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“Development on the margin”

Customary Land Access and Accountability in Ghana: Effects of Land Allocation Practices on Local Livelihoods

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Abstract

This paper examines the dynamics of changing practices of customary land allocation and its effects on local livelihoods of people whose only means of survival depends on farming. With the dearth of alternative employments in rural and peri-urban communities, of Ghana, agricultural production becomes the only means of survival of folks. However, in the context of emerging land marketisation, fueled by de Soto's idea of 'awakening the dead capital', realisation of the objective of marginal people to improve their welfare through increased agriculture is becoming impractical, as their rights to land are being eroded.

Chiefs and heads of families exchange 'communal' lands for money, on the account that such lands are losing their agricultural value. Moneys realised from transfer of lands are also not accounted for. Embedded however within the social fabric of the community is a hierarchical structure of power imbalances, which makes it difficult for poor and marginal people to revolt and stop these heinous activities by their leaders. In the absence of any corrective measure, local people risk losing rights to their lands, poverty may increase and future of the community may be jeopardised.

We question, how these actions of chiefs and heads of land owning groups are impacting on livelihoods of marginal people whose entire lives depend on farming. Using data obtained from a recent field work in Ghana, we focus on the effect of land marketisation and/or rising cost of land leases on the livelihood of rural and peri-urban marginal lands. We show how in spite of government's policies to enhance accountability in customary land management, chiefs and heads of families are able to use excuses of marginality of land to sell communal farmlands without rendering account. We hope the findings of this study will help fine tune the current processes of land administration projects .

Keywords: Accountability, Chieftaincy, Ghana, marginal lands