

Environmental livelihood asset beyond a natural constituent- A study of migrant farmer groups in the Wasa Amenfi West district

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Abstract - In this paper, the dynamic practices of migrant farmers' group formation in establishing and strengthening their rights in land as a major livelihood asset are discussed. The case for this discussion is the Wasa Amenfi West district in the Western region of Ghana. The research aimed to show that land as a livelihood asset is more than just a natural product; it is also socially constituted through the strategies of people to secure and deliver their livelihood assets. Qualitative research approach was considered in collecting data from farmers in the Wasa Amenfi West District. Thus, what is often considered livelihood strategies in the livelihood discourse are not adequately presented as a necessary condition through which resources become assets in the first place. The paper therefore demonstrates that strategies of people such as the migrant farmers' group formation provide social, economic, and political utility for delivering land as key livelihood asset, such that access to and use of land cannot be possible without these strategies. To this end therefore, in a proper perspective, strategies of people should be considered as a necessary social constituent that complement the natural constituent of resources to deliver them as assets.

Index Terms- Livelihood asset, land, security, migrant group formation

I. INTRODUCTION

In the cocoa growing economy of the Western region of Ghana, migrant farmers¹ constitute a significantly large proportion of the population whose livelihood is based directly on customary land. On the basis of the customary property rights system that organises land tenure in Ghana, migrant farmers have over the years accessed and farmed customary land in the region. Since the late-20th century when farmland began to get scarce in the region, migrant farmers have established social systems to strengthen their claims over customary land. In this paper, the dynamic practices of migrant farmers' group formation in establishing and strengthening their rights in land as the major asset for their livelihoods are discussed. The aim is to show that environmental resources as assets for livelihood are not only naturally constituted but also socially founded. The paper contributes to theorising on livelihood assets for direct land-based livelihoods and ways such assets can be better secured and developed.

¹ The term migrant in this work refers to any resident of a community who is not an indigene of such a community and not accepted customarily as one. An indigene in this work connotes a man or woman who belongs to a customarily recognised and accepted clan of their society, and who holds birth rights to land in the society. In the WasaAmenfi West district of Ghana, the indigenes are predominantly the Wasa.

Qualitative data for this paper was obtained in the Wasa Amenfi West district of the Western region of Ghana (Figure1) between June 2007 and April 2008 and revised with new data collected in December 2015. The Wasa Amenfi West district is one of the major cocoa producing areas in Ghana. Cocoa land has been a major resource of livelihood in this region. The cocoa industry has progressed for over a century in the region, and has witnessed significant social and economic developments. As a contributory factor and a consequence, the area has attracted a host of migrant farmers since the first quarter of the 20th century.

In consequence of increases in local and migrant populations, as well as rises in cocoa prices, the significance of cocoa land as the major livelihood asset of majority of the people has increased sharply over the years. In response, landowners and farmers in the region have evolved various strategies to strengthen their claims over land. To this extent, such strategies can be defined as an integral undetectable component of cocoa land as a livelihood asset. In this regard, this paper describes and analyses the dynamics that makes a livelihood resource/asset both a natural and a social product.

Statement of problem: Inadequate emphasis on social dimension of livelihood asset

Shortage of farmland is evident in the Wasa Amenfi area due partly to increasing natural population and partly migrant population growth. For the indigene Wasa but also for the migrant farmers, securing rights in land has become even crucial now than before. While indigenes draw on and assert stronger and stronger their inalienable birth rights in customary land, migrants organise in social networks to secure these rights. However, the discourse on natural resources as livelihood assets in academia and development work approach social networks and activities as livelihood strategies that goes to support strengthening livelihood assets (Ellis 2000; Leach et al. 1999 Krantz 2001.). Thus, it is inferred from this discourse that land automatically is an asset, and only needs strategies to secure it. This may not hold adequately particularly in migrant populated areas. In these areas, it is generally observed that contentions over belonging are usually the norm, and do frame access to resources, where migrants are perceived vulnerable (Geshiere 2009; Nkamleu and Fox 2006 Lentz 2007). To this end, the contentions require carefully devised mechanisms to make land an asset in the first place. Thus, what the literature on livelihood asset fails to emphasize is that in situations where contentions over resources are grave, such as in migrant populated regions, land does not become as asset outside of associated social activities to secure the land. In order words, land as a livelihood asset needs to be defined in particular socio-spatial contexts. This means that for instance where contentions over land is grave, defining land as an asset cannot be separated from its constituent social asset, that is, the gamut of social activities to secure the land. This is however missing in the discourse on land as livelihood asset.

Objectives of the study

- To identify the major challenges faced by cocoa farmers in the district in acquiring land for farming activities
- To obtain adequate information from land managers to unveil the official procedures for land acquisition by farmers

- To make the information on land lease and outright sale available to farmer groups in the study area through seminars/workshops.

Research questions

- What are the major challenges faced by cocoa farmers in the study area in terms of acquiring land for farming?
- What are the procedures farmers need to go through to facilitate land acquisition?
- How do these procedures get to the farmers who are mostly uneducated?

II. METHODOLOGY

Approach and study area

The paper is based on the qualitative case study approach. The choice of this approach was informed by the nature of the study, with its focus on social practices. The Wasa Amenfi West district was chosen for the study because it is a rural area with a high population of migrant farmers who occupy customary land (Alhassan and Manuh 2005). The district is one of the statutorily demarcated administrative areas in the Western region of Ghana (Figure 1).

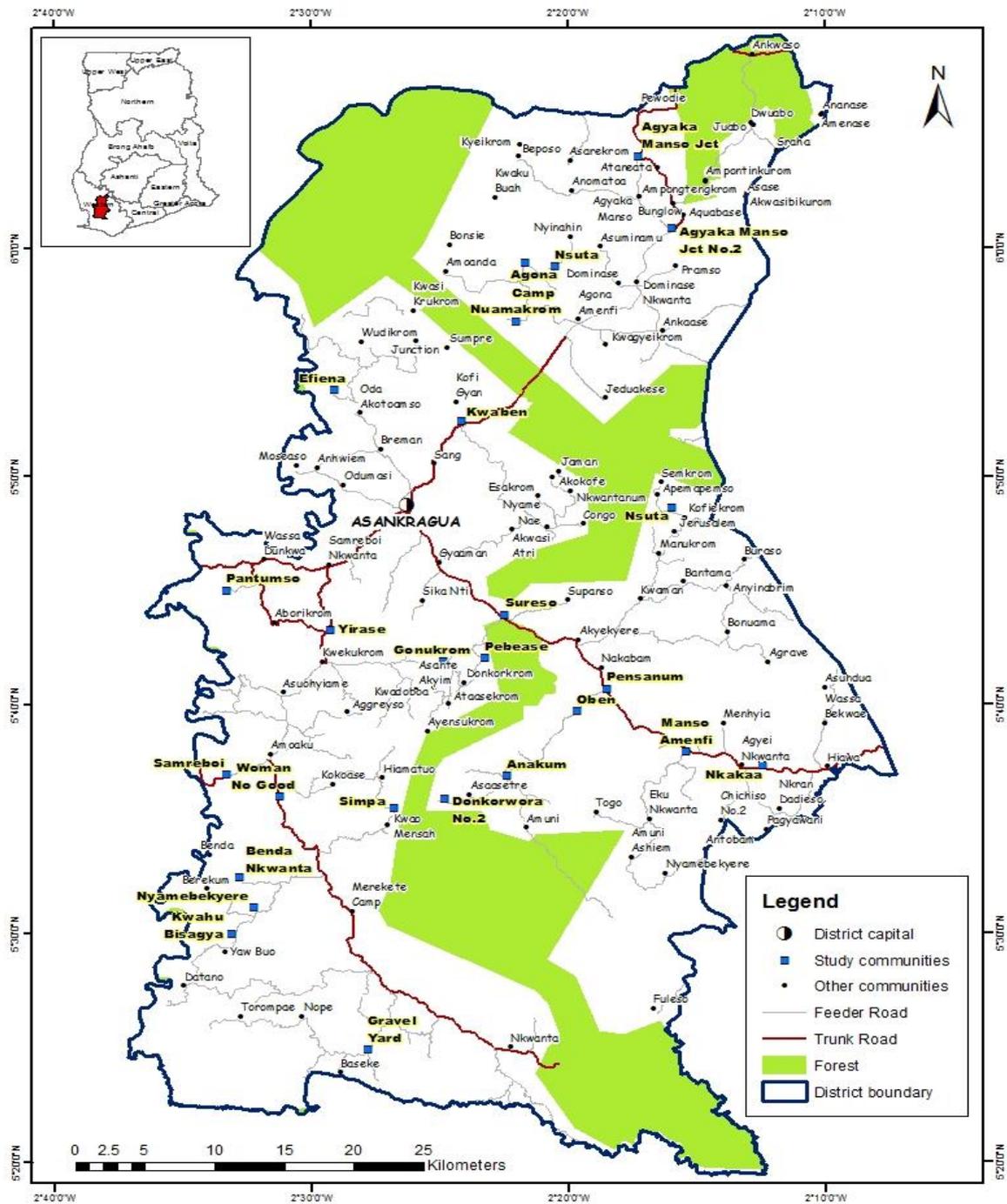


Figure 1: map of Wasa Amenfi West District showing key communities.

Source: Center for Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Services, University of Ghana, Legon (with data from authors' field research, February 2008).

In the 2010 population and housing census of Ghana, the total population of the district is estimated at 161,166.² About 70 percent of the district is rural with the majority of the population living in several settlements (Aidoo 1989). Though the district is a multi-ethnic society, ethnic conflict in the district is rare, but land-based disputes are not uncommon (Alhassan and Manuh 2005).

Data collection process

²Ghana Statistical Service (2012) 2010 Population and housing census, GSS, Accra.

Primary data was gathered through in-depth interviews with forty migrant farmers, twenty indigenes, and three local government officials. In 2007 and 2008, in-depth interviews were held in nine communities while in 2015 in two of these nine communities. The communities are Samreboi, Simpa, and Gravel Yard, all in the south-western part of the district; Asangrangwa, Sureso, and Pensanum all in the central part of the district; Manso Amenfi to the east of the district; and Agona and Agyaka Manso both in the northern part of the district (Figure 1). Four focus group discussions were also conducted with migrant farmers in 2015 in Asankrangua and Manso Amenfi.³

In choosing the participants for the in-depth interviews, a purposive selection technique was followed, based on the authors' prior knowledge of the communities, as well as on reconnaissance of participants' own experiences relating to the theme at hand. The in-depth interviewees and focus group discussants included migrant leaders and farmers, indigene farmers, community leaders, chiefs, family heads, and officials of the district assembly. To ensure heterogeneity between participants in the data collection process, participants of different characteristics and experiences were included, such as the youth and elderly, and recent- and older-generation migrants. To do this, a combination of strategies was adopted. These strategies include opportunistic selection, where relevant people based on prior knowledge were chosen, and snow ball selection where new leads were followed during the fieldwork.

Discussants in the focus group discussions were groups of migrants selected by purposive sampling based on their knowledge and interest to discuss their experiences as migrant farmers, including experiences on customary land tenancy transactions, migrant farmer - land owner relationships, and farmer group formation. Each group had not less than six and not more than ten participants. Secondary data to complement primary data was collected from documents at the district assembly (local government) at Asankrangua and the customary land secretariat at Wasa Akropong, as well as from grey literature and scanty records of migrant farmer groups.

Data analysis

Analysis of data was aided by the use of the Atlas.ti computer assisted qualitative analysis software. The software enabled generation of codes and themes from segments of raw interview transcripts. Atlas.ti permitted the linking of codes and themes from datasets to each other in various ways to determine relationships between participants' claims. In this respect, the qualitative approach followed was inductive, where no predefined categories or themes of the study were set in specific theory and hypothesis (Bahari 2010: 18). Following Bromley (2001: 32), the inductive approach is usually unique to qualitative research. As

³This work adopts the definition of 'stool' in Ghana, in the National Land Policy (Accra, 1999); G.R. Woodman, Customary Land in The Ghanaian Courts (Accra, Ghana Universities Press, 1996); and PNDC (Establishment) Proclamation (Consequential and Supplementary Provision) Law, 1982 (PNDCL 42) S.63 (I). In these sources, stool, is the seat of a chief of an indigenous state (sometimes of a head of family), which represents the source of authority of the chief (or head of family). It is a symbol of unity and its responsibilities devolve upon its living representatives, the chief and his councillors. In Northern Ghana, the equivalent of the stool is the skin. Thus, a group of people who collectively identify themselves to a particular stool or skin constitute the stool or skin area. Land owned by such an area is referred to as stool/skin land.

inductive, it pre-empted interviewees and discussants of this work and the author from being closed up from potential areas of interest that came up only through interactions and the generation of codes and themes in Atlas.ti. As such, the inductive approach was more advantageous than the deductive approach, which is common with quantitative, statistical studies) (Saunders et al.2007; Rocco et al. 2003).

Quotation presentation and referencing

Quotations from data transcripts drawn from the Atlas.ti software are presented in various parts of this work to support interpretation. In these quotations, the real identities of interviewees and discussants are concealed as much as possible. Therefore, only initials of the names of interviewees and discussants are provided in the quotations used. However, official titles of respondents or names of towns in these quotations are real. At the end of each quotation used, there is a quotation reference that provides some basic information about the quotation.

Below is an example of a quotation reference and its meaning:

<ref>P3:_Asangrangua_migrant_farmers_focus_group_discussion_12_December_2015.rtf - 03:18 [(09:12)] by peter narh</ref>.

“<ref>” stands for reference; “P3” means primary document 3, that is, discussion transcript document 3 in the Atlas.ti software; “Asankrangua” refers to the town where the discussion was held; “migrant farmers focus group discussion” is the kind of people involved in the interviewee or discussion; “12December 2015” is the date on which the discussion was held; “rtf” is a computer file format; “03:18” means the quotation used is the 18th quotation in transcript document 3; “[09:12]” means the quotation used begins at paragraph 09 and ends in paragraph 12 of the transcript document; “peter narh” is the name of this transcriber.

Migration into the Wasa Amenfi West district

The diverse ethnic composition of the population of the Wasa Amenfi West district is a consequence of past and present movements of farmers into the area in search of cultivable land. In 2007, officials in the Wasa Amenfi West district (WAWD) estimated the migrant population at between 35 and 40 percent of the total population of the district. At the time of collecting revised data in December 2015, this migrant proportion of the total population was estimated at about 45 to 48 percent. Migrants originally come from various parts of Ghana, particularly the Northern, Eastern, and Ashanti regions. Many as well migrate from neighbouring countries of Burkina Faso, Togo, Niger, Chad, and Mali, primarily to cultivate cocoa (Hill 1963; Awuah 1986; Aidoo 1989; and Alhassan and Manuh 2005) (Figure 2).

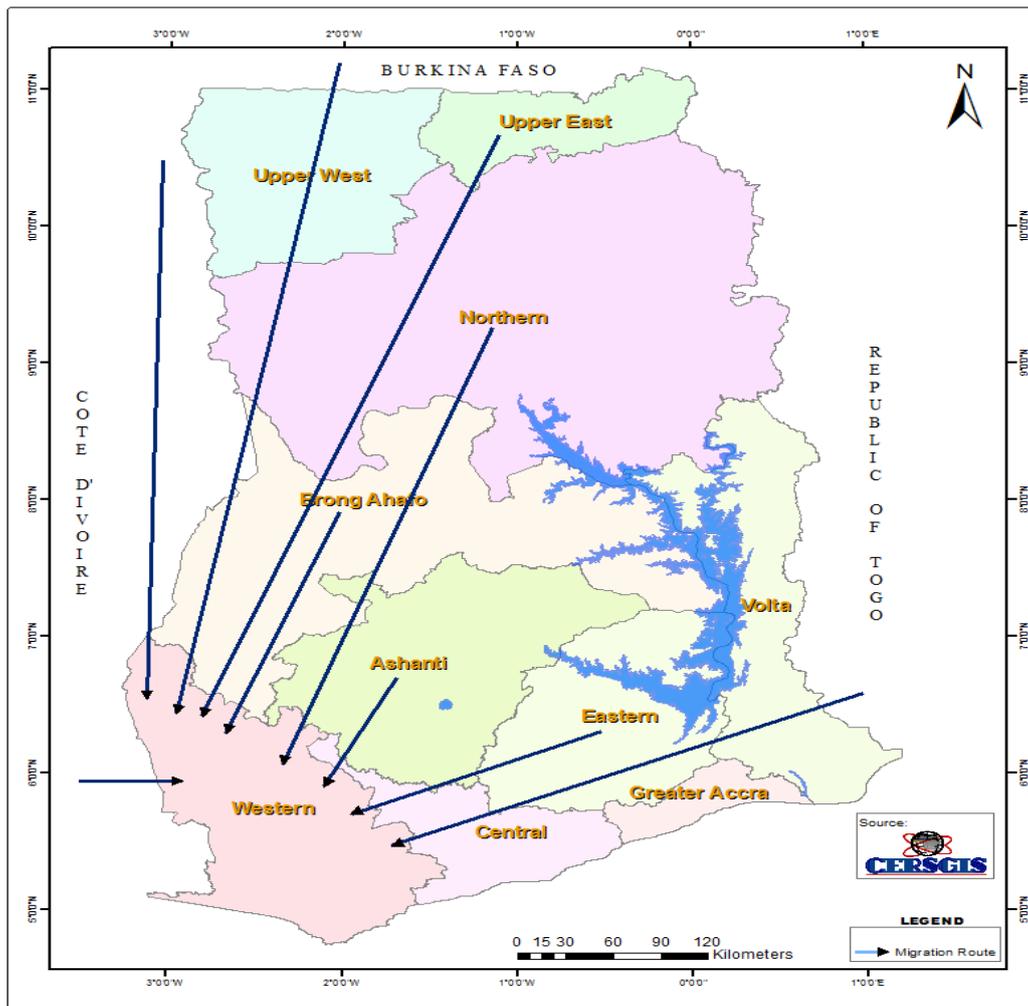


Figure 2, map of Ghana showing migration from other parts of the country and beyond into the western part of the country.

Source: Center for Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Services, University of Ghana, Legon (with data from authors' field research, February 2008).

Informed in-depth interviewees reveal that coincidentally, in the early periods of the migration phenomenon around the mid-20th century, local landowners and chiefs had encouraged migrant farmers to settle and cultivate the large tracts of cocoa land available. For the local people and chiefs, the liberal approach to migrant settlement was a way to increase their economic rewards from the available uncultivated customary lands and also to increase their social status from having tenants. Similar migration phenomenon and associated social status has been reported in the Ivory Coast and Senegal (Adepoju 1995). There are similar phenomena of massive movements from the countryside and conquering of agricultural frontiers by migrants since the 1950s reported in Latin America (Carr 2009; Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013).

Young men in their twenties, thirties, and forties migrate most to the Wasa Amenfi West area. Often, they leave their wives and children behind but later these may join them when they have some financial security after they acquire land and established cocoa farms for themselves. The migrant's main preoccupation in the district is to acquire as much land to grow cocoa as they can. Thus, they first live in the villages where land is easy to find. Subsequently, some make further attempts to find additional land

elsewhere after they had settled and understood the land acquisition dynamics. Many migrants intermarry, own large tracts of cocoa farm, and create second homes in this area. It is tempting to conclude that migrants marry indigenes as a strategy towards increasing their access to and security of land tenure. Thus, sometimes unless told, one is not likely to easily identify a migrant from an indigene.

Migrant farmers usually travel to their hometowns and return with relatives. The network persists today. These new migrants then access land by concluding tenancy land agreements with landowners. Still they may access land either by borrowing from fellow migrants, or by providing farm labour for their relatives or indigenes. Nkamleu and Fox (2006) note that such network migration is common in sub-Saharan Africa. They describe it as chain and group migration where new migrants rely on a network of social relations (friends, relatives, townsfolk) to provide immediate resources such as accommodation and employment until they establish. In the Wasa Amenfi West district, there have been reports that some established migrants charge new migrants some amount of money to bring them to the Wasa Amenfi area. Such assertions however could not be substantiated during the fieldwork for this paper. However, it is uncommon to find a migrant working on other migrant's farms to pay off some form of debt.

Conceptualisation of livelihood and resources

Drawing on Chambers and Conway (1991), and Scoones (1998, 2009) livelihood in this work denotes the means and processes to live. It entails resources, processes, relationships, capacities, and abilities of farmers to access and use resources to live. They state that livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintains or enhances its capabilities and assets, and provides sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation, and contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term. Scoones (1998) builds on this definition of Chambers and Conway to add that livelihood is sustainable also when it does not undermining the natural resource base. Thus, livelihood in this work is about working some form of resources considered crucial.

Livelihood analysis in a sustainable livelihoods approach has over the years considered land resources as the most important livelihood asset for farmers. Livelihood assets may take different forms of tangible capital stock or endowments such as land, equipment, technology, cash, and other materials, or intangible resources such as the claims one make over other materials, information, education, health services, and employment opportunities (Ellis 2000; Leach et al. 1999). The sustainable livelihoods approach is a multidimensional and integrated analytical tool for poverty reduction or guideline for project implementation targeting poor people. It addresses the previous narrow definition of livelihood that informed a focus on isolated and disjointed individual sectoral support (Krantz 2001). Therefore, the new approach is useful for understanding the many factors that affect a person's livelihood and how those factors interact with each other. The approach views livelihood as a system and provides a way

to understand the assets poor people draw upon, the strategies they develop to make a living, the context within which livelihood is developed, and those factors that make livelihood more or less vulnerable to shocks and stresses.

The contention of this paper builds on the conceptualisation of livelihood as above. In this respect, there are livelihood assets and livelihood strategies. As a central component of all livelihood trajectories, livelihood strategies of the people concerned are pivotal to sustaining a living. Livelihood strategies refer to the array and combination of choices and activities that people resort to in order to achieve their livelihood objectives (Marchetta 2011; Ellis 2000), including activities that go to confront threats to livelihood assets (King 2011). While such strategies support ways people secure or use their assets, it is important, in the conviction of this paper, to properly link livelihood strategies up with assets. In this respect, the livelihood strategies of migrant farmers with respect to securing their most important asset, customary cocoa land, suggest that such cocoa land is an important asset of livelihood not just because it is a natural resource. Also and equally important, cocoa land is a resource when such social strategies of people make such resources secure and productive for livelihood. In this conceptualisation, livelihood strategies as social practices are equally important as the natural existence of land, to make land a most important asset for livelihoods.

Customary land tenure in Wasa Amenfi West

Before the description and analysis of migrant groups on land, it is appropriate to start off with some explanations of customary land tenure and administration in the Wasa Amenfi West district, which contributes to migrant farmer group formation. Indeed, existence of such social groups is a strategy of migrant farmers to overcome constraints of the customary land tenure system in the area.

Customary land tenure and administration in Wasa Amenfi West district

'Land' as understood in customary law includes the surface soil and things on the soil, which are enjoyed with it as being part of the land by nature, such as rivers, streams, lakes, lagoons, creeks, growing trees, or things artificially fixed to it like houses, buildings, and any other structures (Woodman 1985; da Rocha 2003). It also includes any estate, interest or right in, to, or over land, or over any of the things being part of the land by nature or artificially fixed to it (Woodman 1985; da Rocha 2003). Customary land tenure refers to ownership and use of land by people, based on some specific recognised rights in such land. Largely, customary land tenure is organised on the basis of customary institutions (customary norms and rules) that are generally accepted by the people concerned. The customary norms and rules are not guaranteed by force, but on the fact that they are recognised, usually explicitly and generally known, as legitimate by the community, though normally they may not be recorded in writing (Fobih 2004).

Adopting this definition of land tenure, migrant land tenure in Wasa Amenfi is described as *abunu* or *abusa* tenancies. Yet, some migrants claim that their land tenure, defined by their outright ownership of land rights, is the same as the usufructuary rights in

land held by indigenes. Such migrants contend that their rights in land are permanent and not tenancies. The contentions surrounding this later version of migrant land tenure have important implications for the social practices of migrant farmers, which are integral parts of their livelihood assets.

The abunu and abusa customary law tenancies

The *abunu* and *abusa* tenancy arrangements are the two main variants of land tenancy in the Wasa Amenfi West district. They provide possessory land (use) rights to otherwise landless people mainly for farming. da Rocha and Lodoh (1999, 84) and Amanor (2005) describe the *abunu* tenancy as the occupation of a contracted land by a tenant for the cultivation of mainly cash crops. The yield of the farm is shared equally between the tenant and the landowner every season, for a number of seasons until such time that the parties agree to divide the portion of the farmland cultivated with the cash crop into two equal halves between the tenant and landowner. The tenant sometimes has complete ownership rights over any food crops cultivated to defray costs incurred in developing the farm; otherwise the food crops are also shared every season. The food crops may be divided into two or three, one-half or a third due the landowner, depending on the extent of contribution they make to the cultivation of the land.

The *abusa* tenancy is a contractual cultivation of land by a tenant for the production of farm crops (food or cash crop) in consideration of a third of the produce or proceeds of the farm to the landowner at the end of every season. The tenant meets all the cost of farming at their own expense (da Rocha and Lodoh 1999, 84). In the district, unlike the *abunu* tenancy, the *abusa* tenancy normally results in sharing of only farm crops, not the farmland. The entire land under the tenancy remains the property of the landowner (Narh 2013). Settler farmers and indigenes in the district are not agreed on the kind of land rights the migrant finally acquires after the land accessed through *abunu* is eventually shared between the landowner and the tenant. For instance, several migrant farmers attached so much emotion to their refusal of the indigenes' assertion that no migrant can hold ownership rights in land in Wasa Amenfi. To them:

GA: ..when you come here the land is given to you to farm and take a part of it for yourself. They never say there is a difference between the soil, which you can use to plant your crops and the land itself which you have to give back to them. They are our caretakers here in terms of giving us land, and we thank them for that. But you see, we cannot toil for nothing, for only crops.

FF: Hmm, this issue has been there since my father came here. We did not own land before, but now I can say we own our lands and we will keep them as such. We respect Nana [local chief] and what he says we will obey. But if we have to lose our lands like they say that the land does not belong to us, then we have to beg Nana that this was not the agreement.

OP: ...my friend, listen to me; me I always ask that when the cocoa is withered then I give back the land. But I will plant year in and year out.

<ref>P3:_migrant_farmers_focus_group_12_December_2015.rtf - 03:18 [(09:12)]
by peter narh</ref>

Let us first put this contention between migrants and indigenes in perspective. Customary law land tenancies such as *abunu* and *abusa*, according to da Rocha and Lodoh (1999) are rights in land capable of being acquired by both indigenes and non-indigenes.

They can be created from both allodial and usufructuary⁴ rights, and may be for an indefinite period, or for a specified period. It gives the tenant limited rights in the land usually for a fee payable in cash or kind. In the Ghana Land Title Registration Law, 1986 (PNDC 152), contractual or share cropping and customary land law tenancies are recognised rights in land. However, neither this statutory law nor customary land laws make clear the circumstances under which a tenant remains a tenant or acquires a different right in the customary land after a period of time.

Indigenes commonly hold that ownership rights over land acquired by settler farmers after the farmland is shared ultimately remains with the original landowner, even after several years. The reason for this is captured succinctly in one interview:

WT: When we talk about this land issue, it is about life and soul. Let me explain better. Wasa Amenfi people, our land is for Wasa Amenfi people because of the toil of our forefathers and the blood they shed sometimes. So it is a relationship of land and blood that cannot be broken. The land is our soul. And I do not need to say it loud that one cannot give out their soul to another person. I mean this land is our soul as Wasa Amenfi people and cannot be alienated to another group of people who are not Wasa Amenfi people.

<ref>P6:_in-depth interview_community leader_Pensanum_16 June 2007.rtf - 06:04 [(05:05)] by peter narh</ref>

However, there is no formal evidence to confirm these claims of the indigenes. Primarily, as seen above, migrant farmers seek to hold on to their *abunu*-acquired lands in perpetuity. Migrant farmers on one hand contend that they hold absolute and perpetual ownership rights in the land they acquire through the *abunu* tenancy arrangement. This means they can rent, bequeath, and even lease off their lands. Indigenes, on the other hand, consider that the land rights of migrant farmers are limited to the lifespan of the cash crop on the land. When any cash crop on the land withers, indigenes expect to reclaim their ownership rights in the land. However, often, migrants plant new cash crops to replace dying ones so that the land is kept under perennial crops for several decades.

Practical reasons can be advanced to account for the seemingly indeterminate land rights of migrants. Though land transactions in the Wasa Amenfi West area are increasingly being documented, largely the documentation is not properly done (Alhassan and Manuh 2005). Many land transaction documents lack proper formulation that unambiguously reflects the nature of rights of parties in land tenancy arrangements. Consequently, there is a high incidence of misinterpretation and breach of terms in the land

⁴ The allodial right is the highest and most comprehensive category of right in customary land by customary law. In the Wasa Amenfi West district, it is held by the chief or paramount chief and encompasses ownership, use, and alienation capacities over customary land. It is the source of all other rights in customary land in Ghana.

The usufructuary right in customary land derives from the allodial right. It is held mostly by indigenes as a complement of rights in view of their inherent membership by birth or adoption to a clan or a landowning community. The usufructuary right in customary land may be acquired by first cultivation of vacant virgin land, or by allotment from the landowning group to its members. Compatible with it being a right and not a privilege, the usufructuary right is indefeasible, inheritable, and often considered inalienable.

transaction documents. The vagueness of the rights over land evolving out of the *abunu* tenancy is the basis of contentions between different sections of the host society, and between the indigenes and migrants.

Migrant group formation over cocoa land as livelihood asset

Migrant groupings are a common phenomenon in the cocoa growing areas in western Ghana. Group formation among migrant farmers is an integral component of their daily lives in the cocoa growing communities. In the words of the coordinator of one the groups in Samreboi, sticking together is an issue of “..a rite for migrants to sustain their lives as crucial as food for the body” “Through these groups migrant farmers attempt to identify together to secure a couple of objectives. These objectives include securing and strengthening rights in land and land tenure, providing labour and capital resources to invest in the productivity of cocoa land, and making regular financial and material contributions towards some identified social and economic needs of a member or members of the group. The groups are able to mobilise in response to immediate needs. Members make constant, though sometimes latent, efforts to organise, nurture or mould their groupings. Most of these groups have neither permanent secretariat nor any proper record keeping procedure of events in the sense of regular recording of events and secured storage of such records. Yet, they have quite effective management machinery that is able to quickly mobilise group members to action to defend the cause of the group in the event of any threats to their objectives.

There are two levels of the migrant group formations. There is the more latent wider group that is composed of all the migrant farmers in one geographical area, say a village or community. But within this group are yet smaller, active, and more closely-knit associations of individuals mostly of common ethnicity, with more clearly defined and pursued ideals. A new migrant automatically acquires membership of the latent wider group without any registration process, in so far as they share in the ideals of the group. But new migrants may need to go through some form of basic registration to become a member of the smaller, close-knit group. Both the wider and smaller groupings are mobilised and come alive purposively when migrants perceive a need, such as a threat to their land rights, or in times when customary services are due the chiefs and community people. As will be expected, the observation is that it is less difficult for the smaller groups to mobilise themselves than the large multi-ethnic groupings.

Drivers of mobilisation

Land tenure challenges

The most important driver for the continuity of migrant groupings is the peculiar land tenure of migrants. Migrant farmers acquire land through tenancy systems described above as *abusa* and *abunu*. Other drivers include the need to contribute financially or materially to assist a member in a current needy situation such as to organise a marriage ceremony, a funeral or provide labour on farms. Mostly, migrant farmer groupings form and persist on the fact that every migrant is constantly aware that land in the district can be insecure sometimes or often. As noted above, the *abunu* and *abusa* land tenure systems are wrought with a couple of challenges, which are constant sources of tension between migrants and indigenes. Migrants therefore identify together to confront these common challenges to safeguard their interests and rights in land. These challenges include contentions over rights in land, which include rights for women, land boundary disputes, and access to and sharing of farm produce. The *abunu* and *abusa*

tenancy systems provide possessory land use rights to otherwise landless migrants. By these systems migrant cocoa farmers have accumulated large parcels of land. In fact, many migrants in many parts of the district now own larger tracts of customary land than the indigenes. This is a constant source of tension between migrants and indigenes. The indigenes are alarmed at the rate at which they continue to lose control of their customary lands to people they still consider migrants.

Migrant farmer groupings are a potent instrument for a common voice to confront threats to migrants land tenure. Enforcement of customary land law sometimes engenders recurrent tensions and disputes between migrants and indigenes. For instance, some landowners in the district have established or are establishing a regulation that seeks to limit rights in customary land acquired through the *abunu* tenancy agreement to a period of fifty years, after which such land rights will be renegotiated, with the first option residing in the landowner. Landowners assert that existing migrant land acquisitions of less than fifty years old are inclusive in this new regulation. Before this regulation, it is common and safe for migrant farmers to regard their tenure of land acquired through the *abunu* transaction as indefinite. In the heat of this regulation in some areas in the district, migrant farmers mobilise to present a common front at the centres of dispute resolution such as the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) office at the district assembly and the divisional and traditional councils.⁵

On the surface, this regulation will seem high-handedness on the part of landowners because its legal basis is not clear. But Article 266(5) of the Ghanaian Constitution, 1992 states:

Where on the twenty-second day of August 1969 any person not being a citizen of Ghana had a leasehold interest in, or right over, any land in Ghana for an unexpired period of more than fifty years, that interest in, or right over, any such land shall be deemed to be an interest or right subsisting for a period of fifty years commencing from the twenty-second day of August 1969.

By this constitutional provision, the regulation for renegotiation for land rights acquired through the *abunu* transaction system after fifty years will seem applicable to the non-Ghanaian migrant farmers. Important questions on this directive may include whether there will be fair, efficient, and adequate opportunity such as at the district ADR and the divisional and traditional councils for both migrants and landowners to effectively address questions like who has first option to renegotiate for the land, who has the right to any crops or structure on the land that may still be productive when the fifty years is due, and the right of the migrant farmer to bequeath the land before the fifty years is due. It is unlikely that this directive will negatively affect the status of relations between migrant farmers and indigenes to serious conflictual extent for now, but important disagreements between land owners and migrant farmers with dire consequences for land tenure security, occur currently and cannot be ruled out also in the near future.

⁵ A Traditional council is the body or organisation comprising the Paramount chief (or King as the case may be), his key officers, and all his or her lower chiefs within the traditional state. Such a body or organisation at the community level is called the Divisional council.

Land and labour needs

Access to land considered enough to make optimal use of the labour of the migrant is an important consideration of migrant groups. The fact that they migrated from far away in other parts of the country to their host communities at great financial costs, migrant groups constantly seek to provide especially to new migrants temporary access to land through borrowing agreements. Land borrowing is a different system to *abunu* and *abusa*. There are often low or no economic or monetary payments involved, and the borrower has no obligation to provide for the upkeep of the lender. Thus, it is usually a social arrangement with a low economic consideration. Land acquisition may take some time for new migrants. In-between the time of arrival and when a new migrant finds a landowner to acquire land, migrants work together to find land among fellow migrants for the new migrant to borrow. Lenders are not necessarily of the same ethnicity of the borrower. Land lending occurs mostly among community members, and within geographical surroundings that will enable the landowner to be constantly aware of the actual use of the land. To this end, land as a livelihood asset for new migrants is contingent on groups finding them land to farm.

Associated with land borrowing is the practice of farm labour borrowing. Migrants provide their labour in the group as temporary labour on each other's farms especially during harvesting and clearing of new land. The work parties are not paid in cash, but the beneficiary of the labour services is obliged to provide food, drink, and transport when the farm is located far from the community. Members of migrant groups rotate their group labour among themselves to work on their farms in turn. Participation in a work party is thus reciprocal. The relevance of farm labour borrowing is twofold with respect to land as livelihood asset. The arrangement enables a farmer to quickly complete tasks such as field preparation, cocoa harvesting, and transporting of cocoa pods to weighing depots, to earn income. Equally important is that, for farmers who are still tenants, the arrangement also enables a farmer to complete these tasks to meet the harvesting and sharing obligations with landowners. Meeting obligations with landowners is a crucial condition to retain the tenancy and thus access to and use rights in land.

In-depth interviews and group discussions indicate that migrant farmers have faith in their groups to provide for meeting land transaction obligations. Some discussants and interviewees explain this group social and economic utility:

HO: Many people need land, including indigenes here. You cannot be idle for a few years; you will be very unwise; you dare not leave your land uncultivated or unattended to for years. If your strength is not enough, we are all here to lend a hand. After all we all face the same situation.

<ref>P9: *_in-depth interview_Agyaka Manso_08 December 2015.rtf - 09:11 [(02:02)] by peter narh*</ref>

CT: We have families back in our home towns that we need to constantly send money and food. We also build in our home towns. So you know, it is all working hard here so that we can keep our families and properties going. ..

MM: Yes, and you know the land is not that good in the north [northern part of the country] so we need to do much here; that is why the self-help groups are very important to us here. Sometimes you will think they don't exist but you make a call and you will see how much helpful the groups can be. It is a tool that we migrants need so much here.

<ref>P1: *_focus group discussion_Asankrangua_09 December 2015.rtf - 01:10 [(08:08)] by peter narh*</ref>

To these ends, group formation is a necessary political, economic, and social instrument for delivering the livelihood assets of migrant farmers.

Annual social obligations to chiefs

Migrants mobilise to legitimate their settlements in their host communities and therefore their land tenure security through the performance of customary services to the divisional and traditional councils every year. These services are mostly due at annual festivals and traditional occasions, as well as during funerals of prominent community elders and chiefs, or at any other important community social occasion. The quanta of the obligations are usually not defined, and can be in cash or kind. In recent times, it is not uncommon for migrants to present cocoa beans with drinks, and a few cash. The customary services started as individual performances by all migrants. However, the recent practice among migrants is that they organise themselves to perform the services in common as a group, usually with bags of cocoa beans or some other materials. Ostensibly, performing the services in common as a group is less costly to migrants. Group presentation of this obligation has been accepted, though both migrants and chiefs note that there had been instances where both parties had contended over the adequacy of the obligations presented in groups.

A migrant who fails or refuses to meet these social obligations risk the wrath of chiefs and people of their host communities. In view of the recurrent tensions between migrants and local people over migrants' land ownership right as noted above, migrants find it imperative to maintain themselves in the good eyes of local people and the chiefs to secure them continued and peaceful stay in their communities. Meeting the annual obligations is one sure way to achieve this. Irrespective of the fact that many migrants have acquired and claim complete outright ownership of large tracts of land in the district, most indigenes still consider them migrants insofar as they are not related to the community by any clan or birth rights to customary land in the area. However, the status of some migrants is quite dicey because they have married indigenes and have children with them. Yet, when the woman in the marriage is an indigene, the man and children are still considered migrants and thus have no birth-right legitimate claim to customary land in the district. This is because indigene land ownership and inheritance are patriarchal systems. Usually, women acquire land and work on it with the support of a male relation. This can be the husband, son, brother, cousin or in-law, as the case may be. For this reason, indigene women have limited rights over land to claim land rights for a child they may have had with a migrant.

III. CONCLUSION

Migrant groups are a major rallying social space that shapes the evolving land tenure system in the Wasa Amenfi West district. Migrant group formation is as much tied to customary land as the most important asset as they are for migrants' continued stay in the communities. The groups exist in the form of social, economic, and political capital not only as livelihood strategies, but also as means to secure or deliver customary land as livelihood assets. To this end, these group strategies are more than livelihood

strategies. In the foregoing discussion, migrant farmer groups crucially mediate migrants' access to and use of customary land. Thus, migrant group activities when considered only as strategies to promote livelihood obscures the central and integral role they play in making land an important livelihood asset. In a proper perspective, strategies such as migrant group formations should be considered as social constituents of livelihood assets, not just livelihood strategies.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- In both urban and rural Ghana, there is increasing land scarcity and associated land-based challenges that are impacting significantly on land as secured livelihood assets for most people, especially farmers. In these circumstances, understanding the complexities of land calls for viewing land not only as a natural product but a social one as well.
- Livelihoods of rural farmers can be better appreciated, assessed holistically, and better supported when the social dimension of land as a livelihood asset is acknowledged and understood. The social dimension is, as the migrant farmer group formation in the Wasa Amenfi West district demonstrates, the collectivity of strategies of farmers toward securing and strengthening their access to and use of land.

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