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Dynamics of large-scale land deals:

Implications of local political influence on land grabbing in north-west of Sierra Leone.

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Abstract

Foreign companies have acquired vast land for bio-fuel crop plantations and agricultural investment in Sub-Saharan African countries, often referred to as "land grabbing." This practice violates human rights, lacks indigenous consent, and has no social or environmental considerations. Large-scale land deals impact land rights, as investors obtain leases and clear land for industrial monoculture plantations, with limited inclusion of local land-owning families. This is a key development strategy of the Sierra Leone government. Large-scale land deals in Sierra Leone affect land rights, allowing investors to clear land for industrial monoculture plantations, limiting local land-owning families' inclusion and a key development strategy.

Goal and objectives:

This study seeks to examine the role of local political influence on the dynamics of large-scale land deals and their implications for land grabbing in North-West of Sierra Leone.

Methodology:

This study explored a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design including quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The study also consists of data collection and synthesis of existing literature through content analyses. Secondary data resources, including journals, research articles, and government reports on large-scale land deals in Sierra Leone. To capture local-level dynamics, purposive sampling method was used for the key informant interviews, which was informed by the need to ensure the sample represented a cross-section of the population of interest, namely, the stakeholders involved on the different sides of civil society activism, the local elites, elders, youth, women, land-owning families, land leasers and the grassroots activists.

Results:

The study revealed that Sierra Leone's institutions are not yet equipped to handle large-scale land deals. Prioritizing governance, regulatory structures, technical know-how, and coordination among key agencies is crucial. The government also lacks the capacity and resources to supplement agricultural investments. Engaging with investors and project developers can identify missed opportunities and seek support from development partners, donors, and NGOs. A structured legal framework for land lease arrangements is needed, allowing government and multinational corporations to increase coordination, inclusion, participation, and cooperation with land-owning families.

Keywords:

Large Scale Land Deals, Land grabbing, Local elites, Sierra Leone, political Influence.

1. Introduction

Literature on large scale land-based agricultural investments have particularly focused on its potential benefits, such as large infusions of capital, infrastructure, technology transfer, bring rapid changes into rural areas, new jobs, economic growth and development etc. However, it has caused increased pressure on natural resources crucial to local livelihoods, particularly land and water (Landmatrix, [SEP]2020). Despite the pressure, large scale foreign investments in African land-based agriculture have increased dramatically. Driven by the 2007-2008 price spike of key primary commodities, in conjunction with the world financial crisis, commercial [SEP]investment companies increasingly sought out new investment ventures (Arezki et al. 2013; Koning [SEP] and van Ittersum, 2009).

The Land Matrix - a record documenting all transnational land acquisitions [SEP] till date - has recorded 1,694 'concluded' large scale land-based agricultural investments, covering about 50 million hectares. Over 30 percent of this are foreign owned arable land. (Landmatrix, [SEP]2020; Nolte et al., 2016). These investments often take the form of large-scale plantations, with [SEP]land rights acquired for a long period (typically 49 or 99 years). While large scale land-based investments may create new opportunities for some (through land rents and employment), they exclude many others (Peters, 2004). Some scholars herald this new wave of investment by commercial parties as an important medium to achieve poverty reduction, highlighting the potential benefits of scale economies in agricultural production (Collier and Dercon, 2014; Ellis, 2005), inducing innovation (Borensztein et al., 1998), [SEP]enabling access to finance (Alfaro et al., 2010) and the organization of production and marketing (Reardon et al., 2003). On the other hand, there are arguments against such land deals that [SEP]stress important potentially significant negative impacts on the dynamics of these land deals such as local political influence, land grabbing, distributional, social and institutional constraints. Such effects may be particularly strong in the African context characterized by strong social dependencies (Townsend, 1994).

While large scale land-based investments may create new opportunities for some (through land rents and employment), they exclude many others (Peters, 2004). Such effects may be particularly strong in the African context characterized by strong social dependencies (Townsend, 1994). Investments may deepen social divisions, possibly contributing to conflict (Peters, 2013; De Schutter, 2011; Baxter, 2013; Scott, 1998). Large-scale land acquisition by foreign companies often amounts to "land grabbing" (Liversage, 2010), generating benefits for foreign investors (and domestic elites). Land rights are impacted as investors obtain leases and clear land for industrial monoculture plantations. For many households this implies a change in access to land (in extreme case even forced migration), and nutritional security, thereby impacting family livelihoods (Liversage, 2010).

Thus, this study examined the dynamics of large-scale land deals: Implications of local political influence on land grabbing to thoroughly investigate and clarified their specific effects on land rights and land grabbing in North-West of Sierra Leone. Therefore, to make it easier to identify long-term solutions that will promote large scale land base investment for sustainable livelihoods and strengthening the governance of large-scale land deals at the local level.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Large-scale land acquisitions (LSLA) in Sub-Saharan Africa countries (SSA) have been characterized by variegated social, economic and cultural controversies. Reported cases include suppression of free speech and other forms of human rights (Claeys et al. 2013, De Schutter, 2011), the alienation of local populations from decision making on land acquisitions, intimidation of local populations by local law enforcement bodies, and local populations being deprived of access to vital local natural resources (Claeys,; Vanloqueren, 2013, Richards, 2013, Fairhead et al. 2012). Given the heavy dependence of many sub-Saharan African countries, especially the rural populations on agriculture, it can be stated, arguably, that depriving rural communities of farming land (where it exists) is one of the most contentious of these controversies. It is therefore justifiable to carry out a study of this nature, as results generated will provide useful information to the government, local authorities and large-scale agriculture investors on the impact of large scale agriculture investment in communities on the implications of local political influence on land grabbing.

The impact of the loss of land is rarely well documented. Richards (2013) finds that 5 of 18 LSLAs use forests, and more than half productive agricultural land, but which share is actually under cultivation is not known. Compensation is minute, and go unpaid in half of the cases. Even worse, victims experience long delays before accessing these meagre amounts. (Cotula 2013; Vãth 2012). These are the strongest evidences of impact on local food security, but the exact figures are unavailable. The nature and implications of local political influence on land grabbing are sparsely engaged in negotiations on LSLAs (Mehta et al. 2012). There are abundant resources particularly in SSA, and there is a need for increased and improved use worldwide from various points of view stabilizing and increasing production and productivity, and mitigating the effects of climate change (FAO and NEPAD 2002; De Fraiture and Wichelns 2010).

However, in most large-scale land deals, the fulfillment of contracts and the data with which to support the need to change business and contracts are difficult to oversee by individual farmers, communities and even national governments. Elements necessary to understand the situation of the enterprise and their local partners may involve productivity, costs, prices, benefits, corporate social responsibility and public good provision, environmental effects, and conflicts and their resolution. Monitoring these issues is important to guarantee trust, tackle rumours and false accusations, renegotiate prices and longer term changes of initial contracts.

The Government of Sierra Leone aspires to 'promote an attractive business environment based on fair and responsible investments in land for both small and large-scale businesses' (GoSL, 2015). The Agricultural-based bioenergy investments has received considerable attention in the media and has been the focus of several policy reports and journal articles (GoSL, 2015, Landmatrix, 2020). Most reports critique the investment and describe how it was forced through by politicians and local elites without involving communities' other than through superficial consultation, and conclude average incomes decreased. Some cite improved incomes, especially for specific landowners. Some also point to increases in social disharmony due to the plantation creating conflicts over access to land and surface rents and in other cases exacerbating existing tensions over land claims. A key drawback is that most of these studies rely on qualitative and small sample case studies. In response to the identified gap, this study examined the dynamics of large scale land deals, with a focus on

implications of local political influence on land grabbing in Northern province of Sierra Leone, using both quantitative and qualitative research instruments to collect and analyze primary data.

1.2 Literature review

In most cases, land investment deals are made between companies and elites and exclude local people from the negotiations, increasing corruption (Peters, 2013; DeSchutter, 2011). Despite the scale of foreign investments in agriculture, local economic impacts have to date failed to receive rigorous quantitative investigation. Exceptions are Herrmann and Grote (2015), who assess a sugarcane plantation and out grower scheme in Malawi, and find positive economic for laborers. The plantation attracts labor from nearby villages typically from the poorest households. Compared to non-laborers, incomes nearly double. A similar paper, by Herrmann (2017) examines rice and sugar plantations in Tanzania. He finds for both sectors an increase in per capital income for plantation laborers compared to other households in the same villages. There is however, no significant effect on agricultural or total household income. Theoretical work by Kleemann and Thiele (2015) and Dessy et al. (2012) show how the net effects of such investment projects crucially depend on the intermediate impacts on labor and land markets. If labor and land are abundant, increased demand for labor and land should not impact local economies. However, this is rarely the case. For instance, in Sierra Leone, the being consider here, where there is severe competition over labor (Mokuwa et al., 2011; Bulte et al., 2018).

The majority of the population of Sierra Leone is engaged in the agricultural sector. Farms are very small: average farm size is about 0.5 hectares. To a large degree farm output is determined by labor rather than land or capital (fertilizer application and improved seed varieties are rare) (MAFFS, 2011). There has been a surge in commercial investments in agriculture. Since 2000, foreign companies have acquired over 25% of the country's arable land (Baxter, 2013; Landmatrix, 2020). Sierra Leone has received a lot of attention from land investors. Since 2000, 24 deals have been concluded, covering 1 million hectares (25% of total arable land) (Landmatrix, 2018). Sierra Leone ranks low on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2018) and has high poverty levels and low food security. Most Sierra Leoneans are smallholder farmers, especially in rural areas. Farm productivity is low. The main agricultural input is labour, with fertilizer and high-yielding seeds virtually unavailable in the country. A 2011 survey found that 65% of households experienced a shortage of labour in the agricultural season. Farm production to a large extent relies on family labour. About one third of households hire labour (MAFFS, 2011).

For any land deal to take place, the traditional authorities and local elites plays a crucial role in the negotiation of the land lease. The Paramount Chiefs as the highest custodian of traditional land in his chieftom has a central role in accessing land. He may provide the contact to the landowning families and has to give the final consent for the land deal with his signature. However, the decision to lease land is always taken by the family who provides the land. Although the paramount chief and tribal authorities have a central role in regulating land use in Sierra Leone, the land laws in Sierra Leone emphasize the "trusteeship of the Chieftom Councils or Tribal Authorities. Thus the Chieftom Councils or Tribal Authorities are not the owners of the land but custodians who hold for and on behalf of the true owners who are thus the respective communities and families" (Chieftaincy Act, 2009).

In Sierra Leone, smallholder farmers, especially in rural areas, farm productivity is low and access to productive inputs, such as fertilizer and high-yielding seeds is minimal. As a result, agricultural production is limited by labor availability. The irony is that, up-scaling of large scale investments in the agricultural sector raises concerns over the likely negative impacts on local people's livelihoods. A review of similar studies in some Sub-Sahara Africa countries shows that relocation and resettlement of families is a common bone of contention in setting up large-scale investments in agriculture (World Bank 2014, and 2016). The government of Sierra Leone survey found that 65% of households experienced a shortage of labor in the agricultural season (MAFFS, 2011). Farm production to a large extent relies on family labor. About one third of households hire labor (MAFFS, 2011). Outside investments can potentially improve this situation by bringing in improved technologies and large-scale production that achieve economies of scale. The social and cultural impacts of LSLAs are often felt disproportionately by the most vulnerable members of society, such as women, children, and the poor. This is because they are often the ones who have the least access to land and resources, and they are the least likely to be consulted or compensated when their land is acquired.

1.2.1 Theoretical framework

In this study, Indemnity and Takers Gain compensation theories are used in order to meet the different compensation objectives. The indemnity theory desires compensation that considers the whole range of losses to put expropriates on a similar status as before the expropriation, but not worse-off (Denyer-Green, 2014). Characteristically, this requires compensation covering market value of property taken, plus additional compensation for severance and injurious affection, expropriatory disturbances, consolatory payments (solatium) and/or special values. Under this principle, compensation is measured by considering an expropriates losses, and not purchaser's benefits (Barnes, 2014).

Various compensation concepts including adequate compensation, appropriate compensation, commensurate compensation, fair compensation, full compensation, equivalent compensation, and full indemnification, among others, subscribe to the indemnity philosophy. Market value of acquired property is generally the principal item for compensation. Likewise, severance and injurious affection are based on market or rental values (Baum et al., 2008). Severance is loss in value of any remaining property where only a fraction of the property is expropriated, while injurious affection is depreciation in value of any remaining property caused by proposed uses on acquired land or the actual works (Barnes, 2014). Generally, depreciation in market value of remaining land is the compensation amount for severance and injurious affection. Disturbance compensation is based on financial calculations and includes profit/income and business losses; costs for relocation and transport, legal and valuation services, among many others (Baum et al., 2008).

Solatium, as a consolation payment for expropriation, is given as a lump sum or as a proportion of the agreed compensation sum (Baum et al., 2008) and varies in different jurisdictions. Special value depends on sentimental attachments between owners and the expropriated properties and benefits emanating from the property to owners besides market value (Keon-Cohen, 2002). Special value is based on a percentage of the compensation sum, or it is agreed upon by the parties (Fortes, 2005).

Thus, the indemnity theory desires compensation that consists of market value of property taken, severance and injurious affection, disturbance, solatium and/or special value to restore expropriatees.

Alternatively, Taker's Gain theory focuses on the expropriated property. It argues that compensating the other additional items covered under the indemnity theory like disturbance, drains public resources (Kratovil & Harrison, 1954), while enriching affected people. Since it is property that is taken, then government should compensate for that at its market value and nothing more or less. Taker's gain compensation is measured by the gains of the acquisition to the taker, and not expropriatee's losses (Kratovil & Harrison, 1954). As such, compensation under taker's gain usually consists of market value of acquired property, which also measures adequacy of compensation required to restore affected people. Thus, all compensation principles focusing only on expropriated property belong to takers' gain theory.

A very frequent finding is that weak groups of local population are particularly neglected. These groups are squatters and migrants, women, pastoralists, and fishermen and water users downstream. Squatters and migrants often are considered as non-permanent and do not have the same quality of rights as the autochthonous population. Under (semi-) formal constitutional rights (the frequent state principle 'the land belongs to who cultivates it') this may be less problematic, but these rules usually are not much respected in rural areas, and they disrespect the social realities of a strong ethnic and clan/family affectation of land (Wily 2011; Anseeuw et al. 2012; Cotula 2013; Nolte 2013). In addition, the user principle does not hold if formal state land is occupied a frequent constellation in LSLA disputes. According to traditional rules, migrants in land-abundant districts are often welcomed as workers for cash crop cultivation (which does include food crops for markets) and given some land for own cultivation as part of remuneration. However, these rules tend to be inconsistent or imprecise when it comes to long-term residential rights and permanent ownership, they have emerged under land surplus conditions, and are effective as long as this condition holds but do not adapted sufficiently to land-constrained conditions (Platteau 2008). LSLAs accelerate the condition of or feelings about land scarcity.

Women do not have strong (if any) land rights and weak representations in many traditional land governance systems, often underlined by gender-biased social and religious principles such as patrilocal marriage and patrilinear inheritance (Chu, 2011). However, they are often the main users of land-related resources such as forests, wild products, pasture for small animals, and have the main responsibility for fetching drinking water. Even if formal (national) rules stipulate equal rights, they may be disadvantaged in reality. Thus, they may have little voice in negotiations about land concessions, and will suffer from squeezing land resources by being pushed onto even more marginal lands (Behrman et al. 2012; Anseeuw et al. 2012). Pastoralists are another group frequently overseen and disadvantaged. They use pastures including harvested plots on a temporal basis, they often do not have formal rights in land and have traditionally not been interested in it. Yet, the continuous squeezing of their pastures and migrant corridors is sometimes dramatically enhanced by LSLAs due to their size and often compact nature (Koopmann 2012; Sulieman 2013; Anseeuw et al. 2012). In parallel with the negligence of water issues, fishermen are a typically overlooked stakeholder group in LSLAs particularly if involving irrigation and if they are outside the project area. Again, their

informal and formal rights and political representations are weak (Mehta et al. 2012; Brüntrup et al. 2013).

Moreover, the negotiation phase of these large scale land deals mostly have implications on land grabbing in the finally results in land leasing or contracts. These processes are mostly over shadow by local elites and huge political influences. Serious biases in representation of local populations, particularly some weaker groups, weak negotiations skills of local representatives, and strong information and power asymmetries insinuate that these contracts are indeed often not favourable for many locals, but lack of transparency makes that not much is known about the actual content of most contracts (Behrman et al. 2012).

1.4 Materials and methods

This study was a mixed-methods, explanatory sequential study including both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Creswell (2014) stated that mixed-methods studies offer advantages over single-method approaches because they utilize the integration of quantitative and qualitative research and data collection. This prevents the researcher from being limited to one specific method and affords the researcher with multiple ways to gather data. The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design is one which the researcher first conducts quantitative research, analyzes the results and then builds the results to explain in more detail with qualitative research. It is considered explanatory because the initial quantitative data results are explained further with the qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). The mixing of both quantitative and qualitative data in this study provided for a stronger understanding of the dynamics of large scale land deals: Implications of local political influence on land grabbing . To capture local level dynamics, purposive sampling method was used for the key informant interviews, which was informed by the need to ensure the sample represented a cross section of the population of interest, namely, the stakeholders involved on the different sides of the civil society activism, the local elites, elders, youth, women, land owning families and the grassroots activists.

Data analysis according to Cohen et al. (2007) involves organizing, accounting for and making sense of the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. They further state that there is no single way of analyzing and presenting the data however, that it must fit the purpose. The primary data that was collected by the researcher during the study was analysed thoroughly by using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. However, the data collection techniques go with the data analysis concurrently during the research study, the researcher had a break during the study to analyse the data and to rectified any unnecessary information or forgot something relevant pertaining to the study suggested by a participant or forgot a set of participants who could have provided a vital information with regards to the study. The researcher also analyzed the data on several occasions during the study.

1.5 Discussion of Findings

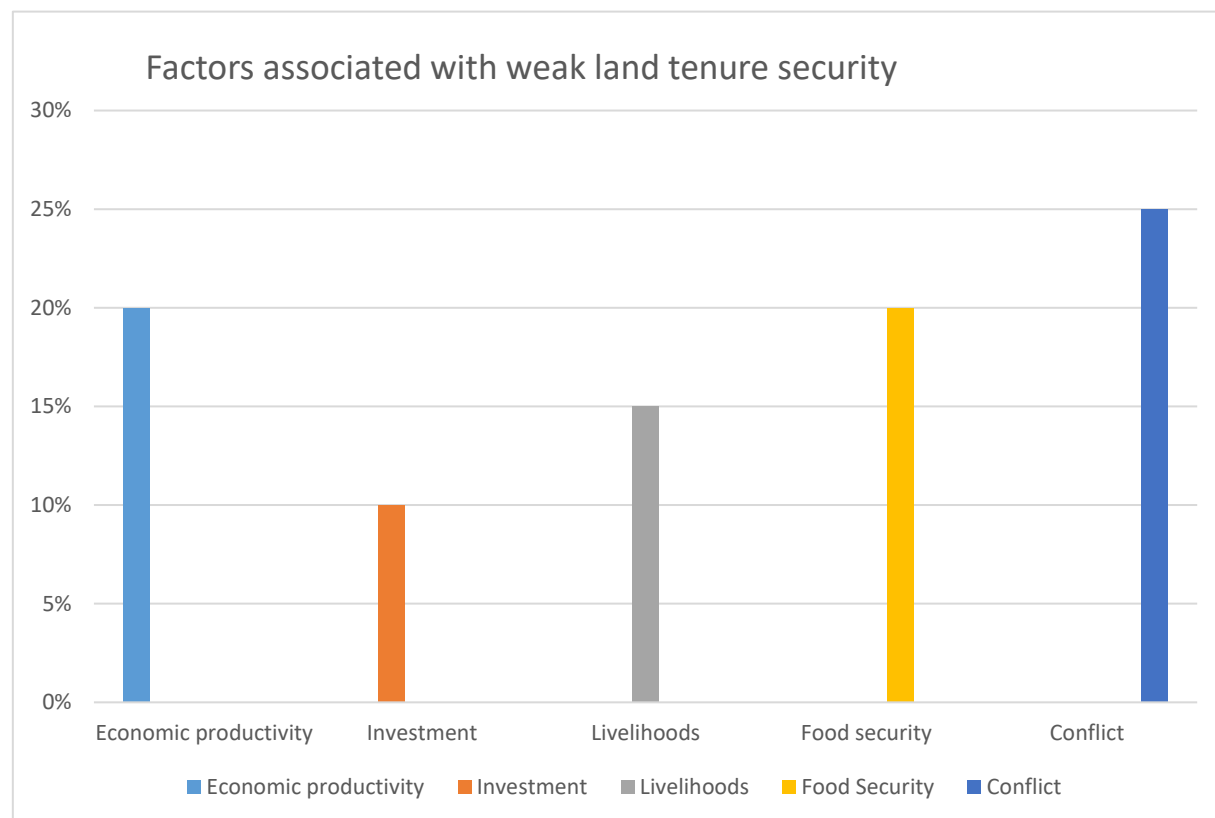
The implications of land grabbing for local communities can be devastating. People who are displaced from their land may lose their livelihoods, their homes, and their access to food and water. They may also experience social and psychological harm. In some cases, land grabbing has led to conflict and violence. Local political influence can also play a role in land grabbing. In some cases, local politicians

may collude with investors to acquire land from local communities. This can happen through a variety of means, such as using their influence to pressure traditional leaders to sell land, or by using their connections to government officials to approve land deals that are not in the best interests of the community. In Sierra Leone, land tenure is often customary, which means that it is based on traditional practices and norms. This can make it difficult to establish clear ownership rights, which can make it easier for investors to acquire land without the consent of the local community. There is a high level of corruption in Sierra Leone, which can facilitate land grabbing by making it easier for investors to bribe government officials or traditional leaders to acquire land. The process of LSLAs is often opaque, which makes it difficult for local communities to know about or participate in the decision-making process. The government of Sierra Leone is weak and poorly equipped to regulate LSLAs. This can make it difficult to prevent land grabbing and to protect the rights of local communities.

1.5.1 Weak land Tenure security

The study result indicate that weak land Tenure security is a major challenge in many parts of the provincial regions of Sierra Leone, and it can have a devastating impact on the lives of those affected. The result from the study found that weak land tenure security was a major factor contributing to land disputes and conflict. The study result indicates that women and other marginalized groups were disproportionately affected by weak land tenure security. The study results shows that weak land tenure security was a barrier to investment and economic development. The study also found that weak land tenure security was a source of insecurity and anxiety for many people. The study indicates that weak land tenure security was a major obstacle to climate adaptation. Non-governmental organizations has been advocating for equity in large scale land deals. "The land tenure security is weak, it has lead to inequity in land ownership, those with more power and resources are often able to acquire land more easily than those who are less powerful. which has lead to a situation where a small number of people control a large amount of land, while the majority of the population has little or no lands". Local Traditional authorities said that conflict has emanated from these large scale land deals within communities. One of the local Chief said that is as a result of the weak land tenure security that has been the source of these conflicts between different groups within a community. "People may disagree about who owns the land, or about how the land should be used. Conflict over land has lead to violence, displacement, and other problems in our communities". Civil Society groups indicated that "weak land tenure security has lead to environmental degradation. Many people in communities are less likely to invest in sustainable land management practices if they do not have secure tenure rights. Which can lead to deforestation, soil erosion, and other problems. Land-owning families interviews believed that "weak land tenure security have lead to the loss our culture and identity. This is so due to the fact that land is often tied to people's sense of identity and belonging. When our people are displaced from their land, they may also lose their culture and identity".

Figure 1: Factors that are associated with weak land tenure security



Data source: Primary data 2023.

Figure 1 above show the factors associated with weak land tenure security influencing large scale land investments in communities. From the result, 20% of the respondents said that weak land tenure security has lead to lower levels of economic productivity. In communities, many people are afraid to invest in their land if they do not have secure tenure rights; while 10% of the respondents said that weak land tenure security has discourage investment and open opportunity for local political elites to grab lands. The result indicates that some investors are reluctant to invest in land if they are not sure who owns it or if they can be evicted, while other used that as an opportunity to under value the land deal; while 15% of the respondents said that weak land tenure security have had a negative impact on livelihoods. The result shows that people who do not have secure tenure rights have more likely to be displaced from their land, which can make it difficult for them to make a living; while 20% of the respondents said that weak land tenure security has lead to food insecurity. The result shows that people who do not have secure tenure rights may be less likely to invest in their land, which can make it difficult for them to produce enough food to meet their needs and 25% of the respondents said that weak land tenure security has been a source of conflict in most communities due to large scale land deals. The result indicates that people have disagreement about ownership rights of the land within the families, between community and community and between chieftdom and chieftdom and in some cases between one district to another, or about how the land deal should be structured and for what purpose is the land used. These conflict over land has lead to violence, displacement, and other social problems. The study result above indicates that weak land tenure security was making it difficult for people to adapt to the impacts of climate change. When land tenure security is weak, it can be easier for investors to acquire land without the consent of the

local community. This is often referred to as land grabbing. Land grabbing can displace people from their homes and land, and it can have a devastating impact on their livelihoods.

1.5.2 Corruption in LSLA deals

The study finds out that corruption is a major problem in Sierra Leone, and it has been a major obstacle to the country's development. Land deals are particularly vulnerable to corruption, as they often involve large sums of money and complex procedures. There have been a number of high-profile cases of corruption in LSLA deals in Sierra Leone. In one case, a company was awarded a 99-year lease for a large tract of land without the knowledge or consent of the local community. In another case, a government official was accused of accepting bribes in exchange for approving a land deal. Corruption in LSLA deals can have a number of negative consequences. It can lead to the displacement of local communities, environmental damage, and the loss of government revenue. It can also undermine public trust in the government and the rule of law.

Local political influence can also play a role in corruption on large-scale land deals. In some cases, local politicians may collude with investors to acquire land from local communities. This can happen through a variety of means, such as using their influence to pressure traditional leaders to sell land, or by using their connections to government officials to approve land deals that are not in the best interests of the community. Local community based organizations said that Land grabbing is a common factor of the practices of corruption in large scale land deals in communities. "Corruption has facilitate land grabbing, which is the illegal or unethical acquisition of land by powerful individuals or groups". The study result shows that this has lead to displacement of people from their homes and land, and have a devastating impact on their livelihoods. Corruption in large scale land deals due to local political elites has cause government to loss appropriate taxes on such land deals. " Investment companies pay less tax as require due to the fact that their is no legislative and policy framework guiding large scale land deals at the moment" government official noted. However, the result from the study indicates that tax evasion comes from "orders from above" that mostly associated with these multinational companies and deprive communities of much-needed revenue that could be used to fund essential services.

The Figure 2 shows the consequences of corruption in large scale land deals for local communities. The result show that 25% of the respondents said that corruption has been the key driver of land grabbing, which is the illegal or unethical acquisition of land by powerful local elites, state institutions, individuals and groups. The result show that corruption is embedded into many deals concluded in communities in the form of poor inclusion in negotiation, inclusion of all landowning families in discussions, under value of the lands, and under representation of vulnerable groups like women and youths that can have a devastating impact on their livelihoods; while 10% of the respondents said that corruption in large scale land deals has lead to inequity in land ownership, as those with more power and resources are often able to negotiate land deals more easily than those who are less powerful. The result from the study shows that the situation where a small number of people control a large amount of land, while the majority of the population has little or no land has lead to bad faith deals from investment companies; while 15% of the respondents said that corruption has been the source of conflict between different groups within the community, as people disagree about who owns the land, or about how the land should be used.

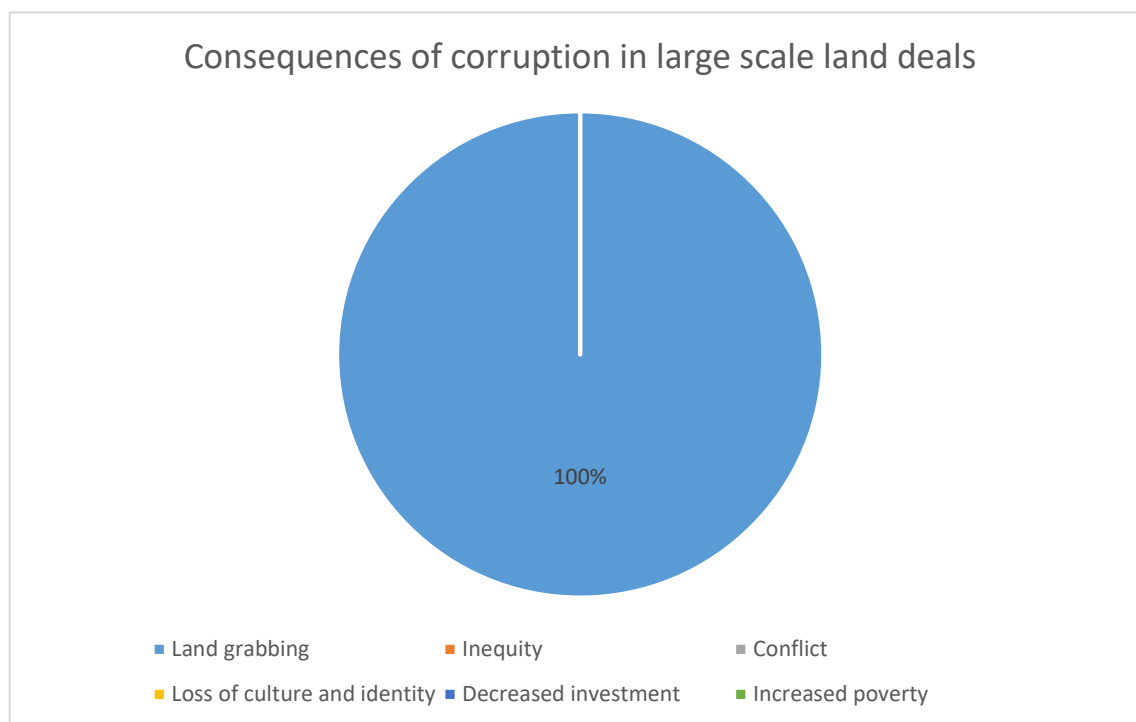


Figure 2: consequences of corruption in large scale land deals for local communities

Data source: Primary data 2023.

The result from the study shows that these conflicts over land has lead to violence, displacement, and socioeconomic problems; while 10% of the respondents said that corruption has often discourage investment, as investors may be reluctant to invest in land if they are not sure who owns it or if they can be evicted and 20% of the respondents said that corruption can lead to poverty, as it can divert resources away from essential services in the community and into the pockets of corrupt officials.

1.5.3 Lack of transparency

Transparency in large scale land deals involves all relevant information is disclosed to the public, including the parties involved, the terms of the deal, and the environmental and social impacts. This information can be disclosed through a variety of means, such as community meetings, radio and TV or in a public registry. Transparent land deals can help to prevent corruption, ensure that the interests of all stakeholders are taken into account, and promote sustainable development. However, the result of the study indicates that transparency has been an issue in most of the large scale land deals in communities.

Civil society organization noted that the lack of political will in some large scale land deal to be more transparent is a concern. One CSO activist noted that "In some cases, governments may be reluctant to make land deals transparent because they fear that it will expose corruption or other wrongdoing". CSOs also noted that issue of lack of community awareness, the community may not be aware of the importance of transparency in land deals or may not know how to access the information that is available. The result of the study also indicated that in most cases, there is the lack of capacity. "The government may not have the capacity to collect and manage the information that is needed to make land deals transparent or even the poverty stricken local authorities may just agreed to any term and conditions without adequate information of the nature of the investment". Moreover, landowning

families are in demand of a legislation that requires transparency in land deals. "We want to see a legislation that require the disclosure of information about the parties involved, the terms of the deal, and the environmental and social impacts". The result also shows that their is no establish a public registry of land deals in the various communities. This registry should make information about land deals publicly available.

Support civil society organizations noted that "When land deals are made in a transparent manner it can help to raise awareness of the issue and to encourage people to demand transparency from their governments".

There are a number of reasons why there is a lack of transparency in LSLA deals in North-west of Sierra Leone. One reason is that the country's land governance frameworks are weak. There is no clear legal framework for land deals, and there is no system for monitoring and enforcing these deals. This makes it easy for corrupt officials to engage in land grabbing and other abuses. Another reason for the lack of transparency is the lack of capacity of local communities. Many local communities are not aware of their land rights, and they do not have the resources to challenge land deals that they believe are unfair or unjust. However, the lack of transparency can also be attributed to the influence of powerful elites. In North-west of Sierra Leone, there are a number of powerful individuals and groups who have a vested interest in land deals. These elites often use their influence to ensure that land deals are made in their favor, even if these deals are not in the best interests of the country or its people.

1.5.4 Weak land governance systems

The consequences of weak governance in large-scale land deals can be devastating for communities. It is important to take steps to strengthen governance in order to protect communities from these negative impacts. Land owning families in Communities noted that weak land governance system has lead to corruption. The result from the study indicates that 'when government officials and local leaders are corrupt, they often use their power to acquire land for themselves or for their friends and family. This has undermine the security of land tenure for ordinary people and families. Land rights activist noted that the lack of capacity on the side of the government to effectively manage land resources, therefore, unable to prevent land grabbing or to resolve disputes over land ownership. However, with the enactment of the Customary Land Act of 2022 it's implementation has not been fully effective. The study finds out from Legal experts that "when laws and regulations governing land are inadequate or poorly enforced, this can create a climate of impunity for those who violate land rights". Moreover, lack of community participation has been highlighted by various women's groups. "when people (particularly women) are not involved in the decision-making process about land use, they are less likely to feel that their land rights are secure".

1.6 Strategies that can integrate the interests, perspectives, needs, and values of the community in the large-scale land deals in Sierra Leone.

There are a number of strategies that can be used to integrate the interests, perspectives, needs, and values of the community in large-scale land deals in Sierra Leone. The Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) by which communities are consulted about land deals and have the right to say no. FPIC is enshrined in international law and is increasingly being recognized as a best practice for

ensuring that the interests of communities are respected. Also, the community participation to ensuring that communities are involved in the decision-making process about land deals, from the planning stage to the implementation stage. This can be done through a variety of mechanisms, such as community-led planning processes, land use committees, and grievance mechanisms. The need for capacity building of communities with the skills and knowledge they need to participate effectively in land deals. This can include training on land rights, negotiation, and conflict resolution.

Increased transparency and accountability by ensuring that information about land deals is accessible to the public and that there are mechanisms in place to hold those involved accountable. This can be done through public disclosure of information, independent monitoring, and grievance mechanisms. Most land deals are done with less gender equality by ensuring that the interests of women are taken into account in land deals. This can be done by ensuring that women are involved in the decision-making process and that their rights are protected. Taking into consideration environmental protection in the process of land deals so that they do not have negative environmental impacts. This can be done by conducting environmental impact assessments and by ensuring that land deals are compatible with sustainable development goals.

By using these strategies, it is possible to ensure that the interests, perspectives, needs, and values of the community are integrated into large-scale land deals in Sierra Leone. This can help to prevent conflict, promote sustainable development, and protect the rights of communities. In addition to the above strategies, it is also important to consider the following factors when integrating the interests of the community in large-scale land deals: the cultural and historical significance of the land that have a deep cultural and historical significance for communities, and this should be taken into account when making decisions about its use. The needs of the community such as access to food, water, and shelter, should be considered when making decisions about land use. The potential impacts of the land deal both positive and negative, should be carefully considered before it is approved. The participation of women in the decision-making process is essential to ensure that their interests are taken into account. The transparency and accountability of the process about decisions on how land use should be transparent and accountable to the community. By taking these factors into account, it is possible to ensure that the interests of the community are integrated into large-scale land deals in a way that is fair and sustainable.

1.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the dynamics of large-scale land deals in the North-west of Sierra Leone are complex and multifaceted. Local political influence plays a significant role in these deals, as chiefs often have a great deal of power over land in their communities. However, this power can be used for good or for bad, and there have been cases where chiefs have been complicit in land grabbing. There is a need for stronger land governance frameworks in Sierra Leone to ensure that land deals are transparent, accountable, and that they benefit local communities. These frameworks should also address the issue of corruption, as this is a major obstacle to ensuring that land deals are fair and equitable. The government of Sierra Leone has taken some steps to address the challenges of large-scale land deals, but more needs to be done. The government should strengthen its land governance frameworks and ensure that they are effectively implemented. It should also work to build the capacity of local communities to participate in land deals and to protect their rights.

The issue of large-scale land deals is a complex one, but it is important to have a better understanding of the dynamics involved. By understanding these dynamics, there can be a better way to identify the challenges and opportunities for ensuring that land deals benefit local communities. The importance of involving local communities in land deals. Local communities should be involved in all stages of land deals, from the planning stage to the implementation stage. This will help to ensure that the deals are fair and equitable and that they benefit local communities. The need for compensation for displaced communities. When land deals displace local communities, they should be compensated for their losses. This compensation should be adequate and should be provided in a timely manner. The importance of environmental protection. Land deals should be designed in a way that minimizes environmental damage. This is particularly important in the case of land deals that involve the conversion of land from food production to other uses.

The role of local chiefs in facilitating land deals with foreign investors. Chiefs often have a great deal of influence over land in their communities, and they can play a key role in mediating between investors and local communities. However, they can also be corrupt and use their power to benefit themselves or their allies. The lack of transparency and accountability in land deals. Often, land deals are made behind closed doors and without the full participation of local communities. This can lead to a lack of transparency and accountability, which can make it difficult to hold those involved accountable for any negative impacts. The impact of land deals on food security and livelihoods. Large-scale land deals can displace local farmers and communities, which can have a negative impact on food security and livelihoods. In some cases, land deals have also been used to convert land from food production to other uses, such as biofuel production, which can further exacerbate food insecurity. The need for stronger land governance frameworks. To address the challenges of large-scale land deals, there is a need for stronger land governance frameworks. These frameworks should ensure that land deals are transparent, accountable, and that they benefit local communities. specific examples of land deals in the north-west of Sierra Leone that have had negative impacts on local communities. For example, the Marampa mining project, which is a large-scale iron ore mine, has been criticized for displacing local communities and causing environmental damage.

1.8 Recommendations

In the context of this study, the recommendations from the study on the dynamics of large-scale land deals and the implications of local political influence on land grabbing in the North-west of Sierra Leone are as follows:

Strengthen land governance frameworks. The government of Sierra Leone should strengthen its land governance frameworks to ensure that land deals are transparent, accountable, and that they benefit local communities. These frameworks should also address the issue of corruption, as this is a major obstacle to ensuring that land deals are fair and equitable.

Involve local communities in land deals. Local communities should be involved in all stages of land deals, from the planning stage to the implementation stage. This will help to ensure that the deals are fair and equitable and that they benefit local communities.

Provide compensation for displaced communities. When land deals displace local communities, they should be compensated for their losses. This compensation should be adequate and should be provided in a timely manner.

Protect the environment. Land deals should be designed in a way that minimizes environmental damage. This is particularly important in the case of land deals that involve the conversion of land from food production to other uses. Enforce land laws. The government of Sierra Leone should enforce its land laws to deter land grabbing and other abuses. This includes ensuring that land deals are registered and that the rights of landowners are protected.

Support civil society organizations. Civil society organizations can play an important role in monitoring land deals and advocating for the rights of local communities. The government of Sierra Leone should support these organizations and provide them with the resources they need to be effective. However, by taking these steps, the government of Sierra Leone can help to ensure that land deals are fair and equitable and that they benefit local communities.

1.8.1 Acknowledgement

The author acknowledged the contributions of members of staff of the Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development, University of Lagos and the WITS-TUB-UNILAG Urban Lab team.

1.8.2 Funding

This research is part of the bilateral partnership between the WITS-TUB-UNILAG Urban Lab program funded by the DAAD.

1.8.3 Authors' contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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1.8.5 Key terms and definitions

Large Scale Land Deals: In the context of this study, large-scale land deals (LSLDs) are the acquisition of land by a single entity, usually a company or government, for a large-scale project. These projects can involve agriculture, mining, forestry, or infrastructure development. In the community, LSLAs have a significant impact on the local people and environment. They have displaced people from their homes, lead to environmental degradation, and reduce access to natural resources.

Land grabbing: In the context of this study, land grabbing is the large-scale acquisition of land by individuals, corporations, or governments, often with the collusion of local elites, through legal or illegal means, without the consent of the affected communities. Land grabbing have a devastating impact on local communities, displacing them from their homes, depriving them of their livelihoods, and undermining their food security. Land grabbing can occur in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, it can displace farmers and pastoralists, leading to food insecurity and poverty. In urban areas, it can displace people from their homes, leading to homelessness and social unrest.

Local elites: In the context of this study, local elites are individuals or groups who have a disproportionate amount of power, wealth, or influence in the community. They are wealthy landowners, politicians, religious leaders, or traditional chiefs. Local elites play a positive role in the community by providing leadership and resources. However, they can also use their power to exploit or oppress others.

The term "local elites" can be defined in different ways, depending on the context. In some cases, it may refer to a specific group of people, such as the traditional chiefs in a particular community. In other cases, it may refer to a more general category of people, such as the wealthy landowners in a particular community. Local elites have a significant impact on the lives of people in their communities. They may control access to land, resources, and opportunities. They may also be able to influence government policies and decisions. As a result, local elites can play a major role in shaping large scale land deals of their communities. The role of local elites in large scale land deals in

community is complex and multifaceted. In some cases, they can be a positive force, providing leadership and resources to help in the negotiations of land deals in their communities. However, in other cases, they can use their power to exploit or oppress other land owners. The impact of local elites on large scale land deals in community vary depending on the specific circumstances.

Political Influence: In the context of this study, political influence in land deals in a community refers to the ability of individuals or groups to use their political power to influence the outcome of land deals. Political influence in land deals can have a significant impact on the lives of the people who live in the community. It can lead to the displacement of people from their homes, the loss of access to land and resources, and the environmental degradation. It can also lead to corruption and the enrichment of a small number of individuals or groups at the expense of the community as a whole.