

The power(lessness) of chiefs

Traditional authorities and dynamics of conflicts over *land grabbing* in Ghana

1. Research Background & Empirical cases

Research Background

Linking three debates on land and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa

1. Traditional authorities - land access, rights and control
2. Conflicts related to large-scale land commodification
3. Traditional authorities as intermediaries

Empirical cases



2. Theoretical considerations

Theoretical approaches

- Combining Political Ecology and Peace and Conflict Studies
- Development of an empirically useful power framework

Empirical findings



Conclusion

The actions of traditional authorities considerably **shape conflict dynamics**

Power structures can only be understood in connection with other actors involved

Power is **relational** and thus determined by the dynamic interaction of particular actors behaving in a specific way in a given situation

Depending on the contextual circumstances, the same chief might be able to derive benefits from the land or not

Conflicts become **more intense** when deeply rooted power structures are contested



Sarah Kirst
"Global change - Local conflicts?"
Freie Universität Berlin

1. Research Background & Empirical cases

Research Background

Linking three debates on land and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa

1. Traditional authorities - land access, rights and control
2. Conflicts related to large-scale land commodification
3. Traditional authorities as intermediaries

Chiefs matter

Traditional authorities as **key player** in large-scale land transactions

Especially in Ghana where 80% of land is administrated under customary tenure

Lack of research on their **specific role in conflicts** over land grabbing and related conflict dynamics

Trend to **homogenize** traditional authorities

Empirical cases





Upper West

Upper East

Northern

Brong-Ahafo

Ashanti

Eastern Volta

Western

Central

Greater Accra

Scanfarm



Asante Akim
North District

BioFuel Africa



Mion District

2. Theoretical considerations

Theoretical approaches

- Combining Political Ecology and Peace and Conflict Studies
- Development of an empirically useful power framework

Power in the analysis of conflicts over land

Definition of Power in Political Ecology

“the control that one party has over the environment of another party”

(Bryant/Bailey 1997: 37)

How to grasp "control"?

Control of resources is closely related to the ability to get access

Access

The ability to derive benefits from a resource

(Ribot/Peluso 2003)

A definition of power in the context of conflicts over land/grobbles

“The ability of an individual or a group to derive benefits from a resource and to control the ability of others to do so”

Additional considerations

Different dimensions of power
Visible, hidden, invisible
Sources of power are socially constructed
Power as a relational concept

A definition of power

in the context of conflicts over *land grabbing*

“The ability of an individual or a group to derive benefits from a resource and to control the ability of others to do so”

Additional considerations

Different dimensions of power
Visible, hidden, invisible

Sources of power are **socially
constructed**

Power as a **relational** concept

3. Empirical findings & conclusion

Empirical findings

Chief and chief are not alike

Chiefs are **not a homogeneous group**

Deeply rooted hierarchies of power

Different chiefs can **allocate land** depending **how much and to whom**

Knowledge on land differs

Land vested in the paramount stool

Stool land



Chief and chief are not alike

Chiefs are **not a homogeneous group**

Deeply rooted hierarchies of power

Different chiefs can **allocate land** depending
how much and to whom

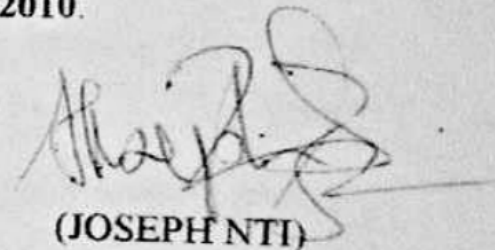
Knowledge on land differs

**AUTHORITY TO CLEAR ALL THE
LAND LEASED BY THE AGOGO STOOL TO
SCANFUEL COMPANY LIMITED
FOR FARMING PURPOSES AT AGOGO**

I am directed by Nana Akuoko Sarpong, Agogohene to give you the authority to go ahead to clear and farm on all the land leased by the Agogo Stool to your Company.

By this grant of authority, the Company is to go about its clearing and farming activities and that if there happens to be any protestor(s) the matter would be addressed by the Agogo Stool.

DATED AT AGOGO THE 4TH DAY OF JANUARY, 2010.



(JOSEPH NTI)

SNR REGISTRAR
AGOGO TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

THE SCANFUEL COMPANY LTD.
AGOGO, A/A

**Land vested in the
paramount stool**

Stool land



Land user and land user are not alike

Land user are also **not a homogeneous group**

Type of access has an impact on the actions of land users in conflicts over land

Depending on the type of land access some land users are more likely to contest or act against traditional authorities' decisions

Community land held in trust by the sub-chief



That wicked man!

Stool land

Conclusion

The actions of traditional authorities considerably **shape conflict dynamics**

Power structures can only be understood in connection with other actors involved

Power is **relational** and thus determined by the dynamic interaction of particular actors behaving in a specific way in a given situation

Depending on the **contextual circumstances**, the same chief might be able to derive benefits from the land or not

Conflicts become **more intense** when deeply rooted power structures are contested



**Thank you
for your attention!**