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Institutional Conflict and Access to Resources in Ghanaian Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture

EILEEN BOGWEH NCHANJI, IMOGEN BELLWOOD-HOWARD, NIKOLAUS SCHAREIKA

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, Germany

Abstract

Food insecurity is a global problem particularly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa. Here, urban agriculture has rarely been formalized and institutional conflict often threatens the possibilities for it to contribute to food security. Yet this case study finds that in Tamale, northern Ghana, conflict between institutions has inadvertently led to innovative resource provisioning in urban agriculture. Vegetable cultivation is a means of survival for many residents of Tamale. It requires access to infrastructure such as markets, transport and extension support. Fourteen months of ethnographic study was carried out to understand the resource politics of vegetable farming in Tamale. Traditional institutions whose allodial right over land has encouraged a lucrative land market play a decisive role in determining the form of farmers' access to land. Agricultural land is sold out for industrial and residential purposes. The resultant shortage of city farmland has led to innovations like farming in and around buildings, on plots of less than 0.25 hectares. Farmers also opportunistically collaborate with the state and private institutions against traditional authorities to get permanent access to designated farming zones in the city. Furthermore, this uneasy institutional relationship has given rise to a cordial association between farmers, academics and other researchers, whereby inputs such as improved seeds are provided for farmers to test on their fields. This process has also encouraged crop diversification in farmers' fields and increasing productivity. As farmers' management practices have become more productive and less risky, their adaptation to climate variability has improved. In a further bid to increase production in a land-scarce situation, farmers and NGO's such as 'New Energy' give 'kola' (a token) for land and in turn bring technological innovations like drip irrigation to peri-urban fringes. This paper explains how conflict between some institutions directly and indirectly involved in urban and peri-urban food production has led to collaboration and synergy between others, increasing innovative farmers' access to the critical resources of land and technology. Such links, if formalized, will improve food security. In demonstrating these relationships, this paper provides an insightful, optimistic picture of the elements that actors must consider in policy decisions around urban agriculture.

Keywords: Food security, institutions, peri-urban, technology, vegetables