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Research Problem, Methodology, Dilemmas and Problems

Research Problem

There is no gainsaying the fact that the egalitarian and relatively free access to land that characterized Ghanaian and other African societies is a thing of the past.

The land question and its related conflicts have therefore attracted scholarly work in most African countries. They have also not been ignored by governments because of the benefits of land as an important resource and as a resource for state revenue while the conflicts have at the same time resulted in high expenditure. To have a stake in land, reforms have been introduced in such areas as title registration and land demarcation by surveying and promotion of land markets to inject greater transparency and efficiency, increase security of tenure, and to some extent, greater fairness for those excluded by traditional system from owning land, especially women (Herbst 2000). In addition to this, donors have equally become interested in land and land-related conflicts and have invested funds for investigation their management. The interest in, and preoccupation with, land and its related conflicts by various stakeholders, have been necessary to address the intractable and divisive phenomenon of land conflicts to ensure social harmony, stability and socio-economic development.

It is against this background that this study examines the causes of land conflicts in the Greater Accra and Eastern regions by focusing on two sub-metropolitan areas, La, Osu and Ga West district (in the Greater Accra region) and Afram Plains district (in the Eastern Region).

Scholarly work has tended to focus on those land conflicts that flare up into large scale civil strife, with little attention being paid to the far more common low scale cases involving rural communities such as those in which 'households experience small-scale land conflicts with relatives, neighbours, landlords, or local governments' (Yamano and Deininger 2005:1).

The study of such 'low intensity conflicts' is imperative if one is to understand the dynamics of identities, local power structures and social group membership.

Methodology

This study used a combination of related methods to ensure reliability and objectivity. Both qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources were used. Field work, which entailed mass survey, in-depth interviews with elites and focus group discussion with identifiable groups was conducted in 10 towns, 5 each in the Greater Accra and Eastern regions in May 2007. For the mass survey, 200 respondents were interviewed in the Greater Accra and Eastern regions. In Greater Accra, a total of 100 questionnaires were administered at Osu and La, Amasaman, Sapeima and Pokuase. In the Eastern Region another 100 respondents were interviewed at the Afram Plains District 100 in five settlements, namely, Donkorkrom, Tease, Ekye Amanfrom, Forofori and Amankwakwakrom. The last two are resettlement communities. The electoral register was used to locate the 200 respondents.

Interviews were conducted with some of the elites in the Greater Accra Region. They were the Ga West District Chief Executive, Secretary of Ga West District Chiefs Association, Chief of Mayera-Faase, Secretary of the chief of Osu (Osu Mantse), and Secretary of La Traditional Council. Different groups were also interviewed in the Greater Accra Region. These were the La Traditional Council, Land and Chieftaincy Dispute Resolution committee of Ga West District, family heads and Land Owners Association of Sapeima, Amasaman Youth Association and Ga-Adangbe Association.

In the Afram Plains District in the Eastern Region, elites interviewed were the District Chief Executive (DCE), the MP of Afram Plains North, native and settler chiefs, Assembly members, the Acting Secretary of the Kwahu Traditional Council and the Deputy Eastern Regional Minister.

The groups interviewed included the Security Committee of the Afram Plains District Assembly, Afram Plains Development Organization, Lands Committee of the Kwahu Traditional Council and Amankwaakrom Youth Association. We also explored secondary literature which allowed us to address the larger context and complexities based on the comparative empirical data.

Our methods were to enable us seek answers to the following questions:

- (i) What are the causes of land struggles?
- (ii) Who originally owned the land and how did the ownership come about?
- (iii) How did the land dispute assume ethnic dimensions?
- (iv) Why did the land disputes remain local?
- (v) What role did traditional institutions play in the land related conflict?
- (vi) What alternative conflict resolution mechanisms are feasible in specific contexts and in relation to particular types of conflict?
- (vii) What mechanisms can be deployed to curb disputes and conflicts associated with access to, and disposal of, land?

The theoretical, empirical and policy relevance of the study is therefore clear. It provides deeper insights by not only engaging with theoretical questions around land and conflict but also hopes to enrich the empirical literature. In addition, it makes policy relevant recommendations that will hopefully curb, if not eliminate, land related conflicts in Ghana.

Dilemmas and Problems

A number of problems were faced in data collection. The most notable were accessibility to respondents and sensitivity of land issues which prevented some respondents from open comments. In some instances, especially with the elite interviews, interviews were re-scheduled at short notice. Poor communication in the Afram Plains District delayed the setting up of interviews.

In other instances, particularly in the Ga West and Afram Plains districts, verification of supporting documents on land such as land titling and registration was lacking. In some of the rural areas of Ga West and Afram Plains districts, the researchers found it difficult to interview women because of the cultural practice that forbids women from making pronouncements on burning issues like land without the presence of men. These problems did not however compromise the reliability and validity of the findings of the study.

