

The Poverty of Neoliberalized Feminism: Gender Equality in a “Best Practice” Large-scale Land Investment in Ghana.

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Abstract

Feminist ideas have entered the neoliberal agricultural development agenda, including increasingly ubiquitous public-private partnerships and businesses. Rhetorically committed to gender equality, these new development actors have reduced equality to a matter of numbers, seeking to include women in their projects while disregarding intersectionally gendered power relations that suffuse any development context. This article seeks to illustrate *how* such power relations inhabit business-led development projects.

Based on ethnographic research of a “best practice” large-scale land investment in Ghana’s Volta Region, we argue that a narrow focus on including women and superficial Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) promises fail to address intersectional inequalities because they pay inadequate attention to local institutions for resource management and the power relations they embed. Focusing on gender equality without regard to local institutions at best serves to empower a few well-connected women and at worst acts as a cover-up of highly exploitative practices.

Keywords: Gender, Intersectionality, Large-scale land investment, Institutions, Power relations

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We used to catch fish and get firewood from there. Our forefathers dug ponds in the water logged area and fishes remained in them when the water dried up; but all these things were destroyed and now we buy even firewood for cooking. (Semi-structured interview, Fievie-Dugame, 4.6.14)

A.A., an elderly widow, is a farmer in the Fievie Traditional Area of Ghana’s Volta region. Together with other women she recounted what happened after GADCO, the Global Agro-Development Company, in 2011 acquired 2500 hectares of mostly communal land in the area to grow rice on a 50-year lease¹. ‘They destroyed everything’ was the staccato that marked the narratives of many of the women we interviewed; the majority of villagers we talked to felt betrayed.

It was not supposed to be this way. GADCO is the embodiment of an increasingly salient approach to harness the capacities of the private sector for development. It explicitly pursues a policy of gender equality and women’s empowerment, promising on its website to ‘invest in programs for the socio-economic advancement of women.’ It has been celebrated as a best practice company that combines entrepreneurial ingenuity with social responsibility and has met the social and environmental criteria necessary to win funding from various development-oriented agencies.² Composed of a multi-national team of investors, it proclaims

¹ At the time of the field research in 2016, approximately 1000 ha were under cultivation. While the concession covered 2500 ha, according to the Environmental Impact Statement for the project there were plans to increase it to 5000 ha of contiguous land within three to four years.

² Sources of funding include the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the Agricultural Development Company (AgDevCo), Acumen Fund and more recently the World Bank-funded Ghana Commercial Agriculture Project (GCAP). Acumen Fund relies on funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and individual

that it is committed to ‘embedding the principles of sustainability into its core business strategy and operations’ (GADCO website, as of 18.6.15). In the Fievie Traditional Area, GADCO entered a ‘community-private partnership’ agreement, in which it committed to contributing 2.5 per cent of the company’s annual sales revenue (increasing to 5 per cent after five years) to a community development fund. It also operated a much-lauded outgrower scheme that was to promote women’s economic empowerment. GADCO has received much positive media attention for this approach both inside and outside Ghana, for example in a UNDP Report (Darko-Osei 2012) and an article in the Guardian (Wan 2012). And although the company went bankrupt in 2015 and had to sell its Fievie operations to RMG Ltd (a subsidiary of Syngenta based in Switzerland) the new owners continue to farm rice in the area, and by many common technical measures, the project could be considered a development success.³

What then went wrong? Why could A.A. and many of the women we talked to in the Fievie Traditional Area not appreciate the benefits generated through this investment? Why did the project not achieve the intended results? We argue that an answer to these questions needs to consider how neoliberal development approaches that are largely blind to power encounter local institutions of resource management that are organized along multiple axes of difference. We define institutions in line with Vatn (2005, p. 60) as the ‘conventions, norms and formally sanctioned rules of a society. They provide expectations, stability and meaning essential to human existence and coordination.’ In this paper, we focus mainly on the rules regulating access to land and resources, including chieftaincies, clans, marital and inheritance

philanthropists, AgDevCo receives money among others from DfID, the British development cooperation agency, and AGRA is funded by the Gates Foundation.

³ RMG Ltd previously supplied GADCO with agro-chemical inputs; the name GADCO is still used in all transactions.

regimes. As in many African societies, in our study area these institutions encode power differentials based on gender, seniority, indigeneity and class (see also Berry 1989; Peters 2004).

Neoliberal approaches to development however tend to be blind to local power relations, as they embrace macro-economic policies that privilege the rights of international businesses and investors, invite the private sector to become a partner in development, and presume that what is good for companies also is good for people. While blind to the class relations they spawn, these approaches have begun to sport a ‘feminist face’ as gender mainstreaming has reached development economics with the World Bank’s increased attention to the topic since 2008 (Prügl 2016). Companies (such as Coca Cola and Goldman Sachs), private foundations (such as the Clinton and Gates foundations), and private sector associations (such as the World Economic Forum) have made gender equality a priority. And the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mainstream gender issues throughout. An analysis of funding for women’s rights by the *Association of Women in Development* shows that ‘women and girls’ have become a (rhetorical) priority in nearly every funding sector – parallel to the upsurge of private sector actors in development financing and the corporatization of development agendas (Arutyunova and Clark, 2013). Gender rhetoric has also entered the neoliberal agenda of agricultural commercialisation, as women are considered to hold ‘the key to food security’ and to play a major role in ‘ensuring food security in the developing world’ (Quisumbing et al. 1995). Gender appears prominently in the vision of the *New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition* – a public private partnership initiative to promote investor-friendly policy reforms in the agricultural sector in Africa.⁴ Its proclaimed

⁴ The Alliance brings together a wide variety of multinational corporations (including Yara, Monsanto, and Nestlé), development agencies from G8 countries, the World Bank, the Gates Foundation and ten African governments, including the government of Ghana.

aim is to ‘address key constraints to agriculture-led growth in Africa, including those that prevent smallholder farmers, particularly women, from increasing their productivity and accessing markets’ (Website of the New Alliance, as of 5.10.2018).

Large-scale land investments (LSLIs) like GADCO are an embodiment of this neoliberalism with a feminist face. They promise development together with gender equality. Yet the literature exploring LSLIs overwhelmingly shows just the opposite: They aggravate gender and other forms of inequality. In this article we want to explore how this happens. Our starting point is the suggestion that gender operates in interaction with other axes of difference in an intersectional manner. We thus ask, *how do intersectionally gendered power relations operate in large-scale land investments to produce inequality?*

Intersectionality is a key methodological tool we employ in this analysis. The concept has its origins in Black feminism in the US and UK and was deployed to make visible the interwoven workings of race and gender in circumscribing the lives of Black women, the silencing of race politics in feminism and of gender politics in anti-racism movements (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Yuval-Davis 2006). The concept has been taken up widely across disciplines, and there is considerable debate about its status as a theory or methodology (e.g. Choo and Ferree 2010; Davis 2008; Hancock 2007; McCall 2005; Mollet and Faria 2013). In this study, we employ intersectionality as a lens to make visible the interaction of power relations in a situated intervention in the management of land and natural resources. We conceptualize this situation as structured by institutions suffused with power along intersecting axes of difference, including local institutions regulating access to resources. The women’s sense that GADCO failed thus is examined through institutional and intersectional lenses. We describe the way power operates in an intersectionally gendered way in the encounter between a neo-liberal investment project and post-colonial local institutions.

The article proceeds as follows: In the next section we provide a brief overview of the existing literature on gender and LSLIs and on the role of resource management institutions in

producing inequality. We then introduce our case study and discuss our methodology. Our findings are reported subsequently in two steps. We first highlight how local institutions draw on different status positions—especially clan and seniority, gender, and migration status—to regulate access to resources. Second, we discuss the way in which the GADCO investment activated intersecting axes of difference in processes of negotiation and implementation resulting in expropriation and exploitation. We argue the limits of a development approach that does not take account of global and local power relations in an intersectionally gendered way.

Gender and LSLIs: The Role of Institutions and Neoliberalized Feminism

In the wake of proliferating LSLIs there has emerged a literature that explores the role of gender in these investments. On the one hand, Behrman et al. (2012) highlight benefits that could arise for women from such investments, including employment, inclusion in outgrower schemes, or new food crops. Outgrower schemes in particular have been described as a win-win alternative to commercial plantation agriculture and a means to empower smallholder farmers and women (Hall et al. 2017; FAO 2009). Others in contrast focus on the potentially negative effects of LSLIs resulting from women's pre-existing disadvantages, such as limited access to productive resources, relative income-poverty, obstacles to participation in decision-making, and greater vulnerability to violence (Daley and Pallas 2013). Levien (2017) reviews historical and contemporary evidence and finds processes and outcomes of dispossession to be characterized by 'a confluence of gendered exclusions and inequalities' (p.17). Women had no decision-making power in the negotiation of any of the land deals reviewed, compensation 'almost universally reproduced women's lack of independent land rights' (p.3) and women were disproportionately affected by the loss of commons in all cases. Case studies on the gendered outcomes of LSLIs again paint a predominantly negative picture regarding

their effects on women (Nyantaki-Frimpong 2017; Tsikata and Yaro 2014; White and White 2011). Some more recent studies have, however, highlighted differences among women relating to class and generation (i.e. Mi-Young Park and White 2017; Elmhirst et al, 2017).

Institutions regulating access to resources importantly define and embed the pre-existing inequalities that have been highlighted in this literature. Male-led families, clans, and villages regulate access to and control over resources and the ways in which they are used both at the communal and household levels (Meinzen-Dick and Mwangi 2007:3), whereby rights within descent groups and villages vary ‘based on seniority, gender, office holding etc.’ (Berry 1989, p.42). Colonialism significantly changed customary systems of resource management - in Ghana, the power of chiefs was strengthened with the effect of denying peasants secure rights to their land, leaving them with only use rights as ‘subjects’ of their respective chief (Amanor 2008; Boni 2008).

But customary land tenure systems continue to be re-negotiated as environmental, social or political conditions change (Berry 1993; Carney and Watts 1991; Chanock 1985; Peters 2009; Haller 2013). Status distinctions have become more pressing as populations have grown and land is becoming scarcer and more commercialized (Berry 1993, 2009a, b; Peters 2004). In Ghana, authors have pinpointed in particular the vulnerable status of migrants or settlers. Already in the aftermath of colonialism, ‘insider-outsider distinctions’ became more salient and settlers were often considered as ‘politically subordinate’ within communities (Boone 2015). This trend has continued in contexts of increasing land commercialization and has given rise to intense contestations, which often play out along multiple status positions linked to indigeneity, gender, class and seniority (Kuba and Lentz 2006; Berry 2009a, b; Boone and Duku 2012; Lanz et al 2018; Amanor, 1999; Peters, 2009).

Gender, class, migration background, clan membership and seniority are thus important factors structuring resource access in sub-Saharan Africa (Dancer and Tsikata 2015). But the power relations inhabiting LSLIs are not only local. International development

interventions that imagine disembodied beneficiaries rationally responding to market incentives hide profound inequalities in interests among the stakeholders in such interventions, which often end up reinforcing local power relations (see Berry 2013; Peters 2004, 2009). Even when putting on a feminist face, such interventions rarely recognize transnational power relations together with their intersectional dynamics. This is at the core of Roberts' critique of 'transnational business feminism': it constructs women as an untapped resource that can deliver high returns on investment and in so doing seeks 'the re-embedding of capitalist relations that reproduce the exploitation of men and women while creating new markets and sources of profit for capital' (Roberts 2012, p. 85). This neoliberalized feminism redefines feminism and capitalism as mutually compatible, hiding power inequalities and drawing a win/win scenario in which the advancement of gender equality delivers growth, poverty alleviation, and food security, in conjunction with free markets and profits. Fused with development as a technocratic apparatus, it empties feminist change projects of politics and, as we show in this paper, does little to ameliorate the inequalities aggravated through LSLIs (s.a. Calkin 2015, Cornwall et al. 2007, Prügl 2016).

Study Design

How then did intersectionally gendered power relations operate in the GADCO investment in the Fievie Traditional Area to produce inequality? GADCO constitutes an 'extreme case' for studying effects on inequality through LSLI (Yin 2009) in the sense that it purposefully has included gender considerations in its business strategy and explicitly committed to sustainability and 'women's economic advancement' (GADCO Website, as of 18.6.2015). If aggravated inequality is observed in such a best-practice example, we can reasonably expect similar outcomes in less extreme cases as well. Moreover, the case would lend itself particularly well to tracing processes and mechanisms producing such outcomes.

Data for this study was collected by the primary author between March and July 2014 and between April and July 2016 in the Fievie Traditional Area, which consist of 57 villages and covers approximately 160 square kilometers.⁵ Through a first phase of participant observation, extensive informal discussions and various transect walks, a general impression of the LSLI was gained and four villages were chosen for further investigation, based on the make-up of their respective populations and the different effects of the investment on these villages (Figure 1). Fievie-Dugame is a village of indigenes, mostly small-scale farmers, that hosts the seat of the chieftaincy; Kpodzi and Kpevikpo are two cattle-rearer communities made up of indigenes and migrants from neighbouring Tefle Traditional Area; Bakpa Adzani is a resettled farming community, which was created after severe flooding in the North Tongu District in the 1960s. Large tracts of land within the Fievie Traditional Area were used as commons (for cattle rearing, fishing, seasonal agriculture and the collection of fuel wood, wild fruits, reed and thatch).

⁵ This article furthermore relies on data collected by the MA students Eva Schober and Dominic Schuppli from February to May 2015 in the context of the SNIS Project on „The effects of large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) on households in rural communities of the Global South: gender relations, decision making and food security” (interview statements marked with *ES and *DS in the text).

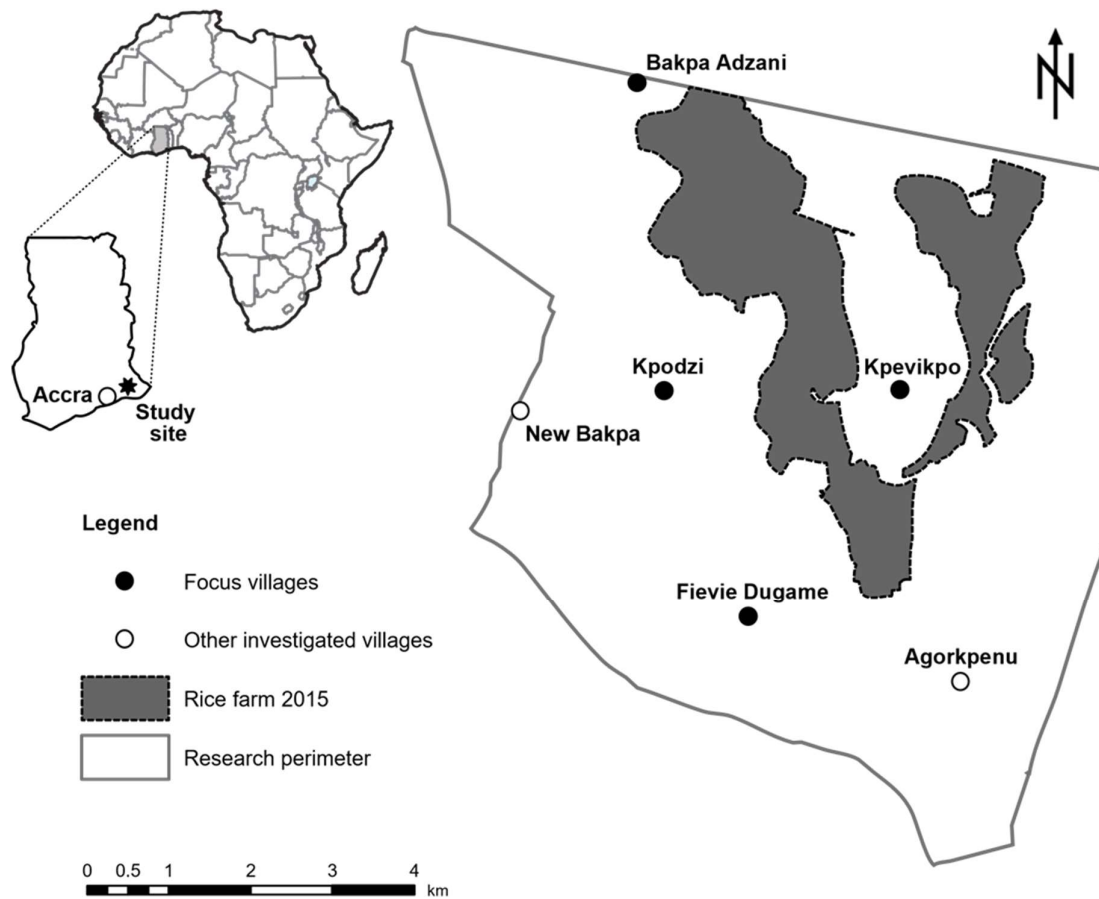


Figure 1. Location of the study area, GADCO rice production and focus villages (adapted from Schuppli, 2016)

Thirty semi-structured household interviews were conducted with differently affected people (outgrowers, employees, people who lost land) from these villages (10 interviews per group). To these were added 18 biographic interviews, representing differently affected women and men of different age groups and social status in the four focus villages, and 27 expert interviews with traditional leaders, government representatives at district and national level (including members of the Lands Commission, Customary Land Secretariat, Town and Country Planning Department, Ministry of Agriculture, as well as District Directorate of Agriculture), as well as company representatives (including company managers). The researcher also participated in various community meetings and events, and five gender-segregated focus group discussions were organized to explore contentious issues.

Some of the data gathered in the field could also be triangulated through various written documents, which were provided to the researcher.⁶ Moreover, two community workshops were hosted at the end of each research period, which brought together women and men from the different communities, chiefs, government representatives and company representatives to discuss and validate the preliminary research results.

Intersectionality in resource management institutions in the Fievie Traditional Area

Access to land and resources in the Fievie Traditional Area is regulated by a range of institutions, which encode differences of gender, class, and indigeneity. They encompass the colonially manufactured chieftaincies, the Customary Land Secretariat (CLS) created by Ghana Land Administration Project (LAP) in 2011,⁷ clans, marital and inheritance regimes, and the commons. Understanding these institutions and the intersectional power relations they draw on is crucial to understanding the way large-scale land investments function to aggravate inequality.

The Fievie Traditional Area is made up of four clans (also called gates) that are headed by four male clan heads and their advisors (stoolfathers). During colonisation, a Paramount Chief, a Paramount Stoolfather and a Paramount Queen Mother were installed as overall authorities for the traditional area. Each village also has a village chief and in several cases a Queen Mother. While Queen Mothers are often excluded from important decisions, some have been prominent, and one played a big role in the GADCO investment, as will be

⁶ These included an Environmental Impact Statement from GADCO and an Environmental Management Plan 2015 to 2018 by RMG Ltd, both conducted as part of the state required Environmental Impact Assessment, various letters written by GADCO to the District Assembly, as well as a letter of complaint written by community members.

⁷ LAP is a 15 to 25 year land reform project encouraged by the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition and financed by USAID and the World Bank.

highlighted below. Unlike in other areas of Ghana, Paramount Chiefs in the Volta Region do not directly control land, as all land is held by families, who allocate land to individual family members through their male family heads (Tsikata 2012, Lanz et al. 2018). There have been many struggles within the ranks of chieftaincy in the Fievie Traditional Area, as different clans have vied for the office of Paramount Chief and have used references to ‘tradition’ (i.e. their roles as the first settlers on the land) to claim authority over land held by other clans. These struggles have supported class formation, as the most successful chiefs were highly educated professionals and businessmen, who often worked in close collaboration with the government elite.⁸ As Amanor (2008, p.78) notes: ‘Chieftaincy is an institution that is closely associated with processes of accumulation and the redefinition of tradition to support accumulation.’

While under customary law all land in the Fievie Traditional Area continues to be vested in the four clans and ‘owned’ by families within these clans, there has been a complete change in the local land tenure regime with the creation of a Customary Land Secretariat. The project has diverted control from family heads to the Paramount Stoolfather, the Paramount Chief, and the four clan heads, who are represented in the CLS. They are now said to hold the power of attorney over all land in the Fievie Traditional Area, and they are in charge of allocating land to investors through the CLS (Lanz et al. 2018). By making it easier to acquire land, the change prepared the grounds for LSLIs such as GADCO. Indeed, critics of LAP have argued that the establishment of a CLS leads to a weakening of land tenure security for

⁸ This process of blurring divisions between the government and the customary elite has also been described by others (i.e. Berry 2013; Amanor 2008; Boamah 2014; Ubink 2008).

individuals, especially for settlers and women (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003; Ubink and Quan 2008).⁹

This was the case for in the Fievie Traditional Area as well. Settlers from Kpodzi and Kpevikpo, who originated from adjoining Tefle Traditional Area, had received use rights for cattle grazing from the respective land-owning families over a century ago, and by the time of research had become integrated into the Fievie Traditional Area through inter-marriage. However the fact that most of the land they used was effectively commons (used for cattle grazing, fishing, the collection of fuel wood and water etc.), as well as the fact that most villagers did not trace their ancestry back to the four lineages making up the traditional area made their land rights under the ever-changing customary tenure regime much less secure. As a member of the CLS said:

You have the right to build a house, you have the right to farm, you have the right to fish, you have the right to do any economic activity you want to do. However, if you are a settler, you are not the owner of the place. (Expert Interview, member of the CLS, Sogakope, 6.2.15,*DS)

By far the most precarious however were land rights in Bakpa Adzani. The village had been resettled by the government in 1963 but it was unclear which Traditional Area had provided the land for resettlement. Fievie chiefs claimed to have given the land for the resettlement and thus saw Bakpa people as mere ‘settlers’ or ‘immigrants’ with no rights to their land. Bakpa clans were divided on the matter, with some claiming that the land originated from Fievie and others arguing that it originated from adjoining Mafi Traditional Area. Politically, Bakpa people continued to claim allegiance to the Bakpa Traditional Area.

⁹ Interestingly, the LAP requires that at least 30 per cent of the members in the Land Management Committee of the CLS should be women. The Fievie CLS fulfils this requirement – there is even a female chair. However, an intersectional perspective shows that all women on the Committee belong to the customary elite, are highly educated and wealthy. In other words, they constitute the superficial feminist face of land privatization that has further empowered local elites.

As a result, Bakpa people did not participate at all in general decision-making in the Fievie Traditional Area, including in decision-making about the GADCO investment although it directly impacted their lands.

Patrilocality and patriliney are the rule in Fievie and constitute an additional land management institution. Thus unmarried women access land through the male family head (usually the oldest man in the family), while married women usually receive a plot of land from their husbands, which they cultivate independently (while also providing labour on their husband's plots). Generally, a woman's plot is considerably smaller than her husband's, in some cases just a 'garden' to grow food crops for family use. Women who marry outside their clan tend to lose access to their fathers' land upon marriage; but those marrying within their own clan often continue to have use rights on this land and in some cases – despite patrilineal inheritance practices – also pass on their plots to their children. Upon divorce or widowhood, women are vulnerable to dispossession, as the husband's family can claim their land, especially if the wife has remained childless.

While the general institutional framework thus provides women with fewer rights than men (especially in case of divorce or widowhood), *de facto* land rights are shaped not only by gender, but also by the amount of land a family holds (which is increasingly linked to clan membership), and by the relationships women have with the family elders and their husbands. During the fieldwork we came across several powerful women, who owned their own businesses, hired labourers to cultivate their farms, and participated in the otherwise male-dominated decision-making structures. In one case an elderly woman was acting as family head and in another a man lived on and used his wife's land (as the wife was a wealthy farmer in her own right and belonged to the most prominent land-owning family). Gender here intersected with class and indigeneity, which allowed these women to overcome discriminatory institutional barriers.

In contrast, many settler women, as well as poorer women from all communities had to rely on the commons for their livelihoods. Many female heads of households used the commons to collect fuelwood, which they processed into charcoal and sold either to traders or directly to end-users. Furthermore Fievie-Dugame, Kpodzi and Kpevikpo had no running water in their villages, so women from these villages fetched water for household use from the two creeks that ran through the Area and various water ponds (apart of some wealthy women, mainly from Fievie-Dugame, who were able to purchase bagged and bottled water). Women from the settler communities of Kpodzi and Kpevikpo also used the commons to engage in seasonal agriculture in the floodplains of the two creeks, in particular growing cash crops with high water requirements, such as okra, tomatoes and garden eggs.

Indigeneity, gender and class thus constituted key vectors organizing access to land and resources through the institutions of the chieftaincies, the CLS, clans, marital and inheritance regimes, and the commons. As we will show, this institutional context interacted with international interests in commercialization to shape the way the GADCO investment was negotiated and implemented, the exclusions it produced and the inequalities it accentuated. The feminist pretensions of the project foundered on the shoals of intersectional, institutionalized power relations.

Including Elite Women: Negotiations and the Administration of the Community Development Fund

Despite the fact that land in the Fievie Traditional Area is owned by families, the GADCO agreement was negotiated with chiefs and clan heads only, and one particularly educated, wealthy and well-connected chief took the lead¹⁰. Thus elderly men dominated the

¹⁰ The initial GADCO negotiations were also marred by conflicts and power struggles between different chiefs (representing different clans). The different positions and strategies adopted by

negotiations and also occupied most of the positions in the committee in charge of disbursing the fund that was supposed to be used for community development purposes. But two prominent women also participated: a wealthy, well-educated and influential former politician, who took an active role in negotiations regarding expansions of the plantation, and a wealthy and educated local Queen Mother who acted as the treasurer of the community development fund, both from the same clan as the lead chief. In their study of GADCO Yeboah and Bugri (2016) argue that “getting women into such decision-making position is important in amplifying their voice, especially on issues relating to equitable use of benefits which are accruing from common resources.” However, an intersectional lens alerts us that clan membership and class privilege obviously mattered in the selection of these prominent women. The fact that the Paramount Queen Mother was not included in the committee administering the community development fund confirms that class outweighed traditional authority. Unlike the women represented on the committee, she had not attended school and lived in a traditional mud house in the village instead of a big house in the city.

Not surprisingly, having privileged women in important positions does not lead to all women’s interests being represented or more voice for women in general. Indeed, there was considerable mistrust among our interviewees (both male and female) of those administering the fund and one of the main complaints concerned the lack of transparency and accountability regarding the use of money. The quotes below are representative for many that questioned the benefits from this fund,

Many people are not happy because not many people have benefitted from the farm and the revenue being generated too is not benefitting anybody in the town. So many people are not happy for that fact.”
(Interview, female outgrower, Fievie-Dugame, 1.5.16)

chiefs, state actors and different groups of local people in this process have been described by Lanz et al (2018).

“I don’t know what they are using the money for, because up till now we don’t even have good drinking water in the town.” (Interview, young woman, Kpodzi, 20.6.14)

The committee in charge of the community development fund also played a key role in identifying individuals that should be compensated by GADCO for the loss of farmland. Most interviewees claimed that they had not received any compensation, but strikingly those who had (women and men) mostly came from Fievie-Dugame and often hailed from chiefly or other influential families. Gender did not seem to be a decisive factor regarding whether compensation was paid or not; instead the main factors were indigeneity, social status and closeness to the relevant customary authorities/clan membership. An elderly woman from Kpevikpo explained:

They have decided compensation amounts by themselves. The committee, which is the leadership of the community here, which should stand and bargain on our behalf, have not done that because they are corrupt. (...) There are some people who would even go and set fire to their own farms and go and report that GADCO has destroyed their farms. The committee, because they are related and have something to do with those people, they would ... get compensation for them. (Biographic Interview, Elderly woman, Kpevikpo, 24.6.16)

Chiefs thus used their roles as middlemen between GADCO and the community to increase their own wealth and that of their families. Similarly, the main beneficiaries of the community development fund were the customary authorities (including some powerful women), who through GADCO managed to accentuate their class position, allowing for additional accumulation.

Despite GADCO’s commitment to gender equality, and specifically to investing in women’s health and education (GADCO Website, as of 18.6.15), such investments never materialized. Nor did placing two elite women into negotiations and the administration of the community development fund amount to the empowerment of women in Fievie. Yet, the company’s manager apparently trusted all goods to materialize quasi-automatically. When asked about the use of money from the fund, he explained:

What they use the money for is none of our business. If you do business with me, it is not up to you to tell me to share the money with my wife. We have our business structures and they have their own. We don't meddle with their way of doing things. (E23, GADCO Manager, Sogakope, 6.7.16)

Commitments to furthering any kind of equality sit uneasily with such an approach. In the end the liberal trust in the value of the investment and the fund as intrinsic goods outweighed any consideration of power relations.

Enclosing the Commons: Expropriating the Vulnerable

Most of the land that was leased out to GADCO was previously used as commons by settler communities, and women in these communities were among those most affected by the loss of various common pool resources. Their *de facto* expropriation was not originally planned but was realized gradually as the company and chiefs advanced their interests without consultation of affected populations.

After signing the original contract with GADCO, a community meeting was called, and all people present (women and men) reportedly agreed that a piece of swampy land in the river basin should be leased out to the rice company. However, the company soon realized that it was difficult to grow and harvest rice in the swampy floodplains and left the initial area. Continuous expansions saw the company move towards Kpodzi and Kpevikpo, as well as Bakpa Adzani. In this process vast tracts of communal land, as well as farmland were enclosed without consultations. Neither the family heads, who owned these lands, nor those using it were informed or consulted about this take-over.

Initially, we were told they would take the waterlogged area but not our place here, we were not informed. The people just came, and we saw their truck working, then we confronted them. We only went to ask them what they were doing, and they told us they were bringing a development project. (HH:O6, male outgrower, Kpodzi, 20.6.14)

We were not informed. We were in the farm, and they approached us that they are coming to plough the place, and we were begging them to wait until after we harvest, then they can take the land.

(HH:LL4, elderly woman, Bakpa Adzani, 27.6.14)

The company expanded its operations in several waves and by 2015 had enclosed approximately 931 ha of communally used land and 92 ha of farmland, the latter mainly in the area of Bakpa Adzani and Kpodzi (Schuppli 2016, 78-79). This land was strategically chosen by chiefs, as the migrant status of these communities meant that their land rights were not recognized under customary law (Lanz et al. 2018). Our qualitative data as well as remote sensing data analysed by Schuppli (2016) confirm that the settler communities were most affected by the loss of farmland. Unlike the people from Fievie-Dugame, the seat of the chieftancy, they hardly received any compensation.

Most of the land acquired by GADCO was however communal and provided pasture for several settler communities (including Kpodzi and Kpevikpo). In the process of expanding the rice plantation, more and more grazing land was made inaccessible to cattle rearers. Furthermore, many ponds, creeks and dams used for fishing and drinking water were destroyed, and some of the remaining water sources were reportedly poisoned by the run-off of fertilizers and pesticides from the company's plantation. Kpodzi and Kpevikpo were completely cut off from their major water supply, as their main water pond – previously used for both human and animal consumption – was destroyed.

Both women and men experienced the loss of common pool resources in Kpodzi and Kpevikpo. However, women experienced it in 'a gender-intensified way' (see Levien 2017) since the collection and sale of firewood and the collection of water was their responsibility.

The water, it affected the women more than the men because women are in charge of water in the house. Men are not much concerned with water in the house and when you have a visitor you cannot expect the man to give the person water, it is the duty of the woman. (B16, middle-aged woman, Kpevikpo, 1.5.16)

Women go to farm, they burn charcoal, and go to the market to sell charcoal and buy food stuff. The trees we used for the charcoal are those that have been cleared so we don't have much there to do now."(Middle-aged woman, Kpevikpo, 1.5.16)

Poorer landless women, in particular female heads of households from settler communities complained that with the destruction of trees, their main source of livelihood was destroyed.

We were cutting wood to produce charcoal but now they have cleared all the places and now we have to struggle before we get something to eat.” (Middle-aged widow, Bakpa Adzani, 21.5.16)

While these findings confirm other studies, which have highlighted that women are most affected by the loss of commons (Levien 2017, Tsikata and Yaro 2014), this is not true for all women equally. In Fievie-Dugame only the poorest women, often landless widows, relied on firewood for their income. Furthermore, some wealthy women did not need to use creeks and dams for water, but rather purchased bagged and bottled water. Like with participation in the negotiations and administration of the project, the impacts of the loss of the commons were intersectionally gendered. Expropriation disproportionately affected the vulnerable: settler communities and in particular settler women, who relied on the commons for their livelihoods.

Empowering Women through Outgrowing?

Integrated into the plantation, GADCO established an outgrower scheme, ‘Fievie Connect’, that was intended to compensate local communities for the loss of land. In addition, the company website advertised that the outgrower scheme would contribute to the ‘economic advancement’ of women. At the time of the field research the company worked with 45 people, according to company records half female and half male, and trained them to farm rice. They were then given a 45 ha plot of land on the company’s plantation and provided with agro-chemicals, the cost of which was deducted from the amount made at harvest time. The company guaranteed to buy the outgrowers’ produce at the Ghanaian market rate.

All outgrowers interviewed during the first research period were very happy with the amount of money that they could make from outgrowing (1700 to 3000 GHS per harvest¹¹). Not surprisingly, the scheme was in demand. Unfortunately the selection of outgrowers repeated the preferential treatments observed in the administration of the community development fund. The company delegated selection to the chiefs, who disproportionately picked people of their own indigene clans. As a result, the majority of beneficiaries again came from Fievie-Dugame, the seat of the Paramountcy, where many of the chiefs' relatives still live. No outgrowers from Bakpa or Kpevikpo were selected and only one person from Kpodzi (a brother of one of the main chiefs promoting the LSLI) – despite the fact that these settlements bore the brunt of the loss of land and resources. Interviews with 10 randomly selected outgrowers (5 men, 5 women) made apparent that the vast majority of the outgrowers were from chiefly families or related to other locally important people, with some important indigenous families having several positions in the outgrower scheme. Those who didn't benefit were aware of this and critical of the matter:

There's a particular house here. The people from that house working on the rice farm are more than those from other families. Why should it be so? Meanwhile, they say the project would benefit people of the community; they did not say it would benefit only a particular family. (Group Discussion, Young women, Fievie-Dugame, 26.6.16)

If class and clan membership/indigeneity thus played a considerable role in the selection of outgrowers, age emerged as an additional vector of differentiation, bestowing privilege to older community members over younger ones. Despite very high youth unemployment and outmigration of young men, mostly elderly people were included in the scheme.

They said the project would benefit both adults and the youth but if you visit the farm, you would see only old men and women. We the youth were supposed to be working on the farm, but they

¹¹ App. 530 to 930 USD (www.oanda.com, per 1.7.2014).

employed old men and old women, is that good? (Group Discussion, Young women, Fievie-Dugame, 26.6.16)

But class and gender never lurked far behind these dynamics. Both the chiefs and the company management conceded that the majority of those who signed up to the scheme did not work on the fields themselves, but rather hired female labourers or in the case of the male participants, sent their wives to do the work.¹²

The reason that more women are enrolled in the outgrower scheme is that women are more hardworking than men. Some men are also enrolled, but they rather send their wives to do the work. They then share the money half/half. (Interview, Member of the Fievie Traditional Council, 6.7.16)

Even though women working on the outgrower fields organized themselves in shifts, i.e. spending half the day on the outgrower field and half on their own, several reported an increase in their time burden, as outgrowing added to their other productive and reproductive activities; some reduced the size of their own farms as a result.

Like the community development fund, this effort at corporate social responsibility thus got entrapped in the chiefs' patronage network. Even though about 50 percent of the outgrowers were female, most were wealthy, well-connected and elderly from Fievie-Dugame. Perhaps one could argue that for them this constituted 'empowerment.' But the scheme also promoted a new class structure, recruiting less privileged women as agricultural wage labourers and making visible the quasi-proletarian status of women working on their husbands' farms. Whether this outcome can be characterized as an advancement of women is questionable.

Adaptations

One of the side effects of the LSLI was increased land scarcity, which circumscribed the

¹² This has also been reported by Maertens and Swinnen (2008) in their study of an outgrower scheme in Senegal, where contracts were predominantly signed by men, while many women provided the unpaid labour on the field, as well as by Carney and Watts (1991) on their study of a rice scheme in the Gambia.

efforts of those who had lost access to land to adapt and find ways to cope. There were still large tracts of land available for the expansion of farming activities within the Fievie Traditional Area, but these were concentrated in the hands of a few families. In Bakpa Adzani, most farmland was already in use, and even those who could get access to land had to reduce farming activities drastically. Many people thought about migrating elsewhere.

There is no more new land, since all was sold to the GADCO Company. (...) there is no hope for the future since they are just continuing what they are doing so we don't cast our minds on them again.

There is nothing to pick from the land anymore, not even trees for fuel woods so I am just thinking to migrate to the Northern Region where there is a lot of vast land idle. I am in dilemma now because of my aged mother so I have not decided yet." (B1, middle-aged woman, Bakpa Adzani, 21.5.16)

Gender structured the opportunities available. Several respondents, especially women, in all study villages reported having to resort to sharecropping.

First we were having our own lands over there [the investor's fields] and we farmed on it for ourselves but since we have moved from there to other places, we went to lease the land from other people or get it from somebody to share the crops/harvest with the landowner. So it has caused us to go into negotiations with landowners to share crops with them and that is the problem we have now. (Focus Group, rice pickers, Fievie-Dugame, 16.3.15, *ES)

The impact was that, before they came, some of us planted maize, pepper, cassava but they came to plough and destroy all of them. That made it difficult for us to access new land. Even if we want to get new land, we have to go and do sharecropping for the landlords. (B6, middle-aged woman, Bakpa Adzani, 25.6.16)

One major way poor women adapted to the loss of land and common pool resources (in particular firewood) was to glean rice. This started right after the company's first harvest, when women went onto the rice fields to collect the rice grains that the company's combine harvesters could not pick up. While the company first wanted to prohibit this practice, the women asked their chiefs for support and were finally allowed to continue. The wealthy outgrowers also allowed poorer women to glean rice on their fields, but claimed two thirds of the rice that was picked for themselves, allowing the pickers to keep only one third. Many

women mentioned that they did not like the gleaning job, as it was very strenuous and the proceeds were limited, but they had few other options. At the time of research, hundreds of women from many different villages could be seen on the fields picking rice, and both the company and the chiefs used their strenuous work to brag about the benefits of the investment.

Women's living standards have improved – they now sell and produce rice – it is of great economic benefit to them. (Speech by chief at the Official GADCO Mill Opening Ceremony, 9.4.14)

The majority of interviewees had some female household members who gleaned rice, and all of them agreed that this benefitted their household. They reported income ranging from 100 to 400 GHS¹³ per month (during harvest time), depending on the number of days and hours spent on the fields. However, the perceived benefits of rice picking were short lived, as GADCO went bankrupt in 2015. The period prior to the take-over of RMG was one of increased insecurity for many women.

Since they (the company) have destroyed all these things and we have used the picking of the rice to compensate those losses, we were happy about it. But just that it did not keep long when they stopped farming on the field and now it has caused a lot of burdens on us again. At first, the picking of the rice compared to the losses, it was somehow better but now that they have stopped, the burden is felt again. (Focus Group, Rice pickers, Fievie-Dugame, 16.3.15, *ES)

Coping strategies and adaptations to the changes wrought by the LSLI thus were informed by gender and indigeneity and revealed aggravated inequality. Some newly landless resorted to out-migration in order to find new livelihoods; others, particularly women, took up share cropping; yet others were reduced to gleaning rice, finding themselves at the mercy of the company's fortunes. For all of them, promises of development and women's empowerment must ring hollow.

¹³ App. 30 to 120 USD (www.oanda.com, as per 1.7.2014)

Discussion and Conclusion

Feminist ideas have entered the neoliberal agricultural development agenda, including increasingly ubiquitous public-private partnerships such as the New Alliance for Food and Agriculture and business-led development projects such as the GADCO investment in Fievie. Rhetorically committed to gender equality, these neoliberal development actors have reduced equality to a matter of numbers, seeking to include women in their projects while disregarding local institutions and related resource rights, as well as intersectionally gendered power relations that suffuse the politics of project implementation. Our case study shows that neither were women generally empowered by GADCO's operations, as the company claims, nor were all women victims of the GADCO investment, as some of the literature on LSLI would suggest. We show that the local institutional context and the intersectional power relations it embeds interacted with an investment that regards commercialization as a general good to shape the distributive outcomes of the LSLI. Inequality, along various axes, was embedded in the institutional structures of resource management in Fievie and, rather than challenging them, the GADCO investment empowered local elites and impoverished those most vulnerable according to their location at the intersections of clan, gender, age, and indigeneity, thus exacerbating inequality.

While the company was able to congratulate itself for having included a few elite women in the administration of its community development fund and recruited many women into its outgrower scheme, pre-existing institutions and axes of differentiation continued to do their work, guiding the impacts of a power-blind intervention in sometimes unintended directions. The investment and the accompanying corporate social responsibility schemes broadly benefited the privileged chiefly families, favoured indigenes over settlers, men over women, and older farmers over the youth. On the other hand, the loss of farmland and various common pool resources predominantly affected settler communities, poor people and in

particular poor women from settler communities. As expected from existing findings in the literature, rather than bringing about equality, the LSLI aggravated inequality.

Our evidence also shows the different ways in which clan membership, gender, indigeneity and class interacted in the case of the GADCO project. On the one hand, class privilege often helped elite women to break institutional rules that would have limited their ownership of land and farming activities. On the other hand the GADCO investment aggravated class distinctions, effectively turning settler status into class disadvantage as settlers lost their land and access to the commons. Settler women more than men became sharecroppers or casual labourers on the land of the wealthy elite or lumpen gatherers of left-over rice. By introducing commercial logics and creating scarcity in land, the LSLI thus pushed a process of empowerment of the elite on the one hand, and expropriation and proletarianisation on the other, guided by intersecting status positions.

Because it has embraced a public commitment to advancing gender equality, we expected GADCO to be a hard case for demonstrating aggravations of inequality. In the end, the investment shows little difference from those without such commitment; indeed, the corporate social responsibility components of the project emerged as additional spoils to be captured by the powerful. Part of the problem no doubt is a gap between rhetoric and implementation as the company clearly failed to monitor the inequality producing impacts of the investment. However, we hope to have shown in addition that it is far-fetched to expect unfettered market integration to produce ‘women’s empowerment’ or indeed any form of equality. Logics of commercialization and scarcity set in motion processes that thrive on and accentuate intersecting differences. Counteracting such tendencies needs much more than establishing plantations with flanking corporate social responsibility schemes. It needs first and foremost political action to call out processes of exclusion, expropriation and exploitation, including along the intersecting axes of gender, generation, indigeneity, and class.

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