



'It is they, the elders, that have thrown away the land'
**A case study on power hierarchies in the community of Babator,
Northern Ghana**

Author: Johanna Caminati Engström
Supervisor: Ellen Hillbom



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List of abbreviations

African Union: AU

AgDevCo: Agricultural Development Company

BIFH: Babator Irrigated Farming Hub

FASDEP II: Food and Agriculture Development Policy II

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

GCAP: Ghana Commercial Agriculture Project

GoG: Government of Ghana

GSS: Ghana Statistical Service

LSLA: large-scale land acquisitions

MLNR: Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources

MoFA: Ministry of Food and Agriculture

OASL: Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands

PCC: Project Communications Committee

SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa

SADA: Savannah Accelerated Development Authority

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Abstract

In a global context of proliferating land-based investments, growing demographic pressure, and increasing urbanization, this thesis investigates a case of large-scale land acquisition (LSLA) in Babator, Norther Ghana. The objective is to provide a better understanding of how local power structures within affected communities influence the outcome of LSLAs. In particular, it focuses on patterns of conflict and cooperation and customary power hierarchies to determine who are the winners and the losers. The methods employed are focus group interviews, key informant interviews, participant observations and go-along walks. The analytical framework is informed by previous research on the topic and is of help in visualizing the context, the interactions of the various actors as well as the power sources affecting such interactions. The study reveals that patterns of conflict have negatively impacted the land acquisition at its initial phase, but examples of cooperation are present too. The research also shows that power hierarchies having their sources in *traditional authority, bureaucratic influence, access to knowledge and local business expertise, social identity and social relations, and control over the development agenda*, have decisively impacted the community both in the pre-acquisition and post-acquisition phase.

Key words: Ghana, customary land, global land rush, large-scale land acquisition, customary hierarchies, power, resource access, conflict and cooperation

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1. Introduction

The interest for foreign direct investments (FDIs) in commercial agriculture has been an essential, but not uncriticized, strategy for economic development in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Syed and Miyazako, 2013; Schoneveld, 2011). Nevertheless, rural people around the world continue to struggle with food insecurity, enduring poverty and degraded land and water (IFPRI, 2019, p.6). With large-scale land-based investments, growing demographic pressure, and increasing urbanization, the pressure on land has been mounting in the African continent. Large scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) have significantly accelerated following the 2008 global food price crisis with millions of hectares of farmland in developing countries being subjected to transactions involving foreign investors. The target for LSLAs is the same land that peasant producers across rural Africa require to support their livelihoods and smallholder production (Alden Wily, 2011).

The risk of impacting the right to adequate food was significant to the point that the then United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, made an addendum to his 2009 report analysing this trend and recalling the obligations imposed on states under international human rights law (UN, 2009). It became clear in the debate that although more investment in rural areas can be effective in reducing poverty - given its potential to create employment, transfer technologies and improve local producers' access to various markets - there are significant risks in this development (ibid.). Considering the agricultural sector's critical role in sustaining rural livelihoods, investigating the rise of LSLAs and their dynamics is of crucial importance.

Prevailing land tenure systems influence the modes and complexities accompanying LSLAs. In most SSA countries, land is governed by customary, traditional, and indigenous systems of common property, with chiefs acting as custodians of the local communities' allodial interests (Dell'Angelo et al., 2017; Ahmed et al., 2018). The various tenure arrangements reinforce land fragmentation, complicating large-scale agricultural development (Ahmed et al., 2018, p.571). In the *global land rush*, untitled land is the main target (Alden Wily, 2011, p.15) and the phenomenon of local elites using their power to privatise land previously held for the community has been identified in various African countries (Quan et al., 2008, p. 193). LSLAs can therefore result in local people losing access to key resources for their livelihoods or even being directly dispossessed

of land which is their long-standing heritage (Cotula et al., 2009). Such processes of expansion in transnational land acquisitions, evocative of colonial dynamics, are sometimes also referred to as *land grabs* (Dell'Angelo et al., 2017).

Given the risks involved in land acquisitions, a key element of many international principles on socially responsible land-based investment is the need to consult and engage with the people and communities that will be affected by a proposed investment prior to implementation. This is in alignment with the international legal principle of “Free, Prior, and Informed Consent” (FPIC) (Landesa, 2019). Nevertheless, the state often being on the side of investors, it is challenging to evaluate whether the consent building process can be freely and fully informative to all the parties involved (Otsuki et al., 2016, p.156).

1.1 Problem statement and research questions

With 78 percent of land administered under customary land tenure arrangements (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001, p.13) and the constitutional recognition of chiefs' custodianship role in land management, Ghana is, although not unique, quite unusual in Africa (Ubink, 2007, p. 228). Often, the custodianship role of traditional authorities has turned into absolute ownership leading to the enclosure of land previously held for the community (Quan et al., 2008, p.193). This has presented many challenges for national and international investors who seek to engage the broader community. Among these is AgDevCo, a British social impact investor which has acquired a 10,369 ha site in Northern Ghana and is currently developing the Babator Irrigated Farming Hub (BIFH). Local sources encountered during the data collection mention that despite active efforts of consultation with the community in the pre-acquisition phase, there are now complaints about the company's unresponsiveness or failure to live up to the initial promises.

Whilst the effects of global commercial pressures fuelling LSLAs are thoroughly discussed in the literature, we know less about the role of local and national power structures. This study shifts the focus to the players on the ground. The objective is to provide a better understanding how national and local power structures influence the outcome of LSLAs. Noting the dynamics in customary land arrangements and the fact that traditional leaders are usually the bridge between investors and communities, the aim of this thesis is to investigate how national and local power dynamics impact LSLAs. This is done by elucidating on patterns of conflict and

cooperation and social interactions when external economic interests are involved. The nearly absolute authority of traditional leaders and the traditional authority hierarchy in Ghanaian customary land governance, poses a challenge for consent seeking. As a result, the development of the BIFH might have affected the livelihoods of the local population differently along lines of gender, class, social hierarchy and other factors. The aim of this research is expressed through the following research questions:

- i) How do patterns of conflict and cooperation influence the outcome of LSLAs?
- ii) What impact do local power hierarchies have on the agrarian and social development emerging from the land acquisition?
- iii) Who are the winners and the losers in the case of the BIFH?

This thesis is organized in seven main chapters. I will now introduce some background information, important to understand the upcoming analysis. From there, I present previous research that is relevant to this thesis, structured along different themes. Subsequently, I introduce my analytical framework and its academic inputs, followed by an explanation of the methodological aspects of this study. Finally, I present my findings and discussion in the analysis chapter and make some concluding remarks.

2. Background

This chapter introduces some key background information about the Ghanaian context in function of better understanding the coming sections.

2.1 Ghana's Land Administration System

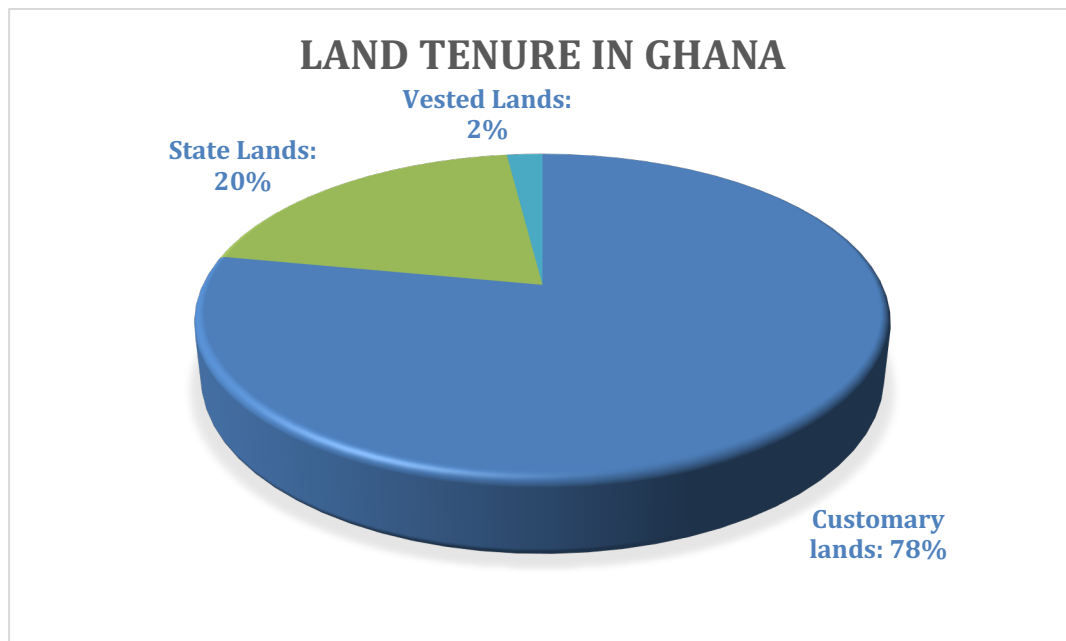


Figure 1 - Visual representation of land tenure systems in Ghana. Source: Author.

Ghana has a dual system of land administration, with a state and a customary system (see Figure 1). Whilst the state land system is governed by state laws and regulations through formal agencies (the Lands Commission), the customary system is based on - usually unwritten - customary practices of various traditional areas in the country (COLANDEF, n.d.). The 1992 Constitution of Ghana recognizes traditional leaders as custodians of all customary lands, approximately 78% of Ghana's land (Ubink & Quan, 2008, p.199). There are three main types of customary lands in Ghana, which are named after the type of traditional authority holding decision-making power over the land in question. They are named *stool lands*, *skin lands* and *clan & family lands*.

In large parts of southern Ghana, customary land is defined as *stool land* in reference to the wooden stool, which is a traditional and spiritual symbol of chieftainship; in the north,

customary land is referred to as *skin lands* because the chiefs sit on a hide (Ubink and Quan, 2008, p.199). In the latter, the Over Lord is the custodian of skin lands and is responsible for overall decision-making on the land. He is supported by Paramount Chiefs who have jurisdiction over designated portions of the skin land. In some skin land areas, there are *Tindamba* who are recognized as spiritual heads over the customary lands and influential in decision making. Paramount Chiefs in skin land areas are supported by Divisional and Local Chiefs in governing the lands (COLANDEF, n.d.). Lastly, some areas are under the jurisdiction of a family. Such a structure is inherited from the colonial period, where the colonial administration provided opportunities for powerful chiefs to centralise political control - and therefore also control over land - through the institutions of the paramount stool or skin (Amanor and Ubink, 2008, p.60; Ubink and Quan, 2007, p.205).¹

The colonial government also removed control of large areas of land from the chiefs. As a result of that, state land falls into two main categories. Part of the land has been compulsorily acquired through the state's power of eminent domain for public interest purposes² and amounts to 20% of Ghana's land. The other part is referred to as Vested Lands, namely lands which have been vested in the President in trust for a landholding community and it amounts to circa 2% of Ghana's land³ (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001; Ministry of Lands and Forestry, 2003, p. 11).

The Constitution does not make specific provisions on how customary lands should be managed by traditional authorities. According to customs, land is communally held in trust for the community and administered by the Traditional Leaders who are responsible for the day to day management. However, customary management is known for its weak administrative machinery, which is the result of lack of consistency on customary practices and lack of awareness by traditional authorities of government policies pertaining to land (Biitir and Nara, 2016, p.529). The

¹ As explained by Amanor (2008), the origin of customary tenure dates back to the early colonial period when the British colonial administration was failing to control land and vest it in the colonial state. In fact, in the 1880s, the Gold Coast (Ghana's colonial name) became the scene for a gold rush. Fearing competition, the Gold Coast was transformed from a protectorate into an imperial colony without consultation with the chiefs or the people and without military defeat. In the 1890s hundreds of mining companies were established on the Gold Coast and vast tracts of land were given out as concessions. Land was not under the monopoly of chiefs, and therefore it was frequently acquired by property speculators who sold it to gold mining companies. The increase and rapid pace of land sales concerned the colonial government who did not have any control over the process. As a solution, the colonial administration followed a policy of Indirect Rule, in which colonial rule was exercised through an alliance with traditional authorities organised into Native Authorities. From this moment, land management and transaction of land became a prerogative of chiefs who had the support of the British colonial administration. This was a way of limiting the development of free land markets and land speculation. This also spurs the creation of the theory of African communal tenure, according to which chiefs manage land on behalf of their communities (p.57).

² under the State Lands Act, 1962 (Act 125).

³ under the Administration of Lands Act, 1962 (Act 123).

Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands (OASL) collects all stool and skin land revenues and disburses them according to the provisions in the Constitution⁴. From a legal perspective, the Constitution recognizes the allodial interest, the customary freehold interest, the usufructuary interest, the leasehold interest, sub-lease interests and share tenancies (see Figure 2).⁵

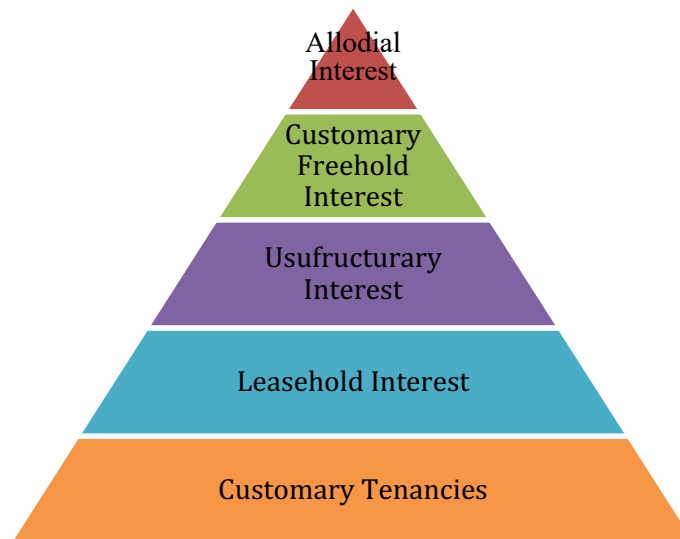


Figure 2- Types of land rights and interests in Ghana.
Source: Author

2.2 Foreign Direct Investments in the agricultural sector in Ghana

Every country in SSA is context-specific with regard to investment, legal and regulatory environments pertaining land⁶. In 2009, the *Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa* (hereby Framework) was introduced as a non-binding normative framework. The objective was to

⁴ Ten percent of the revenue accruing from stool lands shall be paid to the OASL to cover administrative expenses; and the remaining revenue is disbursed in the following proportions: (a) twenty-five per cent to the stool through the traditional authority for the maintenance of the stool in keeping with its status; (b) twenty per cent to the traditional authority; and (c) fifty-five per cent to the District Assembly, within the area of authority of which the stool lands are situated (GoG 1992).

⁵ The allodial interest is the highest interest in land at the customary level which confers absolute rights in land and is non-transactional. It is a collective interest held by a group in perpetuity and held in custody by the Leader (Paramount Chief, Family Head or Clan Head). The Customary Freehold Interest is an interest in land derived from an owner of Allodial interest, acquired from a transaction of outright purchase from a Stool, Family, Skin of Clan. The usufructuary interest is held by individual members of the group that collectively owns the Allodial interest and is a use right arising from cultivation or occupancy of a vacant communal land by usufructs. The Leasehold Interest is a lower interest that is carved out from any higher interest for a defined time through a transaction. The lowest category of customary land rights are the customary share tenancies which results when a stool, skin, clan or family enters into an agreement with another person to grant an interest in land under agreed terms and conditions (Da Rocha and Lodoh, 1999; COLANDEF, n.d.).

⁶ Each state in SSA has the right to decide its own policies under the *Constitutive Act of the African Union*.

provide African Union (AU) member states with guidance on strengthening land rights and boosting productivity with the aspiration of contributing to secure livelihoods. Despite limited guidance regarding FDI, the Framework recommends drafting policies that avoid the risk of uncompensated land loss, in conjunction with land policy reform that addresses various types of social marginalization (Brunton et al., 2017, p.227).

Ghana has made arduous efforts to attract more FDIs through its institutional and legal framework. Modernizing agriculture has been, since the era of *Developmentalism* (1950s-1970s)⁷, a crucial component of aspirations about ‘national development’. It is often subordinated to the desire for industrialization (Bernstein 2010, p.73). In the pursuit of such development, the mainstream consensus is that FDI is a major stimulus for economic growth, given that development in “developing countries” is strongly intertwined with agricultural development (Awunyo Vitor and Sackey, 2018, p.2). Also, it is believed that foreign investment “can provide a valuable jump-start to developing agribusiness value chains, introducing financial and technical resources unavailable domestically” (World Bank Group, 2014, p. 4). In line with these beliefs, the Government of Ghana (GoG) has adopted measures that offer various incentives to investors, so that the agricultural sector will benefit from technological spill-over.

With the promotion of agribusiness and the corporatization of agriculture as central features (Ayelazuno, 2019, p.915), the country witnessed a neoliberal turn in the management of its economy since the 1980s. In 1983 the GoG launched an economic recovery programme (ERP) which aimed to revitalize the economy by taking advantage of the new global environment of free trade (Awunyo Vitor and Sackey, 2018, p.2).⁸

Today Ghana has a large smallholder sector producing about 80% of Ghana’s total agricultural output and a very small commercial sector (Ministry of Food and Agriculture-MoFA, 2007, p.4). Therefore, the MoFA is working towards an intensive modernisation of the agricultural sector with a focus on productivity enhancement and a greater engagement with the private sector. Its Food and Agriculture Development Policy II (FASDEP II) emphasizes a sustainable use of

⁷ By Developmentalism I refer to the pursuit of state-led development which characterized the historical period between the 1950s-1970s. Countries of the Global South emerged from colonialism as still mainly agrarian societies and became therefore devoted to “national development” intended mainly as industrialization. The modernization of agriculture was a central idea of this pursuit and it had as a core logic the promotion of a more productive agriculture through expansion of commodity relations either through smallholder development or large-scale farming (Bernstein 2010, p.74).

⁸ The hunt for foreign investment also resulted in the promulgation of the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre Act, 1994 (Act 478) to boost and facilitate investments in all sectors. The Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) established under the before-mentioned act, coordinates all investments under Act 478 (Djokoto et al. 2014, p.428).

resources, commercialization as a strategy and market-driven growth as the main objective (MoFA, 2007, p.vii).

The Ghana Commercial Agriculture Project (GCAP), implemented by the MoFA with funding from the World Bank and USAID, was established in 2013 to pursue this agenda. Its main objective is “increased access to land, private sector finance, input and output markets by smallholder farms from private public partnerships in commercial agriculture in Accra Plains and Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) zone” (World Bank, 2012).⁹ SADA is trying to bridge the development gap between Northern Ghana and the rest of the country by showcasing the investment opportunities that northern Ghana provides, and is therefore relevant to the case here investigated. SADA has indeed collaborated with AgDevCo on various agricultural demonstrations and trials in the region (AgDevCo, 2013).

In addition, the GCAP produced *Community/Investor Guidelines for Large-Scale Land Transactions*, along with the *Recommendations for Large-Scale Land-Based Investment in Ghana*, and a *Model Lease Agreement*. These documents identify the actions that communities, investors and government officials should undertake, and the documents should be used together.¹⁰ They are to be considered as complementary to the Lands Commission’s new *Guidelines for Large Scale Land Transactions in Ghana* published in 2019. The objective is to provide measures to handle LSLAs and prescribe standard procedures for effective grassroots consultations (Lands Commission, 2016). These national guidelines are to be seen as part of a broader international framework which includes at least two main key instruments aimed at providing guidelines on investments and responsible resource governance.¹¹ However, being soft laws, these measures are not binding and give no assurance that communities won’t become victims in land deals (Gyapong 2020, p.5).

⁹ However, such strategy has also attracted criticism directed towards capitalist farming as a strategy of industrialization, because the market-driven logic is in contradiction with the wellbeing and food security of the rural populace (Ayelazuno 2019).

¹⁰ However, Gyapong (2020) is critical of the fact that these documents treat communities, investors and the government as though they were stakeholders with the same interests and power (p.5).

¹¹ The two key instruments mentioned above are the following:

- *Guiding Principles on Large Scale Land Investments in Africa* by the African Union, African Development Bank, and United Nations Economic Commissions for Africa. They are often referred to as AU Guiding Principles.
- *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). This document is sometimes referred to as Voluntary Guidelines. (Landesa 2019)

3. Review of existing research

This chapter introduces relevant secondary literature structured in themes in order to contextualize the thesis' academic influences and to position it within a body of research.

3.1 Customary land tenure and surrounding debates

Land tenure is the way land is held by individuals or by groups. Different individuals can hold various tenure claims and rights to the same land. The nature of such claims can be formal, informal, customary or religious and might include leasehold, freehold, use rights and private ownership (Knight, 2010, p.19). Property rights, on the other hand, are not to be narrowly understood as ownership but as overlapping *bundles of rights*, in the sense that they are not about the link between a person and a thing, but about social relations between people with regard to a thing and are therefore inserted in a *web of interests* (Meinzen-Dick and Mwangi, 2009, p.36). Customary land rights in Africa are the outcomes of negotiations and agreements embedded in social relations, and people's ability to exercise claims to land remains dependent on membership of social networks and participation in formal and informal political processes (Berry, 1993, p.104). Consequently, "land tenure security is the degree of confidence that land users will not be arbitrarily deprived of the bundle of rights they have over particular lands" (Knight, 2010, p. 19).

It should, however, be mentioned that the understanding of African land tenure as a bundle of rights has also been challenged for being modelled in colonial times, solely on Western jurisprudence, to point at the different character of various kinds of land claims. It is argued that the different kinds of interests in African land tenure do not correspond to the Western jurisprudential distinction between ownership and usufruct, rendering this formulation misleading (Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003, p.77).

In sum, the most influential academic approaches to the "land issue", emphasize perspectives of fluidity and negotiability when it comes to social processes pertaining to land issues. Berry (1993), a central scholar within these issues, is a strong advocate of the advantages of such negotiability. She claims that while economists tend to associate such feature with economic inefficiency and lack of progress, she sees it as a "pervasive feature of social and economic processes which calls for reconceptualization rather than conditionality" (p. 13). In these

processes' fluidity, Berry (1993) sees an opportunity for subordinate groups to strengthen their ability to participate and influence negotiations linked to economic opportunities.

Peters (2004) adds: relations related to land are socially embedded, but embedded in unequal social relationships (Peters, 2004, p.304). Therefore, in clear rupture with Berry, she highlights how the increasing competition and conflict over land expose how negotiable customary systems “reveal processes of exclusion, deepening social divisions and class formation” (Peters, 2004, *ibid.*). Hence, she calls for a major focus on who benefits and who loses from instances of negotiability, also by placing such instances within the broader political, economic and social framework. Moreover, she discusses how the approach highlighting the fluidity of social relations played a role in the recent strategy change that major aid agencies went through, named *post-modern liberalism*. This conversion went from looking at African customary land tenure as a hindrance to agricultural modernization, to praising its flexible character and its capacity to lead to more efficient forms of landholding (p. 270).

The land question can also be conceptualized through two approaches: the *evolutionary property rights* and *communitarian* approaches, as Amanor (2001) argues. The first sees the development of individual property rights as a natural evolution within African land tenure to achieve land tenure security. The second approach focuses instead on land administration as a dual system with a state sector and a customary sector. It is usually critical of modern state framework of land management based on colonial regulations of land tenure and aligned with western notions of property, and calls instead for greater recognition of customary land tenure and of the role communities play in land administration. It also looks at African customary principles of land management as embodying concepts of equity and sustainable resource use and at communities as embodying principles of moral economy such as social redistribution and welfare (Amanor, 2001, p.111). There has, however, been an academic tendency to romanticize customary tenure regimes. Rather, because of its hierarchical nature, certain chiefs profit from communal land tenure, but such knowledge seems to not decisively influence land policies (Ubink, 2007).

3.2 Investments in customary land

The hypothesis that investment incentives depend on expectations of rights over the returns to that investment and therefore on the nature of property rights, has received increasing attention and supporting evidence (Goldstein and Udry, 2008, p.981). There is still, within international

development circles, an interest in making a causal link between formalised property rights and economic productivity (Musembi, 2007, p. 1457). However, despite the strength of an a priori case for a correlation between land tenure and agricultural investment, many years of empirical research have failed to demonstrate its general validity in Africa (Fenske, 2011, p.154). The reason might be that, as Fenske (2011) ascertains, the link between land tenure and agricultural investment is context specific.

However, De Soto's (2000) work "The Mystery of Capital" has been highly influential in this debate. His argument is that the reason why developing countries do not benefit from capitalism, despite having assets, is the lack of formalized property. The latter is, according to him, indispensable in extracting economic potential from assets and transform it into something that can be transported and controlled and therefore acquire greater value in the expanded market (p. 670). What is found in poor countries is therefore *dead capital*, because being informal property it cannot be "globalized" (p. 3022).

When investigating the key reasons why formalized rights over land should encourage investments, much of the literature builds on three reasons: being free from expropriation and feeling secure in the ability to maintain long-term use of the land means having a stronger claim to the fruits of investments, stronger rights make it easier to use land as collateral and therefore increasing access to capital, and finally there is an enhanced possibility for gains from trade, providing the cultivator with freedom to innovate (Besley, 1995, p.906). They are referred to as *assurance*, *collateralizability* and *realizability* effects (Brasselle et al., 2002, p.374).

However, these mainstream discussions, which have been appropriated by a range of development institutions, have also raised some concerns for providing a simplistic western understanding of the issue. In fact, any redefinition of property rights is complex and produces winners and losers. Musembi (2007) summarizes five shortcomings of these arguments: firstly, a narrow construction of legality, where legal pluralism is associated with extra-legality, secondly, a social evolutionist bias that sees private ownership as the inevitable destiny of all societies. Thirdly, she points at the fact that the link between formal title and access to credit facilities is not supported by empirical evidence. Fourthly, markets in land are narrowly understood as 'formal markets' and finally such arguments ignore that titling may mean both security and insecurity.

3.3 The Global Land Rush

There is a broad and growing body of research on LSLAs in customary tenure arrangements, covering many different aspects and characterized by more or less critical stances on the issue. By ‘global land rush’ we refer to the acceleration (especially since 2008) in the formal transfer of lands in agrarian states from the peasant farming and pastoral sector into the hands of large-scale land producers and speculators, both local and international (Alden Wily, 2012). Early evidence suggests many of these investments have targeted SSA and within the region, Ghana has become one of the primary recipients of large-scale farmland investment (Schoneveld and German, 2014, p.188).

The concept of *land grabbing*, which is evocative of historical colonial dynamics, has become widely used to describe processes associated with the recent expansion in transnational land acquisitions, although the term is normative and politically charged (Dell’Angelo et al., 2017). On the same wave, Dell’Angelo et al. (2017) coins the term *grabbed commons*. It refers to the customary, traditional, and indigenous systems of common property that are suffering in the global land rush, also because they are not necessarily legally owned by communities (Alden Wily, 2011, p.4). Also, while there has been growing support for a corporate social responsibility agenda, many scholars strongly undermine the idea of a code of conduct for land grabbing from a pro-poor social justice perspective (Borras and Franco, 2010; De Schutter, 2011; Fairbairn, 2013; Starr, 2013).

Widely cited in the literature is De Schutter (2011), former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, who questions the broadly accepted notion that the main challenge with LSLAs is the weak capacity of the countries targeted by these land deals to effectively manage investments to ensure that they contribute to rural development. If that was the only problem, then appropriate regulations would have solved the problem already. The real concern, he argues, is that giving land to investors will have a smaller impact on poverty reduction than if access to land and water were improved for the local farming communities. In addition, such investments direct agriculture towards cash crops for export and even when installing titling schemes to protect land users from eviction, they accelerate the development of a market for land rights with potentially destructive effects on livelihoods (p.275).

On the other side, there is growing recognition of the fact that studies of LSLAs have been characterized by a binary perspective which portrays global land grabs as top-down phenomenon driven by global markets or foreign states onto domestic settings. Scholars have

either focused on host states facilitating foreign land acquisitions through legal framework that enable dispossession, or on profit-seeking local elites acting as the real land grabbers (Fairbairn, 2013, p.342). Adding to this, the work of Wolford et al. (2013) is important in remembering that ‘the state’ never operates with one voice, and that government and governance are processes, people and relationships. In line with this, Fairbairn (2013) highlights the important role played by host states and domestic elites in creating a facilitating environment for grabs to happen. Arguing against a theorization of land grabbing as a form of neocolonialism, she states that the only similarity she sees with colonialism is the complicity of domestic elites in facilitating foreign rule (p. 352).

In the Ghanaian context, two studies I want to mention are those of Kuusaana (2017) and Ayelazuno (2019). The first study finds that inequalities in benefit sharing from land revenues are customarily anchored and that unequal power relations between land custodians and land users determines who benefits more from land transactions. It is the allodial title holders who are perceived to gain the most out of land transactions. Ayelazuno’s (2019) work focuses on an investment case in Northern Ghana, investigating its business model and its implications from an agrarian change perspective, linking it to Ghana’s industrialisation vision. He finds that LSLAs will not serve the purpose of industrialisation if there is a gap between policies that support secure property rights for agriculture corporations and policies that promote the export of raw materials and import of manufactured goods (such as polished rice).

3.4 Socially responsible investments: the debates

A key element of many international principles on socially responsible land-based investment is the need to consult and engage with the people and communities that will be affected by a proposed investment prior to implementation. ‘Best practices’ usually praise two concepts for socially responsible investments: the *Social License to Operate* and the *Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)*. The first is defined “as the measure of trust and confidence society has in a business to behave in a legitimate, transparent, accountable, and socially acceptable way”, and is therefore based on stakeholders’ perceptions (Landesa, 2019, p.15).

Unlike the social license, which is a social construct, FPIC is a legal notion present in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It requires that project-affected communities be informed and consulted in a timely manner about development projects that affect

them and their surrounding environment and be given the opportunity to make decisions about such interventions (Niber et al., 2015, p.9). The African Commission on Human Rights supports the member countries in ratifying this principle, emphasizing state engagement as a central aspect for enabling and ensuring community participation in negotiations (Otsuki et al., 2016). However, because the state is often on the side of investors, it is not possible to evaluate whether the consent building process can be freely and fully informative to all the parties involved (Fontana and Grugel, 2016). In addition, their consent must be determined in accordance with their customary laws and practices. Achieving FPIC does therefore not necessarily require that every member in the community provide his or her consent, as long as it is aligned with customary practices (MacKay, 2004).

The importance given to consultation is part of the participatory development trend which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as part of a broader move toward grassroots and the rejection of a more top-down exclusionary approach to development. However, by the late 1990s participatory development was itself critiqued for being coercive and exclusionary because of the very practice of participatory development, which is selective in terms of who gets to participate and in terms of the forms such participation might take (Perreault 2015, p.436). Perreault (2015) aligns himself with such critique by looking specifically at consultation mechanisms in Bolivia related to extractive activities in the region. Despite the different context, some of his considerations fit the Ghanaian context too. He considers how public consultation works only in specific contexts and how it operates as a mode of power, and concludes that “consultation serves less to engage citizens in democratic dialogue than to manage unruly subjects” (p. 448). Consultation becomes, therefore, a performance of participation which glosses over the uneven relations of social power inherent in resource extractions, and in doing so, fails its liberatory promise.

In addition, communities are complex and consultation does not eliminate power discrepancies. Fairbairn (2013) argues for instance that “Many would likely choose to give up some of their land for jobs if given a *genuine* opportunity to negotiate with investors” (p. 338). Or for those who decide to give out their land and fall into full or semi-proletarianism, the desperation underlying such gesture together with issues afflicting host communities cannot be overlooked (Gyapong, 2020, p.7).

4. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis are introduced, and some considerations are made about the way the framework is operationalized to answer the research questions. The theoretical framework is informed by Ratner et al.'s (2013) conceptual framework on resource conflict, collective action, and social-ecological resilience together with Fairbairn's access typology. In the following sections I introduce both theoretical perspectives and finally present my analytical framework. It is appropriate for this case because I am able to analyze the various social interactions and determine how they influence the acquisition (RQ1) and discuss how local power hierarchies impact the development emerging from the land acquisition (RQ2) and who becomes the winner and the loser in the case of the BIFH (RQ3).

4.1 The conceptual framework: Resource conflict, collective action, and resilience

Ratner et al. (2013) build a framework on collective action, conflict prevention, and social-ecological resilience; where local stakeholders are linked to the broader institutional context in matters of access to renewable natural resources. Given that renewable resources are essential to rural livelihoods, they reflect on the importance of cooperation in resource management also in relation to strategies for peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and long-term social-ecological resilience (Ratner et al., 2013, p.184). The framework has four main elements: "the initial *context* influences an *action arena*, in which *patterns of interaction* are established, leading to certain *outcomes*" (ibid.). It is a dynamic framework in which the outcomes feed back into the context and action arena in future rounds (see Figure 3).

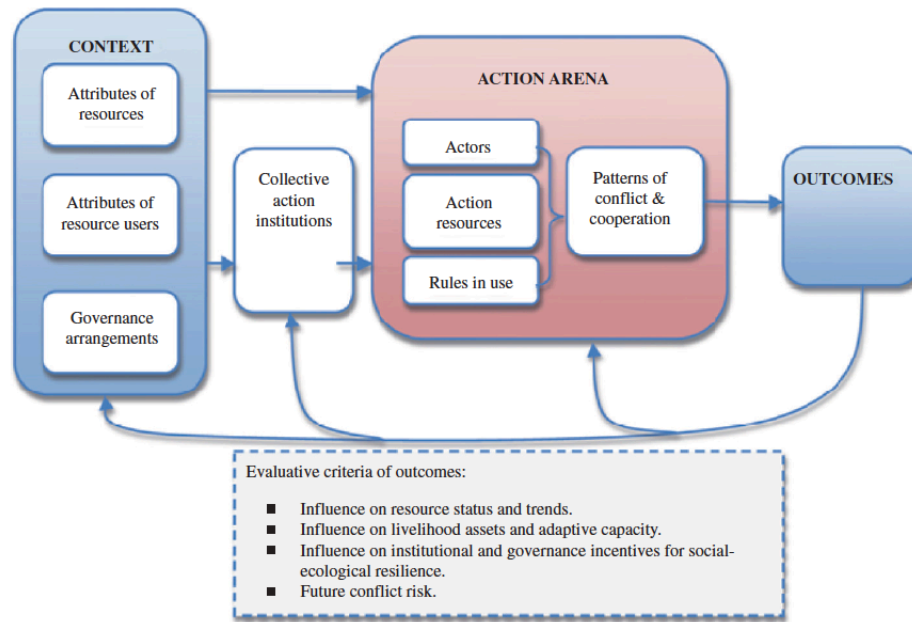


Figure 3- Conceptual framework on resource conflict, collective action, and social-ecological resilience. Source: Ratner et al. 2013, p. 187

The context is composed by three sets of factors: the *attributes of the resources* describing the biophysical conditions, the *attributes of the resource users*, comprising both local communities and extra-local users and finally the *rules*, meaning the governance arrangements regulating the use of the given resource. For each factor, the scholars' intent is to assess how specific characteristics influence the incentives for collective action to manage contested natural resources (Ratner et al., 2013, p.187). Following, in the *action arena* - that is any stage for social bargaining - stakeholders reflect on what can be done to shift the action resources in a way that disadvantaged groups can have an impact on decision-making for more equitable outcomes.

In summary, the action arena constitutes a frame within which the various stakeholders make choices about how to interact. Finally, Ratner et al. (2013) evaluate the outcomes of such interactions in terms of livelihood security, resource sustainability, and adaptive capacity (Ratner et al. 2013, p.197). Of particular interest to this research are the *context* and the *action arena* sections.

4.2 The theory of access: Fairbairn's access typology

In order to understand Madelaine Fairbairn's (2013) *access typology*, an introduction to Ribot and Peluso's (2003) *theory of access* is necessary, since she builds upon their work. I will therefore briefly summarize the theory's main points and then move on to her access typology.

In their work, Ribot and Peluso (2003) explore and theorize the notion of access, namely the ability to benefit from things. Their focus on the concept of *ability* rather than *rights*, has the intent of shifting attention to power and to the social relationships that either constrain or enable people to enjoy or benefit from resources. This way, the focus is not exclusively on property relations, but rather on a broader set of mechanisms by which people gain, control, and maintain resource access (p.172).

Such mechanisms are dynamic and are subject to change, depending on an individual's or a group's position and power within various social relationships (p.158). The political-economic aspect of their theory is emphasized in the division of social action into *access control* and *access maintenance*; where access control is the ability to mediate others' access and maintenance requires dispensing resources and powers in order to keep the resource access. Such division has a parallel with the Marxist relation between actors who own capital and those who labor with other's capital or means of production (p. 159). In order to maintain access, subordinate actors transfer some of their benefits to those in control (p.154).¹²

Ribot and Peluso's access theory inspires Fairbairn's (2013) work on Mozambique. Her main argument is that the mainstream narrative around land deals tends to gloss over the complicity of host states and the complex ongoing domestic dynamics (p.336). Rather, a focus on domestic power imbalances is important to demonstrate how elites exercise access control over Mozambican land, causing community dispossession. She therefore stands firmly against the *win-win narrative*,

¹² In their theory, Ribot and Peluso (2003) provide a set of mechanisms of access. The first of these categories is *rights-based access (legal)*, namely the one sanctioned by law, custom or convention and *illegal access*, which refers to when benefits are obtained through illegal instruments. In addition, they mention various additional factors included in *structural and relational access mechanisms*, which work in parallel to rights-based and illegal mechanisms. They are made up by *technology, capital, markets, labor, knowledge, authority, identities, and social relations*. These mechanisms are neither comprehensive or fixed, because power is situational and operates differently under different circumstances. In fact, a shift in the political economy may outmode certain mechanisms, reason why their analysis of access has to be inserted in a political-economic framework. Benefits can be subjected to change, redistribution, regulations as new conflicts and cooperative arrangements are negotiated (p.160). Therefore, access dynamics cannot be modeled broadly in a generally applicable manner, but have to be understood through situated, relational histories (Ribot and Peluso 2010, p.305).

depicting the actions of well-intentioned corporations easily fulfilling complex principles such as ‘consultation and participation’ or ‘social sustainability’ (p. 337).

The access typology she proposes is not a substitute of Ribot and Peluso’s contribution, but rather a way of contextualizing it in Mozambique. With such premises, her contribution comprises of a typology of the sources of domestic political-economic power that shape the outcome of the Mozambican land grab. The sources are a) traditional authority, b) bureaucratic influence, c) historical accumulation, d) locally-based business knowledge and networks, e) control over the development agenda. Despite the different context and colonial history, the patterns regarding land deals do have commonalities and that is why some of the domestic power sources she has identified are included in my analytical framework.

4.3 The analytical framework: operationalization

As stated, this research’s analytical framework is inspired by two contributions: Ratner et al.’s conceptual framework and Fairbairn’s access typology. I have therefore merged and adapted the two theoretical contributions, acknowledging on one side the role of hierarchies and on the other side the way such hierarchies are interlinked with social identities on the ground (*see Figure 4*). From the first framework, I have borrowed the *context* and *action arena* sections and some of their sub-sections (*compare with Figure 3*). I have then included some power sources from Fairbairn’s access typology with one main modification: whilst her approach consciously glosses over the role of intra-community power imbalances to exclusively focus on economic and political elites, I believe the two perspectives cannot be separated in the analysis of this case. In fact, in the Babator community we see an interplay of power sources related to the broader institutional framework – national and international - as well as extremely localized power sources, as will be explained. My framework is meant to become a support in visualizing the actors interacting to the ground, while also relating them to the broader economic-institutional framework.

Analytical Framework

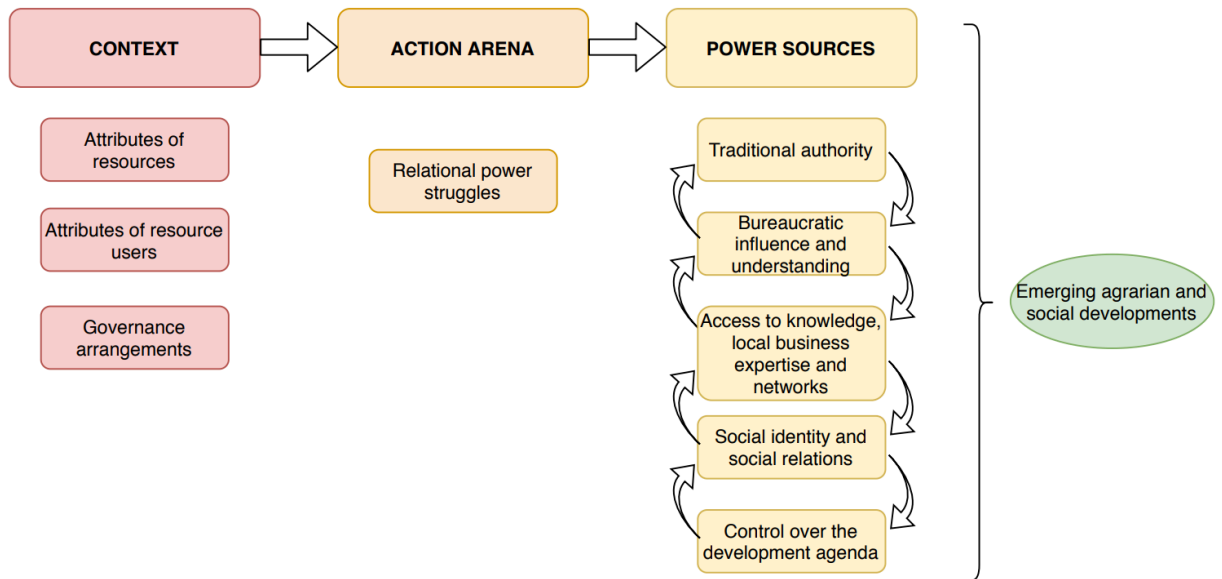


Figure 4- Analytical Framework. Source: Author

The *context* can be perceived as the most descriptive part of my analysis. It introduces my case, the physical characteristics of the land, the social features of the resource users and the institutional arrangements around the land. This in turn influences the action arena, where the various actors within the community and AgDevCo interact through social struggles of various nature. By analysing these struggles, I identify the power sources which in turn have an impact on the changes emerging from the land acquisition. Those identified are *a) traditional authority, b) bureaucratic influence and understanding, c) access to knowledge, local business expertise and networks, d) social identity and social relations, e) control over the development agenda.*

Traditional authority has acquired an even more decisive role with the increasing pressure on land, given its mediating role with foreign investors. The capacity to understand and intervene in the *bureaucracy* of land allocation is a source of social power because it shapes the ultimate form of the land acquisition and benefits the intermediaries (Fairbairn, 2013, p. 345). *Access to knowledge, local business expertise and network* is a central source of power. Lack of knowledge and understanding shapes the result of a land deal, while connecting local know-how with foreign land acquisitions in a professional capacity is an important benefit to investors who would otherwise be in disadvantage when trying to enter the land market as foreigners. It also means

transfer of money and skills to the local population (p.348). *Social identity and social relations* are two fundamental sources of powers. Belonging to a certain ethnic group, gender, class, influence decisively your ability to benefit from a land deal and at the same time social relations can ensure cooperation between the groups. Finally, political and social power can be used to advance a vision for *national development*. In fact, the policies crafted by national-level politicians set the narrative and the discourse around agricultural investment and land rights also at the local level. Nevertheless, as can be seen in Figure 4, the power sources often go hand in hand and reinforce each other.

Finally, my framework includes *emerging agrarian and social development*, a section which allows me to summarize the findings while situating them in the broader economic framework. It also describes some general trends in the community with the help of already existing literature. Despite the complexity of this case and the various issues intersecting at many levels, the framework is of great support in visualizing the actors and social interactions on the ground. It might simplify or leave out certain aspects, but it helps me understand patterns of conflict and cooperation together with the power hierarchies impacting the unfolding of the land acquisition (RQs).

5. Methodology

This section lays out and clarifies the methodological aspects of this thesis. Limitations are acknowledged and highlighted throughout the chapter.

5.1 Research Strategy and Design

This study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research starts with assumptions and the use of interpretive frameworks to inform the study of research problems (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.72). As a qualitative researcher, my aim is to “...study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.3). Given that his study aims to provide a better understanding of how local power dynamics influence the outcome of LSLAs and that I will rely on people’s perception about the phenomenon to do so, a qualitative approach is well-suited. The design has been emergent,

with all the phases of the research process influencing it progressively (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.181)

The research is carried out as a *case study*. Stake (2000) has claimed, “Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p.435). A case study is indeed an approach in which the investigator explores a real-life bounded system- a case- through detailed data collection that takes into account various forms of information (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p. 367). Simply because it is often argued that the aim of case study research is to capture cases in their uniqueness, this approach does not exclude *a priori* an interest in drawing general conclusions. It rather implies that these are reached from evidence of particular cases instead of selecting cases to test a hypothesis (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004, p.92).

In clarifying the intent of this study, we might label the following an *instrumental* case, because the objective is to understand a specific issue or problem (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.371). The Babator community has been selected as a complex case exemplifying many issues often discussed in the literature about LSLAs. In order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the case, I have collected and integrated different types of qualitative data and the description of the case is generated through the identification of case themes, informed by the analytical framework (ibid., p.371-372).

5.2 Ontological and epistemological perspectives

As a researcher I bring beliefs and philosophical assumptions that will unequivocally influence my research which I will clarify here. They are beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research) (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.104). In this section I will focus on the first three aspects, while methodology is discussed throughout this chapter.

In this study, I take an ontological and epistemological perspective guided by *social constructivism*. According to this paradigm, individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. Such meanings are therefore multiple, negotiated through interaction and influenced by historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives. Therefore, as a researcher I look for the complexity of views and rely on participants’ views of the situation (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.121). In practical terms, this translates into broad questions where the informants are given

the opportunity to construct the meaning of a situation, “a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons” (ibid., p.122). Simultaneously, given the importance that hierarchy and power play in my analysis, the *postmodern perspective*¹³ also guides my interpretations.

As a constructivist researcher, I recognize that my personal, cultural and historical background shape my interpretation, reason why I find it important to position myself. I’m also aware that the development researcher needs to be more sensitive to cultural and ethical issues than is the case with research in more familiar terrains. Conducting data collection in low- and middle-income countries with groups of people holding different worldviews and values may give rise to several ethical dilemmas, many of them arising from the power imbalances between the researcher and the researched (Scheyvens and Storey, 2014, p. 139). However, I haven’t always been in a power position. Power is continuously negotiated, and being a young female researcher collecting data in often very patriarchal and traditional settings, I often felt less powerful than my respondents. I’m also aware of the fact that the issue I have investigated is controversial, given its focus on elites and power struggles in a country where I am a foreigner. This has required sensitivity and attentiveness to local customs, as well as additional challenges in drawing well-informed and nuanced conclusions.

5.3 Site sampling and description

The study adopts an *integrated convenience and paradigmatic* sampling procedure for the selection of Babator as the case to be studied. From the beginning, choosing this particular case was the result of *convenience sampling*. I was an intern in a Ghanaian organization doing, among other things, consulting work for land acquisitions, and I was provided with a list of relevant cases in which they had acted as consultants. In my decision I selected the *paradigmatic* case, that is, a case that highlights the general characteristics of the issue in question. Flyvbjerg (2006) explains: “A scientific activity is acknowledged or rejected as good science by how close it is to one or more

¹³ By postmodernism I refer to a family of perspectives which have in common the idea that knowledge must be situated within the current conditions of the world, including the layers of class, race, gender and any other type of group affiliations and hierarchies. These perspectives are sensitive to the multiple meanings of language and to the importance of deconstructing narratives and discourses in order to bring to the surface dominations, oppositions and contradictions of meaning (Creswell and Poth 2017, p. 131-132).

exemplars; that is, practical prototypes of good scientific work. A paradigmatic case of how scientists do science is precisely such a prototype” (p.232).

As mentioned, the Babator community was selected for exemplifying many of the topical issues in LSLAs and because I could rely on my host organisation easing my access to the community. I’m aware of the risks involved, and I meticulously averted discussing the case with the organisation to avoid as much as possible the risk of bias. I also proactively made sure to be introduced as a foreign student researcher and to not have any connection with my organisation in that specific context.

In terms of geographical location, the village of Babator is situated in the Bole District (*see Figure 5 and 6*) of the recently established Savannah region, which was carved out from the Northern Region. It is one of the most deprived districts in the northern part of the country with three-quarters (79 percent) of the population living in rural localities (UNDP Ghana, 2011, p.8). The district accounts for a low literacy rate, with 76.6% of the adults having received no education (USAID, 2017, p.7). In terms of population the district is quite heterogenous, with the major ethnic group being Gonja.¹⁴ From a religious perspective the population is roughly split in half between Christians and Muslims (USAID, 2017, p.7). The predominant economic activity in the district is agriculture and the production consists of two main commodities, cassava and yam. They account for 81.1 percent of the district’s produce (USAID, 2017, p.3). Other crops cultivated are maize, sorghum, groundnut, millet, cowpea, beans, rice and vegetables. The most common tree crops are mango and cashew (UNDP Ghana, 2011, p.21).

Babator is a small farming community of a few hundred people and its livelihoods are dependent on two farming seasons. The farm produce consists of yam, cassava, groundnuts, maize, pepper and okro among others. The community is connected to Bamboi through a single unpaved road (*see Figure 6*). There is no electricity although the UNDP Ghana *Bole District Assembly Human Development Report 2011* mentions Babator as one of the communities for which there are plans to be connected to the national grid (UNDP Ghana, 2011, p.11).

There are eleven project affected communities which can be grouped into three distinct categories: Babator communities near the project site but not on project land (Babator), settlements on the project land (Kalan, Labisigbon, Ehiamankyene, Aberewanko and Gbongbon) and finally

¹⁴ The other major ethnic groups include Vagla, Safalba and Mo. In addition, we find migrant ethnic groups such as Brifor, Lobi and Dagaaba (UNDP Ghana 2011, p.11; GSS 2014, p.1).

settlements across the river from the project land whose members farm on project land (Busuama, Yara, Ntraban, Tefoboi, Gbayonga).

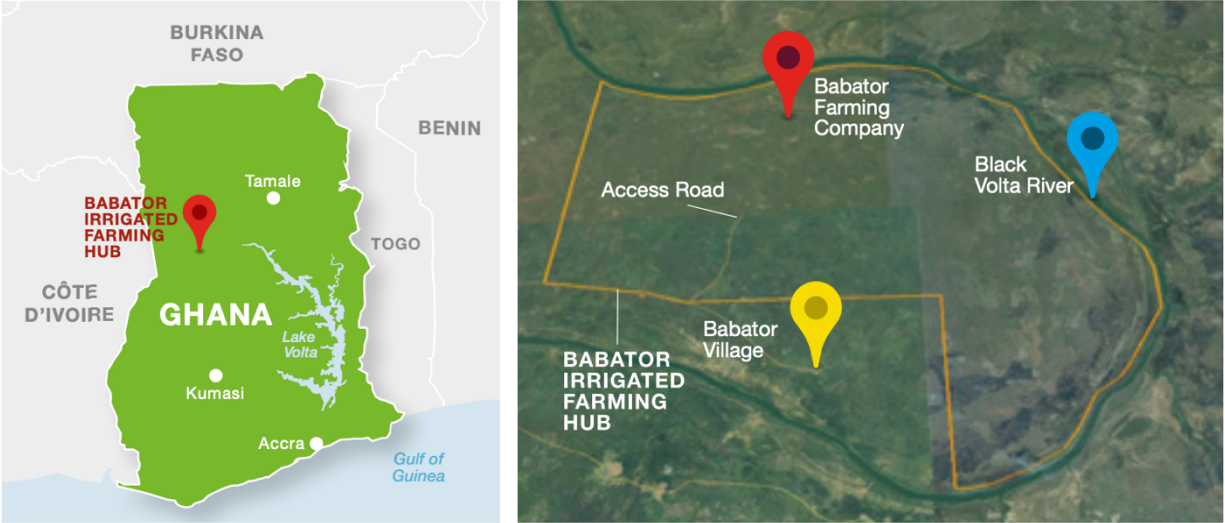


Figure 5- Location of the Babator Irrigated Farming Hub and of the acquired land. Source: AgDevCo



Figure 6- Bole District Map. Source: USAID 2017

5.4 Practical preparations, Sampling, Data Collection Methods

As previously mentioned, the site sampling was influenced by my host organisation. They therefore facilitated the contact with my local gatekeeper and translator, a local assemblyman and secondary school teacher which they had been working with previously. He was highly regarded by the communities of Bamboi and Babator. We established a very good relationship from the very beginning, and he was extremely open to my requests and to feedback in general.

My gatekeeper/translator was key to the success of my interviews, but his very presence had both positive and negative sides. His network and overall relationship with the community was extremely positive and respectful. He was also, in his role of local assemblyman, engaged in the pre-acquisition process and the corresponding consultations, meaning that he could provide me with guidance and in-depth knowledge of my case, as well as directing me to appropriate respondents. At the same time, I want to acknowledge that his very presence may somehow have influenced the testimonies I received during my interviews, although I will not be able to know in which ways.

One dutiful remark is that some aspects might have gotten lost in translation when conducting the focus group interview with the Fulani community, given that the translation was double. Fulani herdsmen descend from Nigerian tribes and therefore do not usually speak Ghanaian languages. However, one member of the community spoke Twi, Ghana's *lingua franca*, so he translated to the rest of his community members, while my gatekeeper translated from Twi to English for me. I insisted on the importance of a word by word translation, but I will never know whether some information got lost during the conversation.

In order to ensure rigorous research anchored in strong scientific and ethical principles which ensures no harm to myself or the people I have been in contact with, I have been fully committed to following ethical guidelines and to the self-evaluation exercise that it entails. Among the main pillars of ethical research is informed consent. It ensures that the people interviewed have a full understanding of the aim of the research, what the results will be used for and who will have access to the information. In preparation of my interviews I prepared information sheets with my contact information and informed consent forms (*see Appendix D*). I was prepared for the eventuality that some of my respondents might be illiterate which required the consent to be given verbally. The procedure remained the same, with my translator ensuring full understanding.

After the site sampling followed the sampling of participants, intending to exemplify the population under consideration. Appropriate respondents were selected through *generic purposive sampling*, meaning that they were sampled in a strategic way and the criteria employed were informed by the research question posed (Bryman, 2012, p.422). A concern typical of this sampling procedure is diversity and variation in the selection to ensure variation of experiences. Although the Babator community is small, various perspectives, interests and agendas are present. With the help of an unpublished case study conducted in the pre-acquisition phase by my host

organisation and the support of my gatekeeper, twelve main voices were identified as being relevant to the research questions. They are in no way exhaustive, but they ensure a variety of backgrounds and perspectives in regard to the issue to obtain an understanding as balanced and nuanced as possible. The aim of this study is to delve into power elites at the local level, so I had to ensure that both ethnic sides of the conflict were included- North Mo and Gonja- along with other relevant social groups. A full list is provided in Appendix A.

5.4.1 Focus group interviews

Nine focus group interviews of four (4) up to seven (7) participants were conducted for a total of forty-four (44) people (*see Appendix A*). The group interviews were in average between an hour and an hour and a half long. Participants of a focus group interview were selected because they had certain characteristics in common which were linked to the topic of the focus group (Krueger and Casey, 2015, p.26). The number of groups is affected by the researcher's belief that "the kinds and range of vies are likely to be affected by socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, class, and so on" (Bryman, 2012, p.505), which results in stratifying criteria to ensure that groups with a wide range of characteristics are included, to capture as much diversity of angles as possible. I am aware that it is a fallacy to assume that an individual can represent his gender, culture, race although individuals may attempt, when asked, to offer opinions of an entire category of people (Krueger and Casey, 2015, p.192). My way of grouping them was not to essentialize their differences, but rather to give them a space were also the differences among people with similar backgrounds would be expressed.

Focus groups interviews have the objective to know what people think and feel, although self-disclosure doesn't come easy for everyone, reason why creating a comfortable, permissive environment becomes crucial (*ibid*, p.30). During my first days I noticed, for instance, how women would be extremely silent in the presence of men, reason why they had separate focus groups, to ensure that social norms did not lessen their contribution. I always adapted the interview location to my respondents' desires: inside their homes, under a tree, outside the mosque.

Although having dominant individuals influencing the results of focus groups is a risk of this methodology, it didn't happen often, and it was easily handled also with the help of my translator. One time, the group interview turned into a heated argument between two participants and my translator had to intervene to calm the situation. When talking to one group of elders, one

person blamed the Paramount chief for giving away the land, while another respondent did not agree and was telling him to stay silent. However, the discussion taught me how controversial this topic is to some participants. This methodological choice allowed me to get an insight in the community's various understanding of the issue, what were the disagreements and common perceptions. In addition, given that I am investigating social hierarchies and local power dynamics, my main unit of analysis is the group rather than the individual, rendering this choice the most logical one (Perecman and Curran, 2006, p.107).

5.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Whilst the focus groups were my main data collection method, four in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants were conducted to complement some of the information I obtained from the groups. They were conducted with the Assemblyman from Babator, one with a staff member of AgDevCo (higher management level), one with the Customary Land Secretariat coordinator in Bamboi, and one with a female PCC representative.

Central to me was that the interviews had a conversational tone, with an accessible language and a relaxed atmosphere (Magnusson, 2015, p.49). I therefore put a lot of emphasis on the briefing and debriefing moments, particularly the first part of the interview where I introduced myself and the project to build the relationship between me and the respondents while putting them at ease. These expectations were shared my translator in advance, given that he played a key role in ensuring this. The interview questions were open-ended questions requiring stories, opinions and reflections (ibid., p.52).

During the data collection, I have engaged with 'the field' "not as a bounded geographical location but as a space, which is actively constituted through the social and spatial practices of the researcher and his/her relationships with participants" (Kindon and Cupples, 2003, p.217). It is therefore a space I am still engaged with through telephone contacts and email, although I have tried to deal responsibly with the ethical, intellectual and emotional responsibilities of physically leaving, negotiating the implications of my presence in Babator and in my respondents' lives.

5.4.3 Participant observations and "go-along" walks

As a researcher I believe in the centrality and meaning of space, especially in this type of study, and I align myself with the idea that methodological dialogue should be understood as a *polylogue*

that includes the researcher, the researched, and the place (Anderson et al., 2010, p.598). I have therefore chosen a mixed qualitative method to strengthen the interviews' potential to reproduce informants' lived experiences of a place (Kusenbach, 2003, p.462). During the data collection, walks and participant observations have complemented the interview process. Furthermore, through *go along walks* with my gatekeeper I have tried to address the limitations of participant observations of not being able to access the environmental perception of other members (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 461). The setting is particularly important in a case study (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.719) and in addition, perception of space in the study of a land acquisition is crucial to obtain a sense of the physical and geographical features of the space I intended to study. I also wanted to observe some phenomena mentioned by my respondents. I was taken to the point where the plot of acquired land started, and I was shown around on motorcycle to see the cultivation change. I also crossed the Black Volta between Babator and Tefoboi on the community canoe to experience the crossing that many non-indigenous farmers do every day to reach the land on which they are farming. Lastly, I kept a research log every day of my fieldwork, where I would take notes of interesting behaviours that could help me better understand my respondents' words.

5.5 Data visualisation and analysis

This research is conducted using a content analysis approach on the data collected, to operate a systematic examination of the body of material to identify patterns, themes and meanings (Lune and Berg, 2017, p.182). *Directed content analysis* has been adopted as a method, implying that the resulting codes are emergent and constitute a mix of analytic notions derived from existing theories and literature, and those derived from the raw data and participants' own voices (ibid., p.183; Elliott, 2018, p.2855).

In practice, after having completed my transcriptions manually, I read my set of transcripts in their entirety together with my field notes and research logs several times. I decided to conduct my coding manually to keep a general overview of the obtained data and conceptualize the codes myself instead of giving the work to a software, also considered the manageable dimension of my database (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.728). Furthermore, the use of a technological tool represents a risk to be drawn into the data in a way that makes you lose the general overview of what is going on, as well as a risk to produce too many codes (Elliott, 2018,

p.2858). Also, doing it manually was a way of fully engaging “in the process of moving in analytic circles” instead of adopting a pre-decided linear approach (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.650).

In the next step I started pre-coding by underlining, highlighting and circling certain words or sentences (Saldaña, 2013, p.19). Subsequently, I added some notes and after a further examination I originated my first set of codes. They were then transformed into themes- which are the outcomes of coding, categorization or analytic reflection (Saldaña, 2013, p.14)- and then my material was sorted through them, identifying similar phrases, patterns, linkages as well as commonalities and disparities. The results of this process were considered in light of previous research and theoretical concepts (Lune and Berg, 2017, p.184; Bryman, 2012, p.557). This process involved both inductive and deductive reasoning. In fact, already existing conceptual frameworks within the academic field directed my analysis initially, but inductive reflection also spurred development of new theory.

6. Data analysis

I hereby present and discuss my empirical data, following the structure of the previously introduced analytical framework. Accordingly, the analysis is divided into four main sections: *Context*, *Action Arena*, *Power sources* and *Emerging Agrarian and Social Change*. The research questions (RQs) will be answered continuously throughout the analysis, but the main points will be summarized in section 6.4.

6.1 Context

With support from the GoG and funding from the UK’s Department of International Development (DFID), AgDevCo has built the BIFH in a 10,369 ha site with over 5,000 ha of net irrigable land in the Savannah region. AgDevCo’s vision is to develop Ghana’s largest food production and processing hub including 3,500 ha of commercial farms and 1,500 ha of irrigated ingrower schemes (AgDevCo, 2019). Consultations with stakeholders began in 2013 and in 2015 the final 50-year lease with an option for 25-year renewal was presented in a public forum and got registered in February 2016 (Landesa & COLANDEF, 2019). AgDevCo as an investment company, is aiming to provide an investment climate for agribusinesses to join and invest alongside them to develop commercial farms. This started through the development of the Babator Farming

Company by AgDevCo, which functions as a showcase where various irrigations schemes and crop varieties have been tested in order to provide a model for other businesses interested in joining. However, the interest to invest has been low, as of the time data collection for this thesis was conducted.¹⁵

6.1.1 Attributes of resources

Ratner et al. (2013) contend that *scarcity* of a resource creates pressure on it. In addition, dispersed resources are more challenging to exclude others from using, as compared to those that are concentrated (p. 188). Whilst land is not a scarce resource in Northern Ghana, the features of the land in question are peculiar: the 10,369 ha site is surrounded by a perennial river, the Black Volta, on three sides (*see Picture 1*), and then by the Babator community on the fourth side. This is an important feature in an area which is predominantly very dry. The district's overall low agricultural productivity and output is also caused by over-dependency on rainfall (UNDP Ghana, 2011, p.23). Rain-fed agriculture makes it very vulnerable because of the variable rainfall pattern and to the often-occurring natural hazards such as droughts and floods. This depends on the district's position in the drainage system of Black Volta (UNDP Ghana, 2011, p.36). Six years of project development and feasibility studies show that the area has a mix of fertile upland and lowland soil types



Picture 1- Black Volta river from the Bamboi side. Source: Author

suited for a large variety of crops including grains (e.g maize, sorghum, rice), legumes (soya, groundnuts), vegetables (e.g. onions) and fruits (e.g. pineapple, citrus, mango, passion fruit) (AgDevCo, 2019).

¹⁵ Personal Communication (2020). Interview with AgDevCo management.

Ratner et al. (2013) also discuss the *predictability* of the resource as an important feature to facilitate the building of institutional arrangements for its management. In Babator, where farmers are extremely vulnerable to meteorological conditions, the weather has become quite unpredictable in the last years. At the moment of the data collection, some of the respondents mentioned the unpredictability of *harmattan* (the dry season) as a major challenge to their livelihoods.

Observability of the resource is another important attribute, because it contributes to conflict mitigation through the monitoring of the resource in question. When there is observability, trust can be built by respecting the rules in place for the management of a given resource (p.189). The plot of land acquired in Babator is extensive, making it difficult to monitor the whole perimeter. Some respondents mention that cattle roams freely on some areas of the land plot¹⁶, especially because with it being so large, cattle herders have no other way to pass to reach the water. The large perimeter makes it challenging for the company to monitor the boundaries, and many of the respondents complain about their lack of detailed information about the plot's size. For some respondents, this seems to be a matter of disinformation or to illiteracy. They mention that they were provided with pamphlets by the company but not being able to read them, they were not of any use.

[...] The land that has been given to the community; it has not been demarcated by the community themselves. It is the company that demarcated the fertile area and left the community behind. They, the community, if you ask them today, they don't even know the beginning to the end, where they've acquired the land.

This quote indicates the lack of information characterizing the community. In addition, since AgDevCo is not yet actively using the whole land, farmers have been relocated as the company expands their farms, while some farmers still get to stay on their land until the company uses it. Majority of the respondents mention that the land where they have been relocated is infertile. Some non-indigenous farmers report it was already farmed by other people, so they had to find an agreement with them.

¹⁶ Although this is allowed on the areas of the Property which are not yet in use by the Lessee (Addendum to the Lease Agreement, point 7e).

6.1.2 Attributes of resource users

According to Ratner et al. (2013), socio-economic characteristics such as ethnicity, education, and economic background are relevant factors when examining along which lines conflicts may arise. This becomes particularly relevant due to these factors' interconnectedness, such as in cases when ethnicity is associated with various and sometimes competing uses of a resource. Risk of conflict increases in situations where various inequalities align, while there is a broad academic support for the claim that groups with a common identity and a history of cooperation are more likely to effectively manage resources (p.189).

Assets are also crucial attributes of resource users. There are various both tangible and intangible ones: natural, physical, human, financial, and social. Natural resource assets may seem to be part of the biophysical context, but they are considered to be attributes of the resource users because there is a property right connecting a resource to a person/group, making it an asset (Ratner et al. 2013, p.190).

Such discussion becomes particularly relevant to the Babator community as well as to Ghana more generally, where communities are heterogeneous. For instance, there are indigenous ethnic groups (or *indigenes*) - meaning those that are the first settlers of the land- and non-indigenous (*non-indigenes*) - meaning those groups that have later migrated to the area (but might have lived in the area for generations already). The latter have, through informal agreements with the indigenous groups, obtained land to farm on. However, their rights are seen as secondary to those of the original settlers of the land. In Babator, the farmers belonging to the Gonjas are the *indigenes* of the area, while the North-Mos and other the sub-groups have secondary rights to the land. Other minorities present are Sisala and Dagati. In addition, Babator hosts a community of Fulani herdsmen that have resided in the area for circa ten years and have also found agreements with the *indigenes* to use part of the land for their cattle to roam on. Another attribute of the resource users to be taken into consideration is gender. In a farming community like Babator, the types of products are in fact traditionally divided along gender lines: whilst men often farm yam and cassava, women usually farm products such as okro, peppers, groundnut, angushi seeds, and plantains.

Human capital (like education and health for instance) is also a relevant attribute to be taken into account (Ratner et al., 2013, p. 190). In regard to education, the human capital of Babator is low and illiteracy is widespread as I have been able to confirm with my interviews. In regard to

physical capital, such as roads, the situation is challenging for the community, given that the road connecting Babator to Bamboi, the closest town, is not paved and accidents happen often. How these attributes have influenced the land acquisition and its aftermath will be discussed further in Section 6.3.4, where these attributes are discussed as *sources of power*.



Picture 2- Cattle roaming on AgDevCo's land. Source: Author

6.1.3 Governance arrangements

By governance arrangements, we refer to dynamics of decision-making pertaining natural resource management: this includes mechanisms of representation of diverse groups in decision-making, power distribution and instruments for accountability (Ratner et al., 2013). These aspects are negotiated through statutory legal and political structures as well as customary ones (p. 190-191).

Ratner et al. (2013) contend that important dimensions of resource conflict emerge from institutional gaps and in cases where there aren't institutions, often new ones are required to bridge the gaps. That is sometimes the re-assertion of prior institutions, the creation of new ones to address emergent challenges or the adaptation of existing institutions to function in new ways (p. 192). In the case of Babator, the institutional gap seems to point at the local level with a low engagement of local bureaucratic authorities. A respondent mention how, bureaucratic representatives should

have gone to the community to clearly explain the details and implications of the land acquisition, but it never happened according to them. According to the respondent from AgDevCo this happened but communication wasn't clear.

While the lease agreement contains majority of the governance arrangements in regard to the land, dissatisfaction and concerns on the side of the community in the post-acquisition phase have required additional arrangements. As a response to the complaints, AgDevCo established the Project Communications Committee (PCC). The committee includes AgDevCo's Community Liaison Officer and representatives from all stakeholders: representatives from North Mo and Gonja ethnic groups, and from Dagaba/Dagati and Sisala ethnic groups. It comprises of representatives from non-indigenes, female representatives and a youth representative. Also, the PCC includes representatives from the Fulani herdsmen community. Although some of the farmers mention they are not aware of the existence of any Committee, the rest of the community seem to be positively oriented towards it, apart from a couple of critical voices claiming that they aren't effective. One respondent sees the PCC as an important milestone in the recently found cordial relationships between the North Mo and Gonja Chieftaincies.

Another arrangement is the creation of the *Babator Community Fund*, in accordance with the lease agreement. According to this, AgDevCo pays one percent (1%) of the gross farm-gate value¹⁷ of agricultural produce grown on the Property under the Project by commercial farmers into a community fund. The payment is made annually, and the purpose of the Fund is to finance infrastructure and services for the collective benefit of the community.¹⁸

6.2 Action arena

As previously stated, the arena is the stage for social bargaining where the actors interact in various ways along lines of cooperation or conflict. Action arenas can be found at many different levels - from the village to the international sphere – and interactions never happen in isolation on one level, but they rather interact across scales (Ratner et al., 2013, p. 192).

¹⁷ By farm gate value we refer to the price of the product available at the farm excluding any separately billed transport or delivery charge (OECD 2005).

¹⁸ Lease Agreement, 4.0.

6.2.2 Relational power struggles

The power struggles taking place within the action arena happen along two lines: those that see AgDevCo on one side and the community on the other, and those happening within the Babator community. As referred by my respondent from AgDevCo, a major challenge of interactions between the company and the community has been and still is communication. Because of the community's low level of education, communication efforts must be adapted to the audience and must constitute a continuous and periodical effort, to avoid the spread of misinformation. During the pre-acquisition phase, various respondents report, representatives from AgDevCo seem to have provided a pamphlet to some of the community groups, as a source of information. Nevertheless, community members indicated that either because of complete illiteracy or because of low level of education they were not able to read or understand the information contained in the pamphlet.

On the other side we have the power struggles of various nature within the Babator community. A central struggle is the one between the two Paramountcies, which existed in the community previous to the arrival of AgDevCo. The conflict has to be settled through customary mechanisms, reason why the two sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding, where they agreed to share the revenues from AgDevCo until the matter got settled. Nevertheless, at the time of the data collection the matter is still pending, and the majority of my respondents refer to this as one of the main causes why the community has not benefitted from the project, as can be understood from the following quote:

The project would have developed us, but because of these two Paramountcies having differences, the money we, as community people, would have realized for development, we are not seeing it.

This quote also reveals the profoundly hierarchical nature of Ghanaian traditional society, which is an obstacle for real community participation in decision making, given that in matters regarding land, the farmers' land rights are always perceived as secondary to those of the traditional authorities. This can be understood as what Perreault (2015) define *performative participation*, by which consultation's liberatory promise cannot live up to its expectation (p. 449). In his work, consultation is depicted as a choreographed and formalized political performance, not created to foster meaningful participation but rather to depoliticize activities and enroll community members in the support of resource extraction projects, while rendering technical deeply unequal relations

of social power (p. 435). In a sense, this surely facilitates the work of a foreign investor who does not make a real effort to be inclusive.

While I have understood AgDevCo actively tried to be inclusive in the consultation, local custom was one of the factors hampering meaningful participation.

We, indigenes of this community, we have never seen this type of project before. So our mind was that if they come to us and we sit down, we would have divided the land and give them a portion, so that we see that subsequent years to come, [if] they are a particular company we can stay with, then we would add them part of our land. We cannot just give them all the land from the very beginning. But because we were not properly consulted, they went ahead and leased the land.

Apart from the struggle between the two Paramountcies, respondents from the North Mo traditional council report new struggles that have emerged within the community since the acquisition. Because the company has now acquired the land previously used by cattle herders, now farmers of the community have issues with them. Respondents belonging to the Gonja Traditional Council mention that the company asked them to pressure the herdsmen to evacuate, but they explain that they have an agreement with them, according to which they pay them a certain amount of royalties each year. They also explain how they are invited to their funerals to mourn and responses showing that the groups are linked by a social relationship.

6.3 Sources of power

In this section I discuss the various sources of power that determine and influence the interactions as well as benefit sharing and resource access in regard to the Babator community.

6.3.1 Traditional Authority

As previously explained, the role of traditional authority is central within African customary tenure arrangements, given its mediating role in deals with foreign investors and also the respect it enjoys from the community. In their role, customary authorities exercise access control. However, traditional authority is complex: “far from being a simple representation of an authentically local, pre-colonial system of leadership, it is a complicated social construction” (Fairbain, 2013, p. 344). Moreover, its existence might be pre-colonial, but its strength is the result of a process initiated

during British colonialism, which wanted to deliver economic progress while not causing any social or political disruption. In practice, this meant introducing its African subjects to the production and consumption of commodities, while maintaining social order through the reinforcement of the chiefly authority (Bernstein, 2010, p.97).

In accordance with the analytical framework, all my respondents point to the role of traditional authority as well as customary hierarchies as playing a crucial role in the way the land acquisition has unfolded. The ongoing Chieftaincy struggle between the Gonjas and North Mos adds another level of complexity. In the case of Babator, the ones sitting in the community are the local chiefs, while the Paramount Chiefs - the ones who were supposed to sign the lease according to custom - are the allodial title owners and stay in other towns or even abroad. Respondents among the local elders from both the Gonja and the North Mo explain how, once AgDevCo got an insight into the customary hierarchy, they left the community to sit down with the Paramount Chiefs. One respondent mention that they felt neglected. Not only respondents from the community, but even some of the elders show resentment towards customary practices and hierarchies as demonstrated by this quote:

The Whites, they didn't come to steal the land. They are in the community with the permission given them from the elders. It is they, the elders, that have thrown away the land.

Part of this quote has become the title of this research. To avoid misunderstandings, it is important to note that elders in the community refer to Paramount chiefs as 'elders' too.

6.3.2 Bureaucratic influence and understanding

Being able to intervene in the bureaucracy of land allocation can be considered a source of social power "whose exercise both shapes the ultimate form of the land acquisition and benefits the intermediaries" (Fairbairn, 2013, p.345). Bureaucratic processes per se seem to pose a hinder for the community. The intricacies of the various Ghanaian ministries as well as the complex land administration system, make it impossible for farmers or any community with a low level of education to comprehend the process. The compensation mechanisms for the farmers who have been relocated so far also present challenges: apart from complaints about the soil quality of the land they have been relocated on, economic compensation also presented challenges. One

respondent mention that they were supposed to receive it through a rural bank named Wenchi Rural Bank in Bamboi, but the bank has collapsed, and he still has not received his compensation.

The bureaucracy of land administration is challenging to grasp for the majority of community members. This quote by a respondent from AgDevCo clearly explains this communication gap:

[...] when you look at the process of paying the land lease, people don't understand why we don't bring the money to Babator, call a couple of elders give it to them and then they would find a way of sharing it. Because this is their land. Yes, technically is their land, if you look at it. But it's not...because customary land, it goes through the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands and there is a process for rent.

Another misunderstanding pertains promises that according to the majority of the respondents from the community, the company made in the pre-acquisition phase. Among these are electricity for the village, tiling of the road between Bamboi and Babator, a health facility, water and a new school structure. As explained in Section 2.1, fifty-five per cent of the revenue accruing from stool lands is disbursed to the District Assembly, that is the institution prioritizing development interventions in the District. For instance, the 'Chief's Compound', a health center, was built in Babator with the contribution of AgDevCo. At the time of the data collection, a water treatment system was being set up for the community. My respondent from AgDevCo mentioned that this was possible thanks to a grant that the company found to smoothen relations with the community which felt that the development should have been accelerated. However, my respondent mentions:

[...] They made it look like AgDevCo is coming to do everything. AgDevCo is not an NGO and doesn't have donor funds that it can just use for development activities. AgDevCo is an impact investor. Whatever investment it does, you need to measure the impact. But it is not like AgDevCo is coming to do everything: build you a hospital, build you a school, all those things. [...] So that was something that wasn't well communicated from the beginning.

In addition, various respondents mention how absent bureaucratic representatives have been in the community during the pre-acquisition.

6.3.3 Access to knowledge and to local business expertise and networks

As in many other situations, access to knowledge is power. Beliefs and discursive practices shape who can benefit from resources. Also, the expert status gained through access to privileged information, higher education or from the ability to employ degrees and titles can give privileged access to labour opportunities, group membership or privileged access to resources (Ribot and Peluso 2003, p. 169). A community with an extremely low level of education is more vulnerable. In Babator, the misunderstandings and knowledge disparities have been a major obstacle to fair negotiations and consultations between the company and the local community. One of the most central challenges is the community's lack of understanding for the land tenure system and its hierarchies and mechanisms. One of my key respondents mentions:

People didn't understand the whole land lease process, because for instance, right now this is their land, they farm on it. But technically it's not their land in court. Because if you look at the customary land acquisition process in Ghana, the custodian of the land is the kin. So there are certain things that the local man doesn't understand because he is farming on it, so he owns it, but he also understands that he has a chief, who also has his supreme chief. Those are some of the technicalities that we're going toward.

On a positive side, the advent of AgDevCo and the Babator Farming Company has brought practical knowledge and skill enhancement to some female members of the community who have been employed by them. As reported by a respondent:

We have learned a lot. I, for one, the way they grow things and then process them, and the way of putting ginger to plant it or work with it, I didn't know, but now I've learned something. We have also learned about maize and groundnuts, how to plant them and how they can yield well for you. Before we didn't know. Onion too. We didn't know that the onion has seeds that they plant. We are happy we know how to do it ourselves.

However, access to local knowledge and networks is a fundamental source of power. Locals with access to economic resources, professional connections, or business aptitude of the specific context are often connected with foreign land acquisitions in from a professional point of view (Fairbairn, 2013, p.348). Accordingly, in the pre-acquisition phase, once AgDevCo realized the ongoing

Chieftaincy dispute between Gonja and North Mo, they agreed to involve a local consultant, COLANDEF, to navigate the customary hierarchies and support the acquisition process. Involving a local consultant was a crucial step in the acquisition process and some respondents belonging to the elders of the community claim that the assurances of such consultant were the reason why they were convinced of the acquisition. The community, on the other side, split in two because of the dispute, did not agree to get a lawyer or any other knowledgeable person to support them in the acquisition, which they regretted:

We the elders have realized that our weakness is that we were not able to get a lawyer to represent us, but we are praying that one day the community will unite and we'll have one lawyer to speak for us.

This shows that having locally based knowledge and networks was decisive in the successful signing of the lease.

6.3.4 Social identity and social relations

Social identity and *social relations* are two power sources that impact profoundly resource access. Access is often mediated by membership in a group, age, gender, ethnicity, status and other attributes. During periods of common enclosure or of change in land use, who is included or excluded from the benefits sharing, frequently depends on identity and is mediated through non-state authorities such as community leaders or village chiefs (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 171).

The distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes, which is linked to people's ethnic belonging, determines the ability to access and use land. As non-indigenes, access to land has to be mediated through and negotiated with the local indigenous elders. This affected the consultations pre-acquisition, and the power relation is clearly demonstrated by this quote:

Because I'm a non-indigene and I don't own the land, I don't have any power. And we were all gathered with the indigenes, so we were looking up to the indigenes to raise an alarm for us to also support. But because they did not raise any alarm, and we don't have any power over the land, we also kept quiet.

Although non-indigenous farmers were consulted in the pre-acquisition and despite having representatives in the PCC, according to custom their rights will always be secondary. The same applies to any other group who has later migrated to the community, such as the Fulani herdsmen community who are located just outside of the village. They are guests on the land.

The ability to benefit from the change of land use clearly varies along *gender lines*. The situation faced by female farmers is direr compared to the one of male farmers. They have to deal with a double burden caused by gender stereotypes, given that women are expected to take care of the household and the children. Some women have been employed as farmers in the BFC and they are thankful about the set of skills they have obtained, but they complain about their meagre pay compared to the amount of work they do. Their working hours are also challenging for them, and different respondents mention this is affecting their marital homes. Women's double burden is clearly



Picture 3- Angushi seeds. Source: Author

demonstrated by the quote of one of the elders, seeing them come back on the company truck after a day of work:

See our women who cook for us, they are now coming. They left here early in the morning 7am, they start work as soon as they get to the farm and they will work up until 12 o'clock. They have a break, ad at one o'clock they continue. When will they come and cook for us to eat?

In addition, some female respondents indicate how they don't get to save much from their earnings, but often spend them on things for the family. The majority of those employed by the company mention that they have some additional economic activity on the side, such as farming and/or petty trading, which point to their agency and resilience. The female farmers I have spoken to highlight another issue: those who have been relocated mention that the crops traditionally farmed by women were not adequately compensated compared to the men's after the acquisition, as the following quote explains:

Our system of farming is set that our husbands they would do the clearing and raise the amounts, but it is us, the women, who also own the angushi, groundnut, okru, we own pepper and other stuff, all the creeping plants. But they only went and valued the farms, payed the cassava and the yam to our husbands and left our homes.

Social relations, as confirmed by the literature on customary tenure arrangements, are central to Ghanaian society, and have played an important role in Babator. For instance, respondents belonging to various social groups mention how they perceive AgDevCo as being disrespectful towards local traditions. It is reported that the company has not contributed to the items that the community buy to pacify their ancestors and to pray for things such as a good farm produce or rains. The community members and the elders believe that this is the reason why the business doesn't seem to be as successful as expected.

6.3.5 Control over the development agenda

The last, but not less important, source of power identified in the case of the Babator community is linked to who has control over the development agenda. In Ghana aspirations about national development are strongly linked to the modernization and industrialization of agriculture with a strong focus on productivity enhancement and a greater engagement with the private sector, in line with the MoFA's FASDEP II. As previously discussed, the neoliberal turn in the economic management dates back to the 1980s and its narrative has penetrated to small rural communities like Babator. The majority of my respondents describes great hope linked to the arrival of a big company. They describe themselves as a community that has been deprived of development and in need of a company to "develop them". That is why they gave away their land, they explain. Great expectations are also linked to modernization, hoping the company would teach them a modern way of farming. The expectations have been followed by disappointment in discovering how losing land make them more vulnerable as farmers and realize the value of having access to the community land:

If you give me one cedi today and I will loose one billion tomorrow, then it is better I depend on my life and get the one billion ahead of me. This is what I see ahead of me. It's a big stone coming from the sky. This land have been there for billions of years, we ourselves have made a mistake and something is going to swallow us.

Even those who are employed by the company, especially the male workers, are not satisfied. They see how they have become dependent on someone else for employment - they report having temporary contracts - while also being more vulnerable because they don't produce their own food anymore.

Critical voices like Gyapong (2020) claim that in order to justify any large-scale investment the 'why question' from the perspective of the landowners who seem attracted to wage labour should always be posed. This might help in bringing to light the desperation that lead people to give out their land and fall into full or semi-proletarianism, and look at the conditions in host communities.

6.4 Findings: emerging agrarian and social developments

Some of the respondents express frustration over their lack of power in the development of their community and livelihoods, and the main sentiment among the respondents is regret about the extensive size of the leased land. Some are worried about the long-term impacts of the land acquisition, and realize the ones that are now employed by the company have lost their independence.

[...] And now that this company has come to take over our farmlands, and we can no longer farm as we used to, we have realized that we are not building a good foundation for our children. My suggestion is that the lease amount that they are paying to the Traditional Council, they should reduce that amount and come down and sit with us, the indigenes of the land. Then we'll also divide the land into two and give them a portion, so that we can also still have fertile land to farm on.

This description is aligned with what Bernstein (2010) defines the *commodification of subsistence*, the process through which self-sufficient farmers become increasingly dependent on markets for their reproduction, meaning that they start to rely on a money income (p.65).

There are some concerns about population increase in the community, voiced by a representative from the Fulani herdsmen community. He mentions that along the population increase, people might need and want to extend their farms, but there is not enough land for that. He believes the community will cease farming and join the company.

The land acquisition seems to have changed or at least blurred some social distinctions that characterized the previous customary balances, such as those regulating the relations between indigenes and non-indigenes. Now their livelihoods are similar, while traditionally indigenes were doing better. An indigene reflects on how they used to be “serious farmers” not in need of begging, but now they have to leave the community to go and buy food. However, the non-indigenes make clear how they did not have a say in the pre-acquisition phase and now blame the indigenes for releasing the land to the investors. Some community members claim this social distinction doesn’t make much sense anymore, because they have lived in the community for generations and are now mixed.

Summing up and answering the research questions, I start by looking at how patterns of conflict and cooperation have influenced the outcome of the LSLAs (RQ1). It can be noted how it was most likely a conflict – the dispute between the North Mo and Gonja Chieftaincies – that facilitated the acquisition for AgDevCo. As previously reported, many community members believe that this division made it impossible to unite as a community and find a common lawyer. Seeing the opportunity for economic benefits, the two Traditional Councils found a temporary agreement in order not to stall the acquisition and secure economic benefits for both sides. In this way, the dispute still stands in customary court. In the meantime, customary elites have directly benefitted, while for the community, also as a result of bureaucratic intricacies and unsuccessful business for the company, the benefits are slow to arrive. Apart from that, we see examples of cooperation in the management of resources: the long-standing relationship with the Fulani community and the creation of the PCC are two examples.

The impact of local power hierarchies (RQ2) was a key factor in determining the way the LSLA has unfolded. In the pre-acquisition, power hierarchies having their sources in *traditional authority, bureaucratic influence, access to knowledge and local business expertise, social identity and social relations, and control over the development agenda* had a decisive impact on the consultations. The latter couldn’t have lived up to their liberatory promises because of underlying inequalities that hamper any attempt to make them fully inclusive. In the post-acquisition phase, these power sources have impacted social relations within the community as well as benefit sharing.

A clear-cut distinction between winners and losers (RQ3) in Babator is impossible to draw: reality is more complex and contradictory than that. However, the findings point out that

customary elites and women are at the extremes of the spectrum. The formers are surely among the winners, because not being dependent on the land, they had the authority to lease it and gained economic benefits from it. Their role is complicit in a negative way. Ayelazuno (2019) reflects on chiefs' role in land acquisitions and poses a question: *custodians of the land for whom?* The ways in which they use their position as custodians and their rights as allodial title holders to facilitate such investments, raise questions about customary land tenure's real potential to promote equitable and communitarian access and use of land. Communitarian notions of Ghanaian customary landholding system as less concerned with economic logic still impact national land policies as well as donor initiatives. A greater recognition of the customary rights of chiefs is encouraged (p. 923). Among the losers, women stand out as a group whose inequality has been exacerbated by the acquisition. For the ones that have been employed by the BFC, despite the meagre economic gains, their burden of work has worsened. For the ones that used to farm but have been relocated, some report that they have ceased farming, while other explain they get very little produce or that they don't have anything to do.

7. Concluding remarks

The aim of this study has been to investigate a case of LSLA looking at patterns of conflict and cooperation and at power hierarchies, to finally determine winners and losers. Through the analytical framework I have been able to visualize the case and its intersecting issues, while identifying five power sources having an impact on social interactions and on the way the acquisition has unfolded. I do not have an interest in exceedingly generalizing my case or draw far-fetched comparisons, although my case has multiple features that are typical of other places in Northern Ghana. There is learning in specificities and situated narratives too.

For one, we have been able to see how power hierarchies, often customarily anchored, are a crucial factor to be taken into consideration in the unfolding of a land acquisition. There is today a widespread acknowledgement, when proposing solutions to current challenges, of the importance of building on existing customary practices rather than assimilating them. However, the debate has clear normative nuances and specific meanings attached to *the local* as something unproblematically good and genuine, when that is not always the case, especially with personal economic interests involved. Customary practices are in place because they are socially accepted

by people gaining benefits from them (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p.162). They are often praised for their dynamism and flexibility and are therefore bound to change. If these benefits are equally distributed and fair procedures are incorporated, there might be potential for equitable land tenure systems.

We have also seen how patterns of conflict, which can sometimes be linked to customary issues, can be detrimental to a community when an external actor comes in. I believe my contribution adds to the literature questioning socially responsible investments and questioning principles like the FPIC in customary societies. Is there really an opportunity for a consultation to be fully informative and democratic, especially if it is only regulated by soft laws? The case shows that even companies trying to “do right” can encounter big challenges and therefore policymakers could think of alternatives to large-scale and long-term leases which dispossess a community of their main natural resource.

With this study, it is not my intent to perpetuate the narrative of the principled peasant against cruel corporate agriculture. However, I want this study to be understood in the broader trend of the *end of peasantry*, in which peasant elimination is considered a necessity by those who understand progress and modernization to be closely linked. In this idea the dispossession of farmers becomes a basic condition for the consolidation of corporate agriculture (Bernstein 2010, p.85).

I believe following this case closely in the coming years will provide other important insights, and further research could be carried out from an institutional perspective, looking at the decentralisation of land management in Ghana, which I think would provide interesting perspectives. In a context of proliferation of LSLAs in Ghana and globally, it is of crucial importance to question this development and its effects. In doing this, perhaps the focus should be more on benefitting smallholders in the Global South, instead of trying to discipline land deals.

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Appendices

Appendix A- List of informants

Red = focus group interviews

Green = Key Informant Interview

Interview type	Person/Group	Date	Location
Interview 1- Key informant Interview	Assemblyman of Babator (1)	17.01.2020	Babator
Interview 2- Focus group Interview	North Mo Elders (7)	17.01.2020	Babator
Interview 3- Focus group Interview	Gonja Elders (6)	17.01.2020	Babator
Interview 4- Focus Group Interview	Affected male indigenous farmers (4)	17.01.2020	Babator
Interview 5- Focus Group Interview	Female BFC workers (4)	18.01.2020	Babator
Interview 6- Focus Group Interview	Affected female indigenous farmers (4)	18.01.2020	Babator
Interview 7- Key informant Interview	AgDevCo Management Representative (1)	18.01.2020	Bamboi
Interview 8- Focus Group Interview	Male Non-Indigenous Farmers (5)	19.01.2020	Tefoboi
Interview 9- Focus Group Interview	Female Non-Indigenous Farmers (4)	19.01.2020	Tefoboi
Interview 10- Focus Group Interview	Fulani herdsman (6)	20.01.2020	Babator
Interview 11- Focus Group Interview	Male BFC workers (4)	21.01.2020	Babator
Interview 12- Key Informant Interview	Women representatives in the PCC (1)	22.01.2020	Babator
Interview 13- Key Informant Interview	CLS Coordinator Bamboi (1)	23.01.2020	Bamboi

Appendix B - Focus Group Interview Guides

Guide for Focus Group Interview

Personal Intro

Good morning/afternoon.

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us. My name is Johanna, and I am a university student from Sweden, but I have lived in Accra for five months. This research is for my Master's thesis and Mr. Bakoji will be my translator (he translates and introduces himself if needed).

*If everyone in the group is literate, I provide them with a consent form to read and sign.
If not, consent is given verbally as explained below.*

You were invited to talk with us because as a community member in Babator, your experiences and opinions are important to my research. I am interested in learning about your livelihood, your community and about your experience with the company. Please keep in mind that there is no right or wrong answer and that you can choose not to answer any question.

If you agree, I would ask you to record this group conversation for my use. All information you supply during the interview will be held in confidence and your name will not appear. You have the opportunity to consider the information and you may withdraw from the research study at any point.

- Do you have any questions before we start?
- Would you like to participate?

Part 1: General characteristics outlining the social position and background of the respondent (age, occupation, ethnic belonging, family structure, land ownership...)

One at the time, could you please stand up and tell me a bit about yourself?

Part 2: Focus Group Discussion Questions

Babator: land, conflict and cooperation

1. What do you know about the way the land is administered in Babator?
2. In your opinion, is Babator a very diverse community?
3. Can you think of examples of cooperation in the community among different groups, especially related to land or other resources?
4. Can you think of examples of conflicts in the community among different groups, especially related to land or other resources?

AgDevCo & power hierarchies

5. What do you know about AgDevCo and their project in Babator?
6. Has the arrival of the company affected you? If yes, how?
7. Prior to the company's formal establishment in Babator, were you ever consulted when the company first approached the community?
8. If yes, do you feel like you were part of the decision making? Do you think your background (ethnicity, class, gender...) influenced your ability to influence the acquisition?
9. In your opinion, how are the relations between the company and the community today?
10. What is your general opinion about the company's impact on the community both from a positive and a negative perspective?
11. In your opinion, are there winners and losers among the community?

Part 3: Closing

12. Is there anything I have left out that you would like to add?
13. Is there anything else you would like to ask me about this study?

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. I'll leave you my contact details if you want to get in touch for other questions or concerns.

Appendix C - Key Informants Interview Guides

Guide for Key Informant Interview

(for Assemblyman and women representative in the PCC)

Personal Intro

(same as for the focus group interview)

Part 1: General characteristics outlining the social position and background of the respondent (age, occupation, ethnic belonging, family structure, land ownership...)

Could you please tell me a bit about yourself and your background?

Part 2: Interview Questions

Babator: land, conflict and cooperation

1. What do you know about the way the land is administered in Babator?
2. In your opinion, is Babator a very diverse community?
3. Can you think of examples of cooperation in the community among different groups, especially related to land or other resources?
4. Can you think of examples of conflicts in the community among different groups, especially related to land or other resources?

AgDevCo & power hierarchies

5. What do you know about AgDevCo and their project in Babator?
6. Has the arrival of the company affected you? If yes, how?
7. Prior to the company's formal establishment in Babator, were you ever consulted when the company first approached the community?
8. If yes, do you feel like you were part of the decision making? Do you think your background (ethnicity, class, gender...) influenced your ability to influence the acquisition?
9. In your opinion, how are the relations between the company and the community today?
10. What is your general opinion about the company's impact on the community both from a positive and a negative perspective?
11. In your opinion, are there winners and losers among the community?

Part 3: Closing

12. Is there anything I have left out that you would like to add?
13. Is there anything else you would like to ask me about this study?

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. I'll leave you my contact details if you want to get in touch for questions or concerns.

Guide for CLS Coordinator

Part 1: General characteristics outlining the social position and background of the respondent (age, occupation, ethnic belonging, family structure, land ownership...)

Could you please tell me a bit about yourself and your background?

Part 2: Interview Questions

Babator: land, conflict and cooperation

1. What do you know about the way the land is administered in Babator?
2. In your opinion, is Babator a very diverse community?
3. Can you think of examples of cooperation in the community among different groups, especially related to land or other resources?
4. Can you think of examples of conflicts in the community among different groups, especially related to land or other resources?

AgDevCo & power hierarchies

5. What do you know about AgDevCo and their project in Babator?
6. Has the arrival of the company affected you? If yes, how?
7. What do you know about the consultation between the company and the community prior to its formal establishment in Babator?
8. To your knowledge, did people's backgrounds (ethnicity, class, gender...) influence their ability to influence the acquisition?
9. In your opinion, how are the relations between the company and the community today?
10. What is your general opinion about the company's impact on the community both from a positive and a negative perspective?
11. In your opinion, are there winners and losers among the community?

Part 3: Closing

12. Is there anything I have left out that you would like to add?

13. Is there anything else you would like to ask me about this study?

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. I'll leave you my contact details if you want to get in touch for questions or concerns.

Changes for AgDevCo representative

Part 1: General characteristics outlining the social position and background of the respondent (age, occupation, ethnic belonging, family structure, land ownership...)

Could you please tell me a bit about yourself and your background?

Part 2: Interview Questions

Babator: land, conflict and cooperation

1. What do you know about the way the land is administered in Babator?
2. In your opinion, is Babator a very diverse community?
3. Do you know any example of cooperation in the community among different groups, especially related to land or other resources?
4. Do you know any example of conflicts in the community among different groups, especially related to land or other resources?

AgDevCo & power hierarchies

5. Tell me a bit about AgDevCo and your project in Babator.
6. What do you know about the consultation between AgDevCo and the community prior to its formal establishment in Babator? What were the challenges?
7. To your knowledge, did people's backgrounds (ethnicity, class, gender...) influence their ability to influence the acquisition?
8. In your opinion, how are the relations between the company and the community today?
9. In your opinion, how has AgDevCo impacted the community both from a positive and a negative perspective?
10. In your opinion, are there winners and losers among the community?

Part 3: Closing

11. Is there anything I have left out that you would like to add?
12. Is there anything else you would like to ask me about this study?

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. I'll leave you my contact details if you want to get in touch for questions or concerns.

Appendix D - Consent Forms

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I. Research Study title

The study in which you are being requested to participate is a case study on power hierarchies in the community of Babator. It is being conducted by Johanna Caminati Engström, a MSc student of International Development and Management from Lund University in Sweden and constitutes a MSc thesis.

II. Purpose of the research

This research aims to gain an insight into how the nature of customary land administration systems has influenced the land acquisition process for the Babator Irrigated Farming Hub (BIFH) and how its development has affected the livelihoods of the local population differently along lines of gender, class, social hierarchy and other factors.

III. Confidentiality

Participants in this research are requested to participate in an interview, which the researcher will request to record (audio only). All information you supply during the interview will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in the thesis or any other publication associated with the research. You have the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have these answered satisfactorily. Your involvement in this study is voluntary. As a participant you may withdraw from the research study at any point.

By signing below, you agree that you have read and understood the information for the above study and that you consent to this interview.

Date:

Signature: