



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



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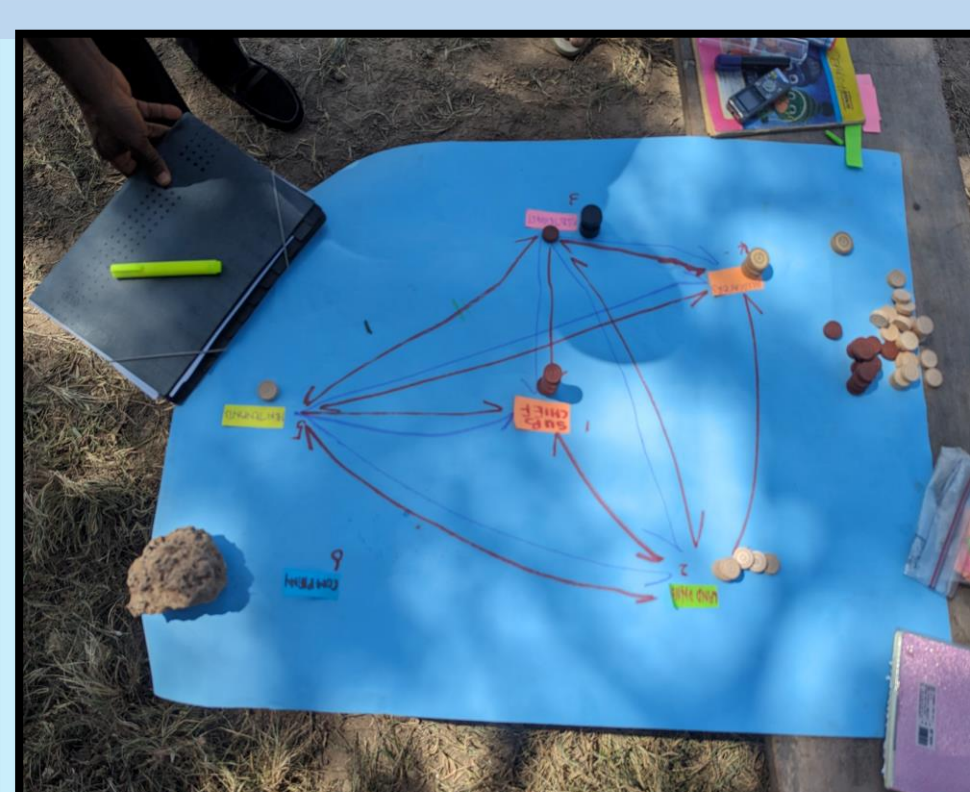
Background

- Renewed interest in agricultural land since the 2000s, driven by high commodity prices, the financial crisis of 2007/08, and demand for biofuels (Cotula et al. 2014)
- Ghana is a case in point: at the height of the “land grab” period, where more than 400,000 ha of land had been acquired for bioenergy production (Land Matrix, 2020)
- More than a decade later, most biofuel land deals were given up completely, many of the investors switched from biofuel to other crops, or are only partially or non-operational
- In Ghana, at least 100,000 hectares were abandoned, and investors now produce food or timber (Land Matrix, 2020)
- Women and youths are greatly affected within the framework of land deals as there exist gender-powered relationships in accessing, controlling, and benefiting from land transfers (Borras et al. 2022)
- “Failed” deals have rarely been studied, therefore, it is unclear what happens to the land and former users

Research Objectives

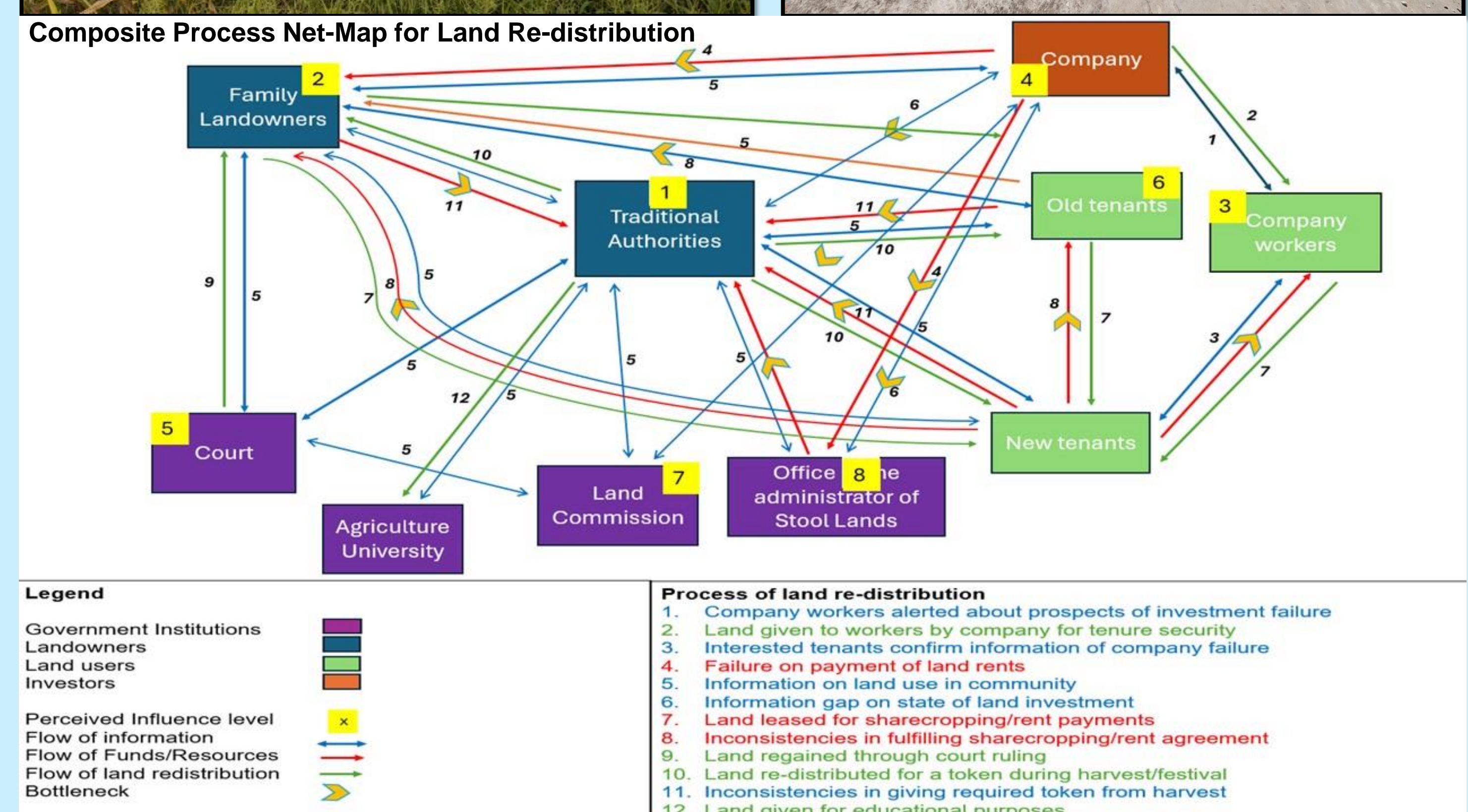
- To examine the power relations amongst the different stakeholders and institutional framework that influences the dynamics of “failed” deals
- To provide an in-depth account of the processes of such “failed” deals
- To understand factors that influence land re-distribution thereafter, and examine differentiated experiences of affected community members, such as landowners, migrant sharecroppers, and women

Methodology



Results

	Case A	Case B
Land tenure System (cropping system)	• Stool land/Family land (Settled cultivation)	• Stool land/Family Land (Shifting Cultivation) Women mostly cultivate during the off-season of husbands
Community Land lease agreements	• Mostly sharecroppers (1/3 of harvest or 45-60GHS per acre per season) or • allodial freehold rights (initial token sum and yearly tribute to chief)	• High share of migrant tenant farmers, with allodial freehold rights (yearly token of 2-10 yam tubers to chief) or • sharecropping (yearly token of 10 tubers of yam to landowner)
Company Land Size / Type of initial lease Agreement	• 33000acres / Upfront payment to chiefs and yearly land rents	• 95,000 acres / 20% ownership and profit sharing was agreed upon with the chief (never paid)
Case of failure/Abandonment?	• Stopped paying land rents in 2016 • Switched from jatropha to maize in 2010 on <600 ha, due to low yields and profitability, in 2023 only 30 ha of maize cultivated	• Complete abandonment in 2014 • Financial challenge of main shareholder • Foreclosure of factory by bank
Did land Redistribution occur?	• Partially in areas not previously exploited by company	• Yes. Community members re-entered company land fully
Who got access to company land?	• Few remaining company workers who are still employed got use rights (they give land out to tenants and secure the land for company) • Some landowners went to court and got their land back • Former sharecroppers in case landowners got land back	• Formal redistribution was done by chief for both women and men migrants, and wives of landowners • Some landowners got both compensation land and access to company land, and increased land holding



Discussion

Combination of the revised ‘**Sustainable Livelihood Framework**’ by Scoones with the ‘**Theory of Access**’ by Peluso and Ribot

- The chiefs yield significant power in land lease and redistribution and can allow for weaker actors, such as migrant sharecroppers or women to get use rights in some cases
- Land rarely returns to its original users, but access is retained mainly due to institutional ties, social relations, and local governance structures.
- Failed deals disrupt the financial and social capitals of local populations, but the exact outcomes depend on the nature of the deal, who controls the resources, under what conditions, and with what mechanisms of power
- Understanding both aftermath livelihood impacts, and access mechanisms during land deals are critical for fairer re-distribution and sustainable land governance

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