change and continuity during the last century, involving structural changes and processes in policy, labour, land and markets. The current state of agricultural commercialisation is a function of various models adopted over several decades. Continuity of the processes and relationships between people and capital are important in providing an understanding of likely trajectories and outcomes of current commercialisation models. Formal institutions gradually influence informal institutions and in some instance override them by the use of force and indirect mechanisms, such as taxation and incentives.

Changes in agrarian political economy and agriculture-related policies (1874–present)

Since the colonial era, the agrarian political economy in Ghana has gone through a number of twists and turns. While subsistence food production dominated the agriculture landscape during the pre-colonial era, colonial penetration and expansion (especially since 1874) saw a drive in production of oil palm and mining of minerals with enormous influence on the development of commercial norms (Dickson, 1969; Hilson, 2002; Jackson, 1992) in land and labour. The Dutch were the first to introduce a plantation system to the then Gold Coast in the early 18th century. However, it failed to gain much acceptance due in part to inter-ethnic conflicts, inter-colonial disputes over territorial expansion and acquisition, and the negative attitude towards the plantation system by the British colonial

rulers who believed that traditional farming systems were more economically resilient than large plantations (Huddleston and Matthew, 2007). Gyasi (1996), for example, argues that the colonialists feared that extensive land acquisitions for plantations could alienate the peasants, seriously disrupt their export production system, and precipitate local opposition and conflict. The Department of Agriculture (1900–1950) was responsible for educating farmers, and assisting them to produce export crops in large quantity and of better quality. A successful peasant sector saved the country from state intervention by encouraging large-scale multinational companies.

By the 1920s, cocoa had taken over from oil palm as the country's principal export because of the declining world prices for oil palm compared to that of cocoa and coffee (Daddieh, 1994). The colonial state established an export-oriented economy to meet the needs of industry in the metropole and supplied the cash needed to govern. The economy of the Gold Coast revolved around these export crops and minerals mandating the flow of labour from all parts of the colony and the northern territories towards the 'golden triangle' where commercialisation was at its peak. The appropriation of the surplus value by the metropole was to be achieved through cheaper administration, labour and land.

Establishment of large-scale plantations (early post-independence era, 1957–1970s)

The radical measures taken by the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) after independence in 1957 sought to change the economic structure of the new nation, Ghana. Agriculture continued to be the most important means of achieving the industrialised status that the CPP had envisioned for the country. The shift in agriculture policy followed a socialist's collective model involving the establishment of new large-scale state farms, and Workers and Farmers' Brigades (Songsore, 2003). Contrary to the colonial confidence in small-scale farmers, the first Five-Year Development Plan (FYDP) (1951–1956) was anchored on the view that small-scale agriculture was difficult to modernise or adapt. Hence there was the need for large-scale farms under state control, which would use mechanised forms of production. The Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC) was established to promote agricultural development through agricultural modernisation.

The commodities served two purposes, improving the nutritional requirements of the populace and also acting as a crucial foreign exchange earner. In that vein, cereals, fish, rice, sugar and cocoa were given special attention. An extension of the production frontier into the Western and Brong Ahafo regions for cash crops and the appropriation of large areas of northern Ghana for cereals by the new socialist systems gained ground. Individual farmers were motivated to join the cooperatives in order to have access to machinery and other modern techniques through extension services. In this way, the government was able to use agriculture to advance the system of a mixed economy where private farmers and public entities had their roles well cut out (Asuming-Brempong, 2003). According to Daddieh (Daddieh, 1994: 194), the agricultural policy vacillated from creating a 'public sector peasantry' to an 'agrarian bourgeoisie', but overall the government displayed a preference for socialised agricultural production on state-owned farms. However, the new agrarian structure did not achieve the success obtained in the colonial era mainly due to the capital constraints, political interference, poor planning and management, and the rigidity of the centralised state control system (Gyasi, 1996). This led to the abandonment of this model after the overthrow of the CPP (1966) in preference for privatised commercial farms between 1966 and 1971 using an export market-oriented approach.

Following the military coup by General I.K. Acheampong in 1972, a shift to large-scale private investment in plantation agriculture was advocated. However, the economic and social benefits of traditional small-scale farming were also recognised, and the government insisted that contract

farming be an integral part of any agribusiness operation (Daddieh, 1994). Commodity development boards were also established to enhance agricultural activities of smallholder farmers. Cotton and grains were particularly given attention in the north of the country to counterbalance the colonial labour reserve policy. The Cocoa Marketing Board, for instance, was in charge of marketing, research and the development of cocoa, coffee and shea nuts production. The famous 'Operation Feed Yourself' programme introduced by the Acheampong regime aimed at encouraging Ghanaians to produce enough food for consumption. Closely on the heels of that policy was the 'Operation Feed Your Industries' programme instituted between 1972 and 1974, which aimed at producing raw materials for Ghanaian industries, which were already operating below capacity. An effective partnership between large-scale and small-scale peasant agriculture was forged to achieve one national objective of producing export crops and raw materials for industry. Effectively, three models of agriculture, viz, the plantation model, outgrower model and clusters of medium and large commercial farms, were operational in Ghana in the 1970s. The plantation model involved huge land parcels devoted to one crop and owned and operated by a single company. The outgrower model involved several farmers producing under contract through the guidance and supervision of a mother entity using their own land and in a few instances company land. Clusters of commercial farms emerged as a result of the suitability of contiguous land areas for particular commercial crops in high demand, thereby leading to mass land leases/sales to richer farmers.

A careful analysis of the agricultural policies pursued under these post-independence regimes indicates that they all tended to favour large-scale, capital-intensive production over small-scale production units. There was the assumption that direct control of the production process via plantations would provide cheaper commodities for the industrialisation drive more efficiently than the peasant farmers who were famous for producing export crops. It therefore made sense only to involve the peasant farmer through outgrower systems to complement production on state farms and privately owned plantations. The state relied on a system of high direct and indirect taxation of agricultural commodities, control of agricultural marketing, input supply, and storage, through public administration with less participation by the private sector. This top-down model of governance was conducive to the exploitation of the peasantry for the modern industrial society envisaged, characterised by urban bias policies.

Liberalisation and promotion of export crops (1980s–2000)

In response to the economic crisis of the late 1970s, the Government of Ghana (GOG), with the help of the World Bank, adopted an economic recovery programme (ERP) in 1983 and this was followed by structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the late 1980s. These programmes placed more emphasis on the cocoa, timber and mining sub-sectors. Agriculture was one of the sectors to receive massive reform during the period of the structural adjustment programmes. Investment codes, which were meant to liberalise the economy and promote investment in tourism, agriculture, logging, real estate and mining, introduced the second wave of large-scale land acquisitions in the country. The major policies reflected the scaling back of the role of the state in favour of privatisation. Policies in the agricultural sector included the removal of subsidies, disbanding of marketing boards, support for export crop production, land tenure administration reforms to enable foreign direct investments, and the liberalisation of trade in all sectors.

The production and export of cocoa witnessed tremendous growth during the period. Between 2000 and 2006, the cocoa sector grew quicker than the rest of the economy and increased its share of national GDP from 3.5% to 4.7% (Coulombe and Woden, 2007). Production prices for cocoa continued to surge and by the 2010/2011 crop season, cocoa farmers enjoyed 70% of Free on Board prices of the commodity (GAIN, 2012). These policies sought to correct the widely accepted

theory that the state had to appropriate an increasing proportion of the producer price to use in expanding its political patronage (Bates, 1981; World Bank, 1983).

In addition to cocoa, new crops especially in the fruit and vegetable sub-sector were introduced to farmers under the banner of 'non-traditional' export crops. Trade liberalisation, which came at a later stage of the reforms, propelled the production and export of non-traditional agricultural export crops such as pineapples and pepper (FAO, 2006), which had an average growth rate of 13% between 2000 and 2007. Pineapple, one of the major horticultural crops, witnessed a hike in production and export during the period to the extent that, in 2004, Ghana alone accounted for 10% of pineapple exports to the European market. The production of other crops such as mangoes, shea and cashew nuts, chillies and aubergines increased dramatically. Much of the growth in this sub-sector can be attributed to private investors who sometimes engage smallholder farmers as outgrowers.

Food crops, which initially suffered due to the opening up of the food markets to global cheap products, subsequently enjoyed significant production growth due to land expansion and the application of modern farming practices during the period. For example, maize, cassava, yam, cocoyam, millet and sorghum saw tremendous growth in production between 1983 and the mid-2000s (Breisinger et al., 2008). The period was characterised by a domination of small-scale farmers, but with a rising number of medium-scale farmers, who concentrated land due to the profitability of joining global value chains in newly introduced crops, and the expansion of cocoa farms. The diversification of state enterprises also placed considerable landed agricultural resources and processing units in the hands of the private sector. Hence, the period marked a continuation of the structure of the 1970s plantation and outgrower models under private ownership. This period marked a new phase in the incorporation of the small farmer into global supply networks.

Neoliberal policies have, in recent years, focused on introducing institutional reform to facilitate and regulate the operation of free markets. Ghana reduced the role of the state in direct production activities, which led to the privatisation of state firms and farms (White and Bhatia, 1998). Most of the controls and regulations within the economy were dismantled in the 1990s, and the country now pursues an outward-oriented development strategy with a minimal role for the state in economic activities (Jebuni, 1995). Governance is therefore under both private and state domains, as each constitutes a series of rules of operation. The World Bank made a good case for control by global firms as these are argued to create more efficient networks to the benefit of smallholders and national economies. Thus, a global network of agricultural commodity and input trade has deepened the commercialised landscape of agriculture in Ghana.

Agricultural modernisation and transnational investments in land (2000–present)

The liberalisation of the Ghanaian economy coupled with the need for foreign direct investments, within a doctrine of modernisation of agriculture under private systems, led to the rise of large-scale commercial farming. In the wake of the food and energy crises, which hit many parts of the world in the mid-2000s, transnational investments in land have become a major development vehicle and a new form of capital accumulation for investors across the world. As in other African countries, two main pathways are used by international capital – the first is building effective agribusiness value chains over which they have control. The second is to acquire land directly from the state and allodial landholders for direct production. Hence, three modes of production, viz, the smallholders, outgrowers and plantations, are encouraged.

An intensification of globalised networks through the promotion of agricultural value chains, which incorporates smallholders into agribusinesses, has emerged as an important strategy of agricultural commercialisation and modernisation (World Bank, 2007). This is similar to the statist

project in the 1970s when peasant farmers were forced to produce for state companies and parastatal marketing companies. This time, farmers are linked to global commodity chains that are believed to improve their living standards and agricultural efficiency.

In the quest to modernise agriculture in the country, the government has encouraged foreign capital to invest in the agriculture sector. In this vein, the state has made several concessions through the Ghana Investment Promotion Council in order to attract foreign investors (Ahwoi, 2010). It has also facilitated land acquisitions for many foreign companies. However, the profiles of most foreign companies trooping into the country for farming show that many are engaged in agro-fuel crop production, which is not consistent with historical food and cash crop production in the country.

Ghana has featured among the top 20 hotspots of transnational land deals in the world. For example, in 2009, about 452,000 hectares of such acquisitions were recorded in the country (Kachika, 2010). In the last few years, for instance, Italian-based Agroils obtained 105,000 ha; the UK company, Jatropha Africa acquired 120,000 ha; Scan Fuel (Norway) cultivated 10,000 hectares and has contracts for 400,000 ha; Galten (Israel) acquired 100,000 ha (Friends of the Earth Africa/Europe, 2010). Others are Biofuel Africa from Norway, ITFC from the Netherlands, Prairie Volta Rice from the USA, Kimminic Estates Ltd, Natural Africa Diesels, Central Supercare Company, B1 Ghana Ltd., GoldStar Bio-Diesel Company, and Biofuel Africa Ltd Northern Sugar Resources Ltd. The majority of these companies used the land to cultivate agro-fuel crops. Due to the falling interest in these oils, some companies are now investing in food crops, especially maize, a flexible crop that could be both a food and an agro-fuel crop. These land acquisitions involve the transfer of common property lands by chiefs and family heads with little benefit going to community members, except for the promises of a good life associated with the modernisation that these projects are to bring (Tsikata and Yaro, 2011).

A new governance framework based on private–public linkages is in vogue. The major donors have advocated civil society incorporation/co-option. According to Amanor (Amanor, 2009), the political structures of governance are shaped to fit into agribusiness modes of accumulation whereby governance reforms are sometimes presented as necessary to encourage agribusiness and at other times agribusiness is presented as a dynamic part of the new structure of governance. In some commercial land acquisitions, the Government of Ghana has partnered foreign companies to invest in various agricultural projects. The case of Prairie Volta Company is an example of such partnerships. Prairie Texas, Ghana Commercial Bank and the Government of Ghana have 40%, 30%, 30% equities respectively in the company (Tsikata and Yaro, 2011), which is on 1250 hectares of land acquired in 1977 by the state.

There is also emerging interest in the savannah woodlands in Northern Ghana. The example of ITFC, which is supposed to be the outgrower model that benefits the communities and the company, was to guide future investments in the country. The business model of engaging outgrowers hinges on farmers receiving inputs and technological support, and marketing assurances. In return, farmers are expected to sell their produce to the company for export. However, the romanticisation of the project's model was short-lived as many farmers lost their farms to savannah fires, while the remaining farms registered poor yields (Yaro and Tsikata, 2013).

Discussion of the effects of major agriculture-related policies on land tenure and labour relations

In this section, we discuss how changes in the agricultural political economy and agriculture-related policies described above shaped land tenure systems and labour relations following the colonial era (1874) to the present.

Effects of changes in agriculture-related policies on land tenure systems

Land tenure systems in Ghana have changed since the colonial era (1874) in line with the changes in agriculture-related policies described above. The changes in land tenure relations allowed for commercial crop production during the colonial era. The growth of the oil palm industry, for example, did not mandate land acquisitions initially, since the crop grew wildly and was a common resource for all in the community. By the 19th century many farmers consciously cultivated the crop. Land sales and sharecropping arrangements emerged to accommodate the commercial pressures. The lucrative trade in oil palm and kernels led the Krobo people to acquire more lands from the Akuapem, beginning from 1814 (La-Anyane, 1961). This land acquisition led to an inward migration from the dry coastal savannah to the humid areas representing the oil palm belt. The communal system of land ownership was highly adaptable to commercial pressures. Extensive areas of land were acquired by migrants through sharecrop arrangements for commercial production. Hence, the communal landownership system did not prevent but rather aided the rapid development of commercial farming (Arhin, 1985; Hill, 1963).

Sharecropping did not evolve only out of the commercial pressures but did so as part of a social system or context that dovetailed the pre-historic relationship between the Akan forest region and the northern slave-producing areas. Not only did the colonial administration build upon these exploitative social relations in carving out the latter area as a reserve, the relations came to inform one's access to land in the Akan region, which was largely determined by one's membership of a matrilineage. Northerners did not have easy access to farmland especially in the forest region because of this form of production relations.

Hill (1963) asserted that it was the scramble for lands for cocoa farming and the arbitrary wholesale disposal of stool lands to cocoa farmers which led to the creation of individual and family land rights from stool lands in many parts of southern Ghana (Stool lands are mainly controlled by chiefs who occupy the seat of authority, the stool, on behalf of the people). In 1917, Governor Hugh Clifford was reported to have said that, though all land still theoretically belongs to the Stool, the vested interest of the cocoa farmers has brought into being a measure of individual property in real estate, such as was never contemplated by ancient tribal customs (Appiah, 2012). The massive spread of cocoa farming and the immense wealth some Gold Coasters amassed as cocoa farmers and merchants propelled the appreciation of land values. These events led to the increasing sale of land by chiefs (Firmin-Sellers, 1995; Green and Hymer, 1966; Hill, 1963). The scramble for land resulted in protracted inter-ethnic disputes. Apart from investing in cocoa farming, chiefs took steps to consolidate their rights to stool lands.

As cocoa and timber trade became lucrative in Ghana, the colonial administration became particularly interested in controlling lands, in order to gain natural resource revenue (DeGrassi, 2003). As such, the Public Lands Act was passed in 1876 to allow government to expropriate lands for public use but the government arbitrarily leased some of those lands to private companies and individuals without recourse to the original owners. The colonial administration attempted in 1894 to create 'Crown lands' by passing what became known as the *Crown Lands Ordinance*. This sought to vest 'waste and forest lands and minerals' in the hands of the colonial administration. However, the Crowns Land Bill could not be implemented because native people vehemently resisted it, on the grounds that it ignored the fact that they had inherited these lands from their ancestors (Teye, 2011). To bring land administration under British land legislation, additional interests in land were introduced under common law. This introduced the plurality of tenurial regimes in the colony (Aryeetey et al., 2007).

The land policies inherited from the colonial government did not change much after independence in 1957. The following Land Acts governed these land tenure regimes: State Lands Act (No.

125, 1962) for public lands (Republic of Ghana, 1962) and the Administration of Lands Act (No. 123, 1962) for vested lands. With regards to vested lands, management functions are held by the state but the allodial titles are held by chiefs. The implication of these legislative instruments, which are still in operation, is that ownership of any parcel of land does not necessarily translate into ownership of the naturally occurring resources of that land.

The state acquired lands mainly by executive instrument over large areas. This was necessary to enable the CPP government carry out its socialist agricultural model of establishing state farms (Gyasi, 1992). People whose lands were taken by the state were compensated. Participation of ordinary people in land matters was limited in state negotiations, while chiefs considered 'anti-state' or against the CPP had no voice. Joint ventures with private capital in the 1970s involving state acquisition had similar features. The transfer of these units therefore represents the basis of land concentration in modern Ghana.

The new food production areas also began to experience commercialisation of agriculture, especially in the north of Ghana which had been a labour reserve with few failed colonial experiments on cotton and groundnuts. This time of the rice, groundnut, livestock and cotton projects had generated competition for land. The rich farmers, urban elites and the chiefs seized the major valleys with support from the state in the form of capital and inputs. That is, a colonial policy that declared northern lands as crown lands was now under the control of the president, thereby giving the bureaucracy leeway in use of these lands.

Traditional sharecropping arrangements involving small-scale farmers dominated most agrarian production in the postcolonial era (Hunter, 1963; Okali, 1983). These were maintained from the colonial era as they served their purpose well in enabling both indigenes, and migrants access to land. However, the *abusa* (*abusa* is to share into three parts) sharecropping system of the colonial era had mutated into *abunu* (*abunu* is to share into two parts – land to tenants on a half-crop share basis), involving sharing of the harvest or land into two, especially in the Eastern Region as land became scarcer (Amanor, 1999). The value of land was rising against labour due to state large-scale acquisitions and higher demand for export commodities. So the bargaining power of labour fell.

Neoliberal policies, large-scale land acquisitions and class struggles

Neoliberal policies adopted after the 1980s also shaped land relations. Land has become more commercialised than ever before, following the passing of the Land Title Registration Law of 1986 (PNDCL 152) (Republic of Ghana, 1986). This formally enabled individuals and companies to legally register interest in land. The Land Administration Project (LAP) sponsored by the World Bank further sought to streamline land transaction procedures and deal with the teething problems in the land sector to enable investors to confidently acquire lands (Ministry of Land and Forestry, 1999). These policies, working in tandem with the rapid urbanisation, population growth and production pressure in rural areas, led to incremental modifications in traditional customary systems to accommodate commercial agriculture. The sharecropping tenure regimes of *abunu* and *abusa* that in the past enabled migrants to have access to land and inputs, under the liberalised economy, are now considered exploitative and arbitrary (Amanor and Diderutuah, 2001).

The top-down projects sponsored by the World Bank in an effort to bring about the modernisation of agriculture often expropriated land from the poor to redistribute to the middle sector small-holder farmers who could afford the minimum investments in inputs and hired labour (Amanor, 2009). A deepening of the proletarianisation of poor farmers occurred as they lost their lands and joined the hired labour pool. There are differentiated effects and a class struggle among rural hierarchies embedded in the processes of commodification and commercialisation of land

tenure transactions in Ghana (Abraham and Yaro, 2013). For example, access to customary lands is usually through inheritance. In many farming communities, male heads allocate land and the beneficiaries are usually male household members. Women's access and rights to land are usually secondary and even then, this is acquired through their husbands. Although many women engage in agriculture and land-based livelihood activities, their access to land remains limited. A vast regional disparity has been identified regarding women's access to and control of land in Ghana. While 50% of land in the Ashanti region is controlled by women, women in Upper East, Upper West and Northern regions control only 2% of lands in their respective regions (CEDAW, 2005). Also, the youth are a new marginalised group in access to land as commercialised decisions lead to land being allocated to non-kin for economic gain. The principles under which access to and control of land in both matrilineal and patrilineal systems operate are under attack due to the development of land markets that favour the highest bidders, the largest being foreign investors.

Since 2000, there have been concerns that the rise of large-scale land acquisition by both foreigners and locals for agricultural investments are compromising the land rights of small farmers, women and other local stakeholders (Hughes et al., 2011; Yaro, 2013a). The state and pro-market ideologues believe this concentration of land is necessary as modernisation is easier under such private large-scale ventures. What is not shown for now is the extent to which capital accumulated can be redistributed to the vulnerable and the poor whose livelihoods are affected by these changes.

Poor farmers are displaced from their lands by allodial title-holders who prefer leasing large tracks of land to multinational companies not only for farming but also for mining, tourism and fishing. The emerging scenario among smallholders is a disaggregation into the very poor who are not part of global commodity systems, and the smallholders who manage to concentrate some land, acquire inputs and state support in producing value chain products. Both the large companies and value chain smallholders squeeze the very poor resulting in their proletarianisation. Also, the lucky smallholders do not necessarily gain from these linkages due to the power imbalance between them and the companies buying their produce. Quality rules and price-setting practices ensure that the smallholders bear the cost of measures meant to satisfy the consumers on the global markets. The whole value chain of food markets is increasingly influenced by power relations and market control, as agribusiness extends its area of influence throughout the world.

Effects of changes in agriculture-related policies on labour relations

Changes in agriculture-related policies also resulted in changes in labour relations over the years. During the colonial era, the commercial production of oil palm over the years had led to share cropping arrangements between landowners and labour, which extended to cocoa and other export crops. In order to get labour to these production zones, the colonial state instituted the Poll Tax, which required payments that subsistence farmers could not afford. Hence, representatives of families needed to migrate to export crop zones and work as wage labourers. For example, labour migrated from the northern territories to cocoa farms and the mines (Hill, 1956). Colonial taxation policy aimed at creating labour reserves from where labour migrated to production zones in the golden triangle. Also, chiefs were required to provide annual quotas of labour to the production zones (Austin, 1987). In addition, the provision of basic infrastructure in the production zones to the neglect of the rest of the country created a pull effect to the disadvantage of the periphery (Yaro, 2013b).

Once in the production zones, the labour relations that developed reflected landholding arrangements because land was relatively plentiful and sharecropping became the preferred medium of payments. Sharecropping arrangements emerged as a labour strategy used by landowners to deal with the demands of land preparation, weeding and capital investments especially for cocoa

(Amanor and Diderutuah, 2001). These are normally negotiations between landlord and tenant over access to labour, land and capital. They agreed on a division of the harvest, or a division of land into two portions, in a system called *domayenkye* ('weed and we share'). Before the 1950s, share contracts were synonymous with the *abusa* system (Hill, 1956; Pogucki, 1955). These were a means of attracting labour as well as a disguised form of land sales defying bans by paramount chiefs. Austin (1987) argued that in Ashanti, *abusa* did not develop until the 1930s when the economic depression created difficulties for farmers in finding money to pay wages.

From sharecropping to agricultural wage labour (1957–1970s)

With independence in 1957 came the promise of jobs and employment for the masses. The emerging economic structure and new agrarian production systems created new labour relations and reinforced old relationships. The expansion of the production area meant that land was getting scarcer in relation to labour, which continued to migrate from poorly developed areas to commercial agriculture and mining areas. The interventions of the state were too little to reverse the initial processes of inequality. The forms of labour arrangements included wage labour on state and private farms, and cooperative farmers on state-acquired lands and communal lands. After the CPP was overthrown in 1966, the vibrant outgrower systems and plantations imposed an altered labour system of plantation workers and independent growers controlled by company contracts. At the same time, the labour relations in the private sphere were changing from sharecropping systems to wage labour as land became scarcer. Agricultural wage labour became an accepted form for most of the rich farmers who could afford to pay wages. In the frontier areas, where land was still abundant sharecropping continued as the viable option for obtaining labour. The working conditions for agricultural labour in export crop farms were still as difficult as in the colonial era as land/labour ratios altered (Arhin, 1985).

The Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation (GOPDC), an oil palm plantation company, expropriated 9000 hectares of land previously cultivated by 7000 farmers at Kwae in Akyem Abuakwa (Gyasi, 1992). The GOPC project was modelled on three schemes – outgrowers, nucleus plantations and smallholder farmers. With the nucleus scheme, wage labourers were employed to work on the plantation, outgrowers were contracted to grow oil palm on their own lands but were obliged to sell the produce to the company, while smallholder farmers were allocated portions of the company's land for oil palm cultivation and onward sale of the produce to the company. All the three schemes came with harsh conditions. One of such conditions for the smallholders and outgrowers was that the participant must not be unmarried, which discriminated against the youth. The youth were limited in options as they were either employed as farm labourers or had to migrate to seek wage work in other agrarian areas. In the rice valleys in northern Ghana, Goody (1980) describes how investors employed heavy machinery in the cultivation and harvesting of rice, but resorted to hired labour for management, uprooting of grass and transplanting. Local women dominated most of the farm labour operations, particularly taking the place of machinery. Commoditisation of labour in agricultural production became widespread as wealthier farmers envisaged a market for their products as created by the political economy of the time.

Effects of large-scale land acquisitions on labour relations (1980s–present)

Since the 1980s, the deepening of commercialised norms in agricultural production with the widening of the range of crops for export and domestic markets affected labour relations, especially in the household. The expansion in production envisaged by the structural adjustment programme incentives was contingent on the varying ability of farmers to use custom and power to negotiate

successfully for the critical resource of labour (Awanyo, 2001). Mobilising family labour in matrilineal systems is problematic due to the nature of the inheritance systems and labour relations. Since nephews inherit from their maternal uncles, fewer sons are willing to build their fathers' farm assets for others to inherit. Also, where production is destined for the market, with proceeds benefiting few household members or the head, other members resist conscription into family labour pools.

According to Awanyo (2001), success in labour negotiation and labour control depends upon adherence to the terms of contracts such that where an individual fails to meet contract terms, he/she confronts resistance and must struggle to control both family and hired workers. Women are unable to negotiate for labour from their kin or hired labour where resources are limited. Women are therefore less likely to increase production than men in an atmosphere of commercialised transactions and with a past history of discrimination and low wealth accumulation. Also, women and young boys and girls (youth) are assigned domestic tasks in addition to productive responsibilities, which take up most of their time. Also, there was increasing social differentiation in the 1980s among the labouring class of northern migrants in the food producing areas of the forest fringes. This was the result of the evolution of sharecropping, which defined the ability of many to lease land for food production.

Large-scale land acquisitions since 2000 have also raised concerns about the displacement of poor farmers. The promise of employment by companies is often not commensurate with the quantum of unemployed displaced people. Furthermore, the casualisation of employment on these farms creates earnings uncertainty and deprives workers of their rights to social security. Mechanisation of agriculture on large and small farms is reducing avenues for employment and suppressing wages. Modern techniques of production render most forms of labour irrelevant. The rise in urbanward movements of displaced people due to production pressures and land concentration is mainly the result of rural unemployment and underemployment created by the new agrarian structure.

The movement into wage labour by poor farmers is a new phase in the commercialisation of agriculture better interpreted as forced proletarianisation. The livelihoods literature erroneously classifies this as diversification into income-earning activities from peasant modes of agriculture. Adapting livelihoods, especially becoming a farm worker, is not a choice but a necessity resulting from structural changes to the agrarian system.

Land scarcity in the face of global-oriented production systems leads to land rental systems rather than sharecropping arrangements. The possibility to exchange labour for land is therefore truncated and the poor have to work on a 'by-day' basis, which is a form of casual labour on call at any time. The suggestion that smallholders sometimes can also benefit from economies of scale in input or output markets by renting out their land and working on the larger farms (World Bank, 2007) is unrealistic in this regard, given the conditions of employment provided by the new farms

The over-concentration of resources on male-produced crops is blamed for the deterioration of women's performance in the agriculture sector (INSTRAW, 1985). Women became proletarianised in big land schemes with poorer working conditions. Also, they do not enjoy compensation for lands taken up by the state and corporations because they are not considered part of the ruling local elite and are also not family heads (Amankwah, 2009; Boamah, 2011; Wisborg, 2012). Fewer women are part of outgrower schemes due to inability to access lands or to procure the capital and labour needed, which is the result of decades of marginalisation in the circuits of capital accumulation and power. Building current initiatives on a flawed past has the tendency to deepen the marginalisation of vulnerable groups such as the poor, women and the youth (Tsikata and Yaro, 2014).

Conclusions

The commercialisation of agriculture in Ghana has evolved progressively from the colonial era, aided by policies of coercion, persuasion and incentives to its current globalised form. These have resulted in tremendous transformations in land and labour relations in the agrarian sector. Both colonial and postcolonial land policies have facilitated the modernisation of commercial agriculture for major export crops. The traditional arrangements for access to and control over land have altered from free inheritance and gifts to sharecropping systems and now to leasing, renting and sales. The communal notion of land is giving way to an individualistic one, as commercial agriculture mandates tenure security via individualisation and land titles.

Production pressure has led to increasing demand for land in a fiercely competitive atmosphere where the powerful displace the weak. An increasing trend in land concentration has been noticeable over the decades, culminating in foreign large-scale acquisitions that disenfranchise entire communities. The changing agrarian structures are characterised by a renegotiation of the rules of the game in resource access and political power within society. The coercion of farmers into cash crop production initially and subsequently through market mechanisms has been aided by land tenure policies that seek to allocate land to rich farmers (Firmin-Sellers, 1995; Kasanga and Kotey, 2001). The monetisation of agricultural relations of production is good news for the neoliberal conception of farmers as entrepreneurs running businesses that respond to global markets.

Commercialisation of agriculture is intensifying rural social stratification where farmers who earn more from their produce are able to accumulate wealth to embark on further acquisitions of land and engage in aggressive agrarian expansions. The situation for women has not changed significantly under SAP and post-SAP since a focus on cash crops and the use of custom to legitimise male control over land means peripheral roles for women (Agbosu et al., 2007; Duncan, 2004). Elderly men with traditional titles control land to the detriment of the women, youth and poor.

The expansion in the number of agricultural commodities and area cultivated necessarily increased the demand for more labour. Labour movements and favourable sharecropping systems effectively facilitated a new agricultural economy of booming cocoa and oil palm exports. Labour movements resulting from colonial coercion gradually changed to economy-induced labour movements as the commodity-producing zones became richer with better amenities than the rest of the country. The initial sharecropping arrangements when land was abundant have gradually given way to wage labour in reflection of the increasing supply of migrant labour and also the displacement of local small farmers. Expansionist agriculture tends to create accumulation of wealth by landowners and hardworking labour in sharecropping arrangements (Hill, 1963; Huddleston and Matthew, 2007). There is an intricate relationship between land availability and labour relations in agrarian formations. Increasing land pressure creates a larger proletariat, while low pressure accommodates some poor farmers. Also, commercial agriculture led to the loss of control over family labour as Awanyo (2001) observed. The control of over a disciplined family labour, especially women's labour, was crucial to the success of commercial agriculture in the colonial and postcolonial eras, but not in the neoliberal era.

The casualisation of labour is a predominant feature of commercial agriculture. The expectations of a thriving employment industry as modern large-scale farms dominate the rural landscape has not come to fruition. The preference for casual labour leaves many without jobs seasonally, with its consequent impoverishment on the population without access to land for subsistence. The proletarianisation of women has only moved them from one form of exploitation by the family farm, to exploitation by corporate business without the social support systems of the former.

The forms of land concentration and labour relations created and enhanced wealth accumulation for the richer segments of society and global capital to the detriment of the emerging poor

throughout Ghana's agrarian history. This process has been intensifying over the decades and therefore producing more disadvantaged people as commercialisation accelerates (Amanor, 2005; Asuming-Brempong, 2003; Yaro, 2013a).

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