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Women as Victims of Land Grabbing: Implications for Household Food Security and Livelihoods in Cameroon

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Abstract

This multi-sited research will make use of primary and secondary data to understand the multiple implications of land grabbing for local food production and rural livelihoods in Cameroon. Amidst restricted access to land and forest resources, this study will demonstrate how land previously accessed by communities to grow crops and to harvest forest resources is being acquired and transformed into commercial oil palm plantations by Herakles Farms, a US-based company, with Sithe Global Sustainable Oils Cameroon as its local subsidiary. Focusing on selected land grabbing communities in Cameroon, the study uses a feminist political ecology lens to examine the gendered nature in resources access and its impacts for women's food production in particular, and rural livelihoods in general. I will argue that the change in land use particularly erodes women's rights to access land and forest resources, and in turn negatively affects local food production and rural livelihood in the region. I will show how women in the region play instrumental and dominant roles in ensuring local food production through subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture but are unfortunately the main losers of territory that the state considers as 'empty' or underutilised - and is subjected to appropriation. The paper will conclude that, rural women's active participation in the decision-making processes concerning the use of and/or allotment of land to foreign investors is indispensable to guarantee local, national and global food security, but also to ensure that alternative livelihood options are provided, particularly to those rural women facing dispossession or at risk of being dispossessed.

Keywords: Access to resources, Cameroon, feminist political ecology, food security, gender, land, land grabbing, women