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## Grazing Fields and Fishponds on the Rice Farm — The Contested Nature of a Commercial Agricultural Investment in Ghana

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### Abstract

Large-scale land acquisitions (LSLA) in countries of the South are increasingly challenging the food security of rural communities. While intensifying land use and raising yield output within the investment perimeter, LSLA substantially affect livelihood patterns of local individual households by altering and limiting access to resources for food production and consumption. Gender, kinship and social position within the community are crucial variables that define an individual's ability to benefit or suffer from a LSLA. Taking on a feminist political ecology perspective, this study analyses the impacts of a 2500 hectares rice plantation in the South Tongu District of Ghana on the food security of households living in and around the farm. Data was collected through questionnaire-based interviews with female and male small-scale farmers and focus group discussions, focusing on changes in livelihood patterns, availability, access and utilisation of food and the related resources. Transect walks and the attendance of community meetings provided additional insights. Further information was gained through semi-structured and informal interviews with company representatives, governmental and customary authorities. The case study is located in a rural community, where livelihoods are shaped to a high degree by a customary system. Its' various institutions define the control and use of land, the distribution of power, the inclusion or exclusion of individuals from negotiation processes as well as the accessibility of information. Through the collaboration between the company and the traditional authorities, new institutions are also created and intra-community tensions arise. This further affects people's ability to sustain their food security and aggravates the marginalization of some kin and gender groups. Through the LSLA, communal land, crucial for the collection of wild foods and firewood as well as for pasture, turned into private farmland. Hence, some sorts of food allocation, like fishing, are under constraint. Other resources, like wood, an important source of quick income to women, are getting scarce. However, through negotiation and adaptation, women and men develop innovative ways to compensate for the various losses. Furthermore, employment opportunities with the company, in particular an outgrowing scheme, are providing promising opportunities to diversify the livelihoods of households.

**Keywords:** Communal land, food security, gender, large-scale land acquisition, small-scale farmers