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## Who gets the land? A comparative case study on “failed” large-scale land deals in Ghana

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### Abstract

Large-scale land deals in Africa have profound repercussions in many rural communities altering socio-economic frameworks and livelihoods even if they are non-operational or fail. Ghana is a case in point where according to the Land Matrix, more than 400,000 hectares were acquired for bioenergy crops, at the height of the “land grab” period. More than a decade later, many of these deals grow different crops, are only partially operational, non-operational or have been given up completely.

These failed deals have rarely been studied and, therefore, it is unclear what happened to the land and its former users. We aim to provide an in-depth understanding of such land deals, the current land use, the institutional setting, and differentiated experiences of affected community members, such as landowners, migrant sharecroppers, and women. Two cases are selected which have been subject to an earlier study by one of the authors. We used a mixed-method comparative case study research design employing the Process Net-Map method, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and transect walks for an in-depth exploration of the present state after the failed land deals. The revised ‘Sustainable Livelihood Framework’ by Scoones is combined with the ‘Theory of Access’ by Peluso and Ribot to interpret our findings. Results show rather different outcomes at the two sites with an important link between the present situation on these lands to the nature of the initial lease agreements. Case 1 is ongoing with different crops on a very small scale, and some parts of the remaining lands given to a few company workers who gained access to the land to maintain company control over it prospectively. In case 2 the company has completely abandoned the land, and members of the community including a large proportion of previous landowners’ wives and migrant sharecroppers who were previously disenfranchised, are now allowed to farm the former company land under the auspices of the subchief. This study shows that land rarely returns to the original owners after a failed deal as in other literature and this have implications on sustainable land use and fairer redistribution prospects.

**Keywords:** Bioenergy crops, gendered experiences, land governance