

Agricultural land use change in the Jaman North District of Ghana: Implications for land tenure, women's rights and food security

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The economy of most rural areas in Ghana largely relies on the natural capital (land-based resources) for everything economic, from basic subsistence to debt payment. These resources are threatened by a cascading set of forces, many of which play out in complex arrangements that are well beyond the control of the local land managers and are often spatially distant from them (Turner II, 1997). The recent agricultural land use change from the production of food crops to the growing of cashew in Ghana raises a number of concerns. The study therefore sought to explore the causes and implications of such a change. With most villages already experiencing yearly food shortages since the 1990s, a sudden change in land use from food crops to tree crops might lead to chronic food crop shortages overtime. It is against this land and food insecurity concern that this paper seeks to explore the causes and implications of the change in agricultural land uses in the Jaman North District for common property resources, women's rights and access to land and food security in the village.

Research setting and methodology

The primary location for this research is a rural community of Dawiri, located in the Jaman North District. Dawiri was chosen as the research location for two main reasons; first the village's involvement in the cashew growing business is the very recent. Secondly, the village has been experiencing a decreasing population growth (from 793 in 1984 to 751 in 2000) and that the change in agricultural land use might not be attributed to population pressure as suggested in most researches (Boserup, 1965; Davis, 1991). Finally, the village is fairly representative of the general conditions of cashew growing communities in the District.

The study adopted the exploratory research design. In particular, strategies of the narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 cited in Obeng, 2002) were considered for the study. The chief and queen mother, as well as three (3) family heads and six (6) household heads (three males and three females) were selected for the study. Interview guide was used to solicit their informed opinions on the changing land use pattern in the village and its implications for land tenure, women's right and food security. In addition, two (2) separate Focus Group Discussions were held for male and female groups to complement the information obtained from the In-depth Interviews.

Results

The study found that the major causes of the change are decreasing food crops yields, resulting from decreased soil fertility, infrequent rainfall (climate change), and the rapidly increasing demand for cashew nuts. It was also found that the agricultural land use change has altered the land tenure regime, reduced women's access to land, increased inter-family and intra-family conflicts, and has the potential to threaten food security in the village within a short time. Thus immediate implication of this change for land tenure is that a portion of a family land loses its "*commonness*" and therefore becomes an individual property. This is because cashew is a tree crop and has a longer life span and that any family member who cultivates cashew on a piece of a family land will invariably own that piece of land forever. Secondly, the transition has implications for food security as less agricultural land will be available for food crop production.

Recommendations

It is therefore, recommended that the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Jaman North District Assembly should engage in diversified sensitization programme that seeks to prompt these farmers on the future implications of their present actions. Agricultural Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can also help these farmers to improve the soil fertility and make it suitable for food crop production.