

CHANGING LABOUR RELATIONS, RESISTANCE AND CLASS STRUGGLE

The scramble for land for cashew production, as described above, is commercialising land tenure in the communities included in this research. Historically, migrant and landless farmers in many Akan communities of the forest south, including cashew growing areas, accessed land for farming through sharecropping arrangements (Austin, 1987; Pogucki, 1955). Migrant farmers in Amponsahkrom, for example, described conditions prior to the introduction of cashew production, where sharecropping and land rental were the main arrangements through which they accessed land. However, since the introduction of cashew, they explained that sharecropping arrangements have more frequently evolved into “Taungya”,⁵ a system of land use whereby land is released to migrant farmers for food crops, while landowners planted cashew on the farm. As part of this arrangement, migrant farmers described not being required to share the food they produced with the landowners or pay land rent, however they were required to provide labour to support the maintenance of the cashew trees for three years, including when intercropping was no longer possible on the basis that the canopy and rooting system of the cashew trees constrained mixed species plantings.

Some of the local elites and “Burgers” who have acquired land for cashew production often entered into “Taungya” arrangement with migrant farmers who, in some instances, were already farming on the land. One migrant farmer in Amponsahkrom explained:

The “Burgers”, after buying the land, will allow you to work on the farm or take care of the cashew plantation for them by intercropping food crops with cashew trees and when the cashew trees grow, you have to leave the land. Some of the “Burgers” too would sack you from the land immediately after they buy it.

This emerging “Taungya” system was, in some cases, driving tension between migrant farmers and landowners in the cashew growing communities we undertook this research. Such tension was emerging in the context of the “Taungya” system, which does not give migrant farmers continuous access to land, thereby limiting migrant farmers to just three years of intercropping food crops between cashew trees. In addition, this new system was described by many migrant farmers as exploitative, on the basis they did not receive any compensation for their loss of access to land. This form of labour exploitation was enabled via the condition that required migrant farmers to maintain the cashew farms – without any additional labour input from the landowners. This is an arrangement migrant farmers described increasingly resisting.

Such resistance was observed most notably in Nyakoma (in the Kintampo area), where migrant farmers were engaged in cropping on land belonging to the Mo ethnic group. These migrant farmers, while describing the land as not belonging to them, were protesting what they described as labour exploitation. Such tension and struggle between migrant farmers and landowners is not unique to cashew production; and reflects broader agrarian tensions and class struggles in Africa (Yaro et al., 2017; Bernstein, 1979).

Based on our findings, we argue the promotion of cashew production – despite its championing as a pathway out of poverty for poor farmers – is driving impoverishment and dispossession through land accumulation and labour exploitation by landowners, local elites and “Burgers”. These processes of land accumulation and labour exploitation are, however, not without resistance,

⁵ *Taungya* is a forestry system where land is released to farmers to inter-plant trees with food crops to serve the farmers’ need for arable land and reforestation (FAO, 1984).

the outcome of which is manifest in class-based struggles. The emerging land capture and labour exploitation is critical to understand both historical and contemporary outcomes of agrarian change in Ghana. The seizure of land from migrant farmers, who mostly produce food as a source of livelihood, and its increasing conversion into cashew production, raises concerns for food production. With this as background, we now turn to discuss how cashew production is driving food insecurity concerns.

CASHEW PRODUCTION DRIVES FOOD INSECURITY CONCERNS

The Brong Ahafo region has historically been the 'breadbasket' of Ghana, with the region noted for maize, yam and cassava production, including for both local (regional) and national consumption (Amanor and Pabi, 2007). The region leads in the production of these food crops, which are major staples in Ghana. The concentration of food production in this region is supported by favorable agro-climatic conditions that are suitable for the cultivation of a variety of local food crops. The region supplies most of Ghana's staple foods that are consumed nationwide, particularly in the urban south. Indeed, production of these staple crops has been a major livelihood activity of migrant farmers in the region over many decades. The expansion of market-oriented crops however, including cashew nuts, poses significant challenges for ensuring regional and national food security.

Despite the possible economic benefits that might be realized via cashew production, many farmers expressed growing concerns about the impacts of expanding cashew production for local food provisioning. The majority of participants included in this study, for example, described being worried about the impacts of changes in land use, alongside the concentration of land amongst elites, including the possible impacts for meeting national food needs. Although there are currently no available figures to measure the land use trade-off and associated reduction in food production due to conversion to cashew, local agriculture officers at the District Agriculture offices similarly described cashew production as affecting food production. For example, a Crop Development officer at Wenchi Municipal Assembly stated:

Cashew production will make the prices of food to go high, because every farmer is going into it.

Similarly, some farmers described a reduction in the production of food as driving the cost of food upwards at local markets. One woman in Amponsahkrom, for example, lamented the impacts of cashew production during a focus group:

Cashew production will bring famine to this community. People are saying they would buy rice with income from cashew farm. What if the rice is not available to buy? What would we eat? It is maize that gives us food here and we may no longer farm maize because of cashew, so what are we going to eat? This will bring famine here, and the rest of Ghana.

Another farmer in Kintampo juxtaposed the case of cashew with cocoa production in Sefwi (a well noted area of cocoa production in Ghana):

The tree crops are good, but it will bring famine to this place. Because some have planted cashew all over and they don't have any place left for food crops. It will be like Sefwi. The people of Sefwi use to farm plantain a lot, but because of cocoa

there is no land for plantain again. It is good we farm cashew, but we have to limit ourselves.

While some farmers expressed support for converting their land to cashew nut production, they also reflected upon the impacts for local food production. While farmers expressed concerns about a coming famine within their own communities, they similarly expressed concerns about famine in urban areas of Ghana that depended upon food grown in the Brong Ahafo region. Demonstrating this, one older farmer, who had grown maize for much of his life, explained that if maize production in Brong Ahafo region reduced, the urban south of Ghana would experience severe famine:

If production of maize reduces, there will be famine in the urban south of Ghana; because we supply the nation with maize, and if the production reduces, then there will be famine because the cost of maize will increase as well.

These emerging trends in Ghana's 'breadbasket' resonate with evidence elsewhere in the global South; where local food growing has been replaced by the cultivation of export commodities, driving questions and challenges for local food security (Lawrence, 2017; Rosin et al., 2012)

Given widely shared concerns related to the challenges of export cashew production for local food security, a number of farmers described reserving a small portion of their land for production of food for the household. In these cases, farmers described limiting food cropping to just those crops destined for household consumption. The remaining majority of land was designated to cashew production. If this trend continues, the Brong Ahafo region can be expected to have limited surplus food available to meet the demands of urban Ghanaians.

Some farmers described the deployment of a range of other strategies as they attempted to remain food secure alongside conversion of their farmland into cashew nut. Amongst these strategies included the practice of intercropping cashew trees with food crops, including maize, yam, groundnut and cassava. However, and as detailed above, intercropping was described as only possible during the first three years of cashew farm establishment. After this, the cashew trees form a closed canopy and a spreading rooting system, which prohibits intercropping.

Based on the results presented in this paper, the increasing production of cashew nuts in Ghana's 'breadbasket' for sale in the global market can be understood as presenting an immediate threat to local – referring to both household level and national – food security. This is particularly worrying given the Brong Ahafo region as supplier of most of Ghana's local food requirements, especially urban Ghanaians (Amanor and Pabi, 2007; Amanor, 2009). Already, farmers in cashew growing areas describe producing less food for themselves, and for sale in the local markets (see also Evans et al., 2015). This is likely to pose significant challenges for ensuring availability and accessibility of traditional food staples, both within the region and across Ghana.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The paper has demonstrated that expansion of cashew production in Ghana – including in the Brong Ahafo region – is associated with extensive land use change, and alongside socio-economic impacts at the local level. Foremost amongst these is the challenge of ensuring local food security for both the region, and more broadly across Ghana. The conversion of land from local food growing to a cash crop intended for export is driving this food security challenge. Given state, private and development sector support for on-going expansion of the cashew export industry, these challenges and tensions can be expected to continue into the future.

Whilst our paper has presented new empirical insights and understandings related to the conflicts and tensions associated with Ghana's expanding cashew industry, it has also demonstrated the extension of agricultural transformation and rural restructuring that has persisted as part of colonial and so-called postcolonial agricultural development. The expansion of cashew nut production for export should be understood as the latest in a line of plantation-based and export led agricultural development projects established to integrate Ghanaian farmers into international markets. This reflects a neoliberal policy approach to agricultural development; that positions private sector actors and development agencies as key to driving agricultural change.

There are, however, a number of unique insights we wish to draw out from our findings, which assist to understand the particular dynamics associated with Brong Ahafo's emergent export cashew industry.

Firstly, our findings add to growing understandings of the conflicts and tensions associated with Ghana's rapidly expanding cashew industry. Changes in land tenure, including the individualisation and concentration of land amongst certain family members, alongside elites and/or "Burgers", has emerged as a direct outcome of cashew industry expansion. The long time required between cashew seedling planting and harvest of nuts requires secure land tenure to realize economic returns. It is this necessity that is, at least in part, driving these significant changes in land tenure, including the disruption and/or devaluing of traditional and customary land title.

The transformation of common and family land into individualised ownership has the effect of excluding family members, as well as migrant farmers and other smallholder farmers from land they once relied upon for food growing, and other vital livelihood activities. Similarly, the concentration of land ownership associated with cashew production is driving changes to labour relations between landowners and migrant farmers. The emerging labour relations were described by migrant farmers as exploitative, given they work on cashew farms as caretakers, but not beneficiaries of any proceeds derived from cashew cultivation.

Secondly, the paper adds to discussions on power relations, social differentiation and agrarian class struggle associated with cashew production. Drawing from a power analysis informed by political ecology, our findings demonstrate there are unequal power relations between landowners and local elites, and migrants, landless and smallholder farmers. While indigenes in cashew growing communities were once able to derive control of land via family and customary law, local elites have leveraged social and economic capital to buy land. This is disrupting traditional land tenure arrangements, and reinforcing inequalities between landowners, local elites and migrant farmers. Our findings are similar to Yaro et al. (2017) in regard to oil palm in the Western region and mango producing communities in the Eastern region of Ghana. In each of these locations, social differentiation was identified as emerging as a result of land accumulation by rich elites, creating a pool of wage labourers.

On the basis of these findings, our paper concludes by calling for a critical rethink of the agricultural policy and planning frameworks that are driving cashew industry expansion, especially in the Brong Ahafo region. While key plans – including the 10-year Cashew Development Plan and Planting for Export and Rural Development Plan – were designed to assist the development of Ghana's cashew sector as a pathway out of poverty for smallholder farmers, our findings demonstrate they are falling short on these goals. In the face of our findings, there is a requirement for frameworks to consider social inequalities, class exploitation and

marginalisation of livelihoods, alongside industry expansion. Such rethinking – including by widening the lens beyond export-led growth, to also consider local, regional and national food needs – may assist to circumvent the adverse impacts of cashew production on local, regional and national communities.

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