



Tropentag, September 16-18, 2015, Berlin, Germany

“Management of land use systems for enhanced food security:  
conflicts, controversies and resolutions”

## **An Analysis of the Effects of Large Scale Land Acquisition on Rural Livelihoods in Sierra Leone. Integrating a Gender Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

In Sierra Leone, one of the smallest and most food insecure countries in sub-Saharan Africa, huge tracts of land have been leased to mostly foreign investors. Guided by the sustainable livelihoods framework, this study investigates land rights and ownership patterns in this country, as well as the gender dimensions of large scale land acquisition and its effects on rural livelihoods. Field work was carried out in Samalen Chiefdom in southern Sierra Leone between April and July 2014, applying a mixed methods approach. Qualitative data were collected through five key informant interviews and five focus group discussions and analysed using Nvivo, while structured interviews were conducted with sixty households to collect quantitative data and analysed using SPSS.

In the study site, large scale land acquisition has contributed to high levels of unemployment, reduced income and increased food insecurity due to loss of land as the main livelihoods asset. Alternative livelihood options are limited, with only few employment opportunities offered by the land investor. Prevailing cultural and traditional local practices that are embedded in the predominantly patriarchal society, in conjunction with gender discriminatory national laws, result in women having been disproportionately affected by large scale land acquisition compared to men. For instance, women's share of land and property holdings and their role in land use decision making were in general marginal to non-existent. Also, while more women than men have been employed by the land investors, they struggle to combine household tasks and their day jobs. At the same time, men complained that women were “disrespectful” and felt “equal” to men since they started working for large scale land investors. Recommendations include the review of land laws to include explicit provisions that define the role of governing bodies and land owners in large scale land acquisition processes and provide equal access to and protection of land ownership and use for men and women. It is further suggested that an international legally binding framework to regulate the process of large scale land acquisition be developed and institutionalised

**Keywords:** Food insecurity, gender, land grabbing, large scale land acquisition, national land laws and legislations, Sierra Leone, smallholder farmers, sustainable livelihoods