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Published in:
Journal of International Development

DOI:
[10.1002/jid.3707](https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3707)

2023

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Kugbega, S., & Andersson Djurfeldt, A. (2023). Gendered dynamics of state-led smallholder commercialisation in Ghana. The case of Nkoranza traditional area. *Journal of International Development*, 35(5), 716-737.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3707>

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Gendered dynamics of state-led smallholder commercialisation in Ghana. The case of Nkoranza traditional area

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Abstract

Commercial smallholder production is touted as a mechanism for reducing rural poverty and transforming African agriculture. In line with this ideology, the Ghanaian state introduced two policies to provide incentives for commercial food and tree crop cultivation among smallholder farmers. Policy implementation is done in a blanket manner without considerations of gendered differences in agricultural asset distribution, such as land, and the particular sociocultural opportunities and constraints men and women face in undertaking commercial production. The paper investigates these gendered trajectories using a qualitative methodology. Results reveal the varied nature of women's constraints and related levels of vulnerability. Although native women are structurally disadvantaged in commercial food crop production, tree crop commercialisation presents an opportunity for them to reclaim dormant land rights safeguarded by their male kin. These results provide perspective for considering gender-sensitive agricultural incentives as well as potential for leveraging on the tree crop sector for attaining gender neutrality.

KEYWORDS

commercialisation, land, smallholder, tenure rights, women

Funding Information This research received no external funding.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Recent discussions on agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have been centred on the integration of smallholder farmers into agricultural markets and commodity value chains as a pathway to structural transformation (see Dzanku et al., 2021; Jaleta et al., 2009). Smallholder-based agrarian transformation has been touted as one of the best mechanisms for raising incomes, reducing poverty and increasing food availability in agrarian economies (see Haggblade et al., 2010; World Bank, 2007). The examples of East Asian countries lend credence to the cumulative transformative potential of smallholder commercialisation. Whereas the East Asian blueprint has been attempted in several African countries, the latter have not been able to realise the same economic gains (Djurfeldt et al., 2005; Nin-Pratt & McBride, 2014). In Ghana, agricultural policies have oscillated constantly between focusing on small-scale or large-scale production and both (Dzanku & Udry, 2017). Although considerable efforts have been made in improving small-scale production, the recent introduction of the smallholder-targeted Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) policy as a panacea to attaining structural economic change is evidence of a renewed state commitment. With its nationwide appeal and planned budgetary allocation of \$723 538 502 (2017–2020) (MoFA, 2017), the PFJ policy has been lauded as one of the most audacious contemporary attempts at improving smallholder cultivation in the country. The policy seeks to realign smallholder production of staple food crops to attain food self-sufficiency and structural economic change (MoFA, 2017). The PFJ policy is complemented by a tree crop commercialisation policy dubbed Planting for Export and Rural Development (PERD). The PERD policy was designed to complement ongoing local processes of nontraditional tree crop commercialisation and also to introduce farmers to other nontraditional tree crops with high commercial value. Though laudable, PFJ and PERD policy implementation assumes that smallholders are a homogenous group to which a blanket solution of commercialisation can be prescribed, without varied socio-economic consequences. Structural divisions among smallholders have been noted, however in terms of differences in sociocultural and economic factors. Empirically, Amanor (1999) observed that structural inequities based on gender, ethnicity and age are often deepened in the context of commercialisation. Bernstein (2010) and Oya (2007) argue that the process of smallholder commercialisation has two major implications: the creation of entrepreneurial smallholders (petty commodity producers) and the increase of social differentiation. Differentiation among smallholders occurs when more dynamic farmers benefit from accumulation processes to increase their rural land-holdings while dispossessing less efficient farmers of their land. Processes of accumulation may be encouraged by state policy incentives that provide free and subsidised inputs to encourage commercial cultivation. Patterns of differentiation that arise from agricultural commercialisation in rural African communities are often complex and context-specific. The resultant inequities are primarily defined by kinship and inheritance claims, income, age, gender and socio-economic status (see Amanor, 2010; Yaro et al., 2018). But how do patterns of smallholder commercialisation interphase with gendered dynamics of agricultural production and customary land tenure?

The implementation of smallholder-oriented agricultural policies in Ghana relies on secure land access mediated by customary tenure institutions. These institutions are headed by chiefs, family/clan heads and earth priests¹ who are entrusted with land management responsibilities. The aforementioned leaders of customary institutions are men who often uphold patriarchal values defined by historical tenets of male conquest and consequent property ownership claims (Doss et al., 2014; Lambrecht, 2016). This allows men to have easier access and ownership of land compared with women (Doss et al., 2015). Male control over land resources and land-based factors of production leads to a higher propensity for wealth accumulation among men. Colin (2018) argues that this imbalance can be resolved through commercialisation, which could in theory increase market-based land access for vulnerable groups. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that market-based processes themselves are discriminatory and often favour privileged groups. Thus, the commercialisation process, despite the emergence of formal land markets, may serve to further constrain rather than ensure equitable land access for women (Razavi, 2007). The unintended outcome

¹The institution of the earth priest, locally termed as *tendana/tendamba* (plural) and translated as land owner, is common in the northern regions of Ghana. They serve as both spiritual and physical custodians of customary land.

of commercialisation policies may therefore be to undermine the already weaker tenure rights of women, whereas the gendered dynamics of access to land in themselves affect women's possibilities for participating in commercial processes. The gendered consequences of commercialisation policies for land tenure relations are therefore central to understanding the socio-economic effects of the state's agrarian change objectives.

Whereas existing literature points to the inequitable interaction between commercialisation and land tenure relations, the focus of this literature is generally placed on the tangible aspects of market access, land access and land use. This article contributes to the literature on the nexus between commercial smallholder production, land tenure and gendered dynamics by contextualising these material factors in relation to cultural norms centred around the family and the gendered division of labour between and within agriculture. Although these relationships have been widely explored for example by Dzanku et al. (2021), Hall et al. (2017), Lambrecht et al. (2018) and Tsikata and Yaro (2014), the paper's unique contribution lies in positioning these arguments within the context of ongoing state-led policy processes. In doing so, the paper examines whether and how new policies for Ghana's agricultural development deal with critical gendered challenges around land tenure. We seek to explore the relationship between gender and land rights in the context of state-led commercialisation through a set of four research questions: How are women's interest and ability to commercialise their agricultural production related to their differential access to land and gendered priorities around intrafamilial use of land? How and why do cultural norms surrounding the gendered division of labour affect the gender dynamics of food crop commercialisation, as promoted by the PFJ? How and why does food crop commercialisation as promoted by the PFJ lead to gendered differences in access to land within the food crop sector? And finally, how do gender dynamics surrounding commercialisation and land use related to the tree crop sector differ?

The remainder of the paper is structured in five sections. Section 2 provides the background on agricultural commercialisation by focusing on the characteristics of PFJ and PERD, gendered land rights within customary tenure and land rights and kinship among the Akan-Bono in Ghana. Section 3 details the theoretical framing of the article and conceptualisations of the linkages between commercialisation and women's land rights. Section 4 describes the methods used, whereas Section 5 analyses data and reports key findings. Section 5 is structured around the research questions, such that each subsection (5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4, respectively) relates to one of the four research questions. Section 6 draws conclusions and makes some policy recommendations.

2 | BACKGROUND

2.1 | Agricultural commercialisation- the case of PFJ and PERD

Agricultural commercialisation is central to contemporary processes of structural change and to the transformation of rural communities in SSA (see World Bank, 2007). It is aimed at fostering production efficiency and is based on an assumption that improved yields, and access to markets will stimulate entrepreneurial production. The creation of a cadre of more efficient smallholders is touted as a mechanism for agricultural transformation (World Bank, 2009). Commercial smallholder production has a long history in Ghana albeit more prominent in the country's cocoa-, rubber- and oil palm-dominated regions (see Yaro et al., 2018). Smallholder farmers have historically shown enormous capacity in producing targeted export volumes of cash crops that form the bedrock of Ghana's economy. Their mode of organisation, production and capital formation in southern Ghana was described by Hill (1963) as rural capitalism. Such production efficiency has been encouraged by both the colonial and post-independence state through input-based incentives, minimum guaranteed producer prices and extension services. Smallholder efficiency in cash crop production is however not reflected in food crop cultivation. Historically, state efforts at encouraging commercial food crop cultivation among smallholders as exemplified by the "Operation Feed Yourself" and "Operation Feed Your Industries" policies in the 1970s and the "Block Farm" projects between 2008 and 2016 are at best ad hoc responses to crisis with little institutional, financial and coherent policy support (Dzanku et al., 2021). The

consequent economic gains are short-lived and assume a boom and bust nature. Practically this involves high interest and production increases in the immediate period following a state intervention, yet reduced interest and productivity decline in the long term. This boom and bust effect is partly explained by lack of continuity in incentive schemes and what Dzanku and Udry (2017) noted as variations in intergovernmental policy direction on agriculture.

In the context of this paper, the Ghanaian state's PFJ policy takes centre stage. It is by far the largest smallholder-targeted commercialisation strategy for the food crop subsector since independence in 1957. The policy, which was introduced in 2017, is aimed at improving smallholder cultivation of priority food crops, such as maize, rice, sorghum, soya beans and vegetables. In turn, this is expected to encourage food self-sufficiency and to lead to structural economic change (MoFA, 2017). To do this, the policy leverages on the combined production capacity of smallholder farmers and provides incentives, including fertiliser and seed subsidies, market opportunities, extension services and IT-based automated monitoring services. The PFJ is complemented by a tree crop commercialisation policy termed the PERD, which was introduced in 2019 (MoFA, 2019). It focuses on the development of nontraditional tree crops, such as cashew, coffee, oil palm, coconut, mango and rubber. The PERD policy attempts to improve and streamline production through providing free tree crop seedlings, extension services, business support and managerial oversight by a tree crop development authority. The incorporation of small farmers into commodity markets has however been criticised as exclusionary, leading to the eventual dispossession of vulnerable and less efficient smallholder farmers who fail to compete in output markets. Such dispossession may occur through distress sales and competition for land, thus creating various forms of land enclosures, social differentiation and landlessness in rural communities (Peters, 2004). In countries like Ghana, where extensive agriculture through farmland expansion is the norm, the risk of dispossession may be especially high (see CILSS, 2016; Houssou et al., 2018).

2.2 | Gender, property rights and land tenure in SSA and Ghana

Women represent a significant share of the agricultural workforce in SSA, and their output constitutes a notable proportion of total food crop production (Doss, 2014). Their agricultural factor endowments, including land rights and ownership, remain generally low, however (Yngstrom, 2002). In many instances, as exemplified by Doss et al. (2012) for Uganda, women are structurally ignored or given token allocations during customary property sharing. Upon marriage, many women lose the rights to consanguineal² family land and are expected to cultivate their husband's lands (Duncan & Brants, 2004). This dynamic is more common in patrilineal than matrilineal systems where women still exercise some rights to customary land in marriage. Still, their consanguineal land rights are mediated through male kin, an indication that matriarchy is not an automatic guarantee of improved land rights (Kusi et al., 2022).

Additionally, women are often not customarily recognised as co-owners of land in their affinal³ families and are considered to cultivate such lands at the benevolence of their husbands (see Joireman, 2008; Lambrecht, 2016). In the case of Ghana, this notion received judicial recognition in the case of *Quartey v Martey & Anor* (1959:380) GLR 377 when the court held *inter alia* that "By customary law, it is the domestic responsibility of a man's wife and children to assist him in the carrying out of the duties of his station in life, eg, farming or business. The proceeds of this joint effort of a man and his wife and/or children and any property which the man acquires with such proceeds are by customary law the individual property of the man. It is not the joint property of the man and his wife and/or children". Thus, women are often dispossessed and left destitute upon the demise of the husband or in instances of separation and divorce. Customarily, this is explained by the absence of bloodline connections to their husband's lineage; hence, women are required to return to their natal families for land access (Lambrecht, 2016).

Though exceptions exist (see Asiam, 1997), women are often viewed as transient members of both consanguineal and affinal families and as such often excluded in decisions pertaining to property rights and distribution (Duncan

²Consanguineal family relationships are defined by blood lineage and may include extended or nuclear family or lineage and sublineage groups.

³Affinal family relationships are established through marriage.

& Brants, 2004; Higgins & Fenrich, 2011). That said, they are often allowed to exercise some cultivation rights over land in their natal and affinal homes. In the latter case, women's land rights become significantly stronger in patrilineal systems if they have children with their husbands. This is because children hold inalienable inheritance rights to their father's property. However, the same is not the case in matrilineal systems where children are required to assert inheritance claims in their maternal families (Kusi et al., 2022). Though these dynamics hold true in many cases in SSA, significant cultural exceptions that highlight the varied and contextual nature of women's land rights exist. For instance, Peters (2010) notes that women in southern Malawi observe a matrilineal and matrilocal kinship system in which land customarily devolves to females in the matrilineal lineage. This depicts strong land use, and ownership claims and challenges widely held notions of women's apparent vulnerability.

Gender-sensitive legislations in Ghana have sought to deal with the inequities in land and property distribution and to safeguard women's rights in receiving an equal or fair share of properties. Notable examples are the intestate succession law (1985-PNDCL 111) that upholds the rights of widows to property and the Land Act (2020-Act 1036) that makes an allocation for co-ownership of property during marriage and individual disposition of gifted lands received during marriage. Whereas these legislations make references to equality and fairness in property distribution in Ghana, the Property Rights of Spouses Bill that was proposed in 2009 to clarify property rights in marriage has received little attention and is yet to be passed into law.

Though some authors view commercialisation and associated land market development as central to improving women's land rights (see Deininger & Mpuga, 2008; Holden et al., 2011), women still face considerable social and structural impediments in negotiating market-based land rights (Doss et al., 2015; Joireman, 2008). In parts of Ghana, women's engagement in land purchase and rental markets is generally mediated through male kin or husbands or at least with their concurrence (Adolwine & Dudima, 2010).

2.3 | Land rights and kinship among the Akan-bono

Though the dominant system of inheritance in Ghana is patrilineal, the Akan-bono, like all other Akan ethnic groups, inherit matrilineally with land devolving from maternal uncles(s) to maternal nephews or nieces. Children are considered to belong to their maternal family; hence, the paternal family neither owes women nor children a customary duty of care (see da Rocha & Lodoh, 1999; Ollennu & Woodman, 1985). The nature of land rights is best understood by the formation of nuclear and extended family property historically. First an individual clears the forest and claims *inter vivos*⁴ user rights over the land through the *right of the axe*⁵ principle under customary law (Ollennu & Woodman, 1985). When such an individual dies intestate, the extended family holds *de facto* ownership of the self-acquired property and appoints a nephew or niece as caretaker. Thus, the extended family, which consists of a constellation of segmented lineages, sublineages and nuclear families that are connected by common ancestry, is considered the basis for customary succession (Bentsi-Enchill, 1964).

This arrangement does not reflect current practices that emphasise the primary obligation of parents to the nuclear family comprising wife/wives and natural or adopted children. Thus, nuclear family members may be left destitute when customary principles of matrilineal inheritance are strictly applied (Fenrich & Higgins, 2001). In many instances, their land rights are dependent on the benevolence of the affinal family and administrator(s) of the deceased's estate. The customary system has attempted to deal with potential impoverishment of surviving spouses and children through customary gifts of land from husband/father to wife/wives and children. Such gifting divests land from the extended family and extinguishes the inheritance rights of maternal nephews and nieces (Ollennu & Woodman, 1985). Customary land gifts are often accompanied by corresponding token allocations to the gifter's maternal family to secure the continued sustenance of customary heirs and a thanksgiving ceremony performed by

⁴For the duration of their lifetime or until control is relinquished

⁵Ownership and use rights to land that results from first cultivation

beneficiaries in appreciation of the gesture. Nonetheless, testators are not allowed to gift family property over which they exercise mere cultivation rights. Lands that are the subject of customary gifts are those that the husbands or fathers cultivated and annexed themselves (by virtue of the customary right of first cultivation) and are considered family property upon their intestate death. Transfer of property often occurs through testamentary disposition and can be claimed during the lifetime or after the death of the testator. With gifting, land becomes either individualised or is owned exclusively by subgroups⁶ comprising all named beneficiaries of the customary gift.

3 | CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical literature around commercialisation, land tenure and gender is generally limited but can be broadly divided into three main bodies of scholarship, which provide the conceptual lens for the paper. Perspectives related to women's poorer access to assets, including land, emphasise the supply-side aspects of agricultural production, highlighting such shortfalls as explanations for lower productivity. This literature does not generally consider commercialisation but focuses on production, although the inability to produce a marketable surplus can be linked to lower productivity. Another body of literature focuses instead on the commercialisation process itself and the gender biases found within markets and value chains. Finally, the scholarship on de-agrarianisation and de-peasantisation provides a link between the two and considers the detrimental outcomes of commercial processes for land tenure relations for vulnerable groups, including women.

3.1 | Asset control and production perspectives

Theoretical and empirical contributions departing from the subfields of feminist economics acknowledge the importance of assets as sources of livelihoods, insurance against natural disasters and other shocks and stores of value (Deere, 2010; Deere & Doss, 2006). Whereas the economic theory from the subfield of feminist economics has traditionally linked such control to the bargaining power of individuals within the household (Quisumbing, 2010), more recent contributions stress the importance of the household as a site of power as well as cooperation (Doss & Quisumbing, 2018). Empirically, the literature shows that women generally hold less assets than men and also hold assets of lower value, making them susceptible to economic shocks (Deere & Doss, 2006). Their land holdings are primarily defined by social relations and the related institutional vehicles that specify and entrench differential allocation of resources and gendered responsibilities (Kabeer, 2005; Lambrecht et al., 2018). To this extent, many women's land rights are conditioned by cultural and historical factors (Fenrich & Higgins, 2001), which are often underscored by ideological, economic and spiritual motivations (FAO, 2011). With time, these gendered dynamics become socially ingrained, and women themselves contribute to normalising and to perpetuating them. Empirical evidence further shows that families/households, communities, markets, state actors and the interactions between them are central to the production and to the reproduction of gender inequities (Andersson Djurfeldt, Hillbom, et al., 2018; Kabeer, 1994; March et al., 1999). They, for instance, regulate what gets done and how, who benefits, who is excluded, who makes decisions and whose interests are served (March et al., 1999). Although exceptions exist (see Peters, 2010), these regulations are patriarchal and often favour men, allowing them more access and control of communal assets than women (Deere, 2010; Deere & Doss, 2006). Still, women are shown to invest more in land when their tenure security is high (Quisumbing et al., 2001). In terms of land holdings and land use specifically, data from the FAO Gender and Land Rights database show that female landholders are in the minority and that women

⁶This may include nuclear family/uterine siblings/lineage/sublineage. Such group ownership occurs when the gifted land is not shared among members of the group and is instead jointly owned and cultivated.

generally hold smaller plots across the countries covered by the database. These data are confirmed also by other longitudinal studies of African smallholder agriculture specifically Andersson Djurfeldt (2018a).

Livelihood perspectives inspired by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998; Scoones, 2009) depart instead from the broader notion of capitals.⁷ These approaches focus on how different types of capitals—human, natural, physical, financial and cultural for instance—are used by households to sustain the livelihoods of their members. Recent contributions have added a gendered understanding to how different capitals are controlled, accessed and used within households (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014). Political economy approaches privilege broader contextual explanations for gender-based differences in power and resource control, adding perspectives related to historical change, social differentiation and cultural dynamics (Jackson, 2003; Peters, 2013; Razavi, 2003, 2009). Empirically, studies show how female-headed households have poorer access to labour resources (Andersson Djurfeldt, 2018a) and also how reproductive care burdens affect women's possibilities for participating in agricultural production (Andersson Djurfeldt, Dzanku, & Isinika, 2018; Andersson Djurfeldt, Hillbom, et al., 2018). Lacking extension services (Kilic et al., 2015) and lower technology uptake (Doss, 2001; Doss & Morris, 2001; Quisumbing & Pandolfelli, 2010) can also be linked to lower productivity among female farmers. In turn, production differentials among male and female farmers lead to a relative gender gap in commercialisation potential (see Andersson Djurfeldt, 2018b; Lambrecht, 2016).

3.2 | Gendered processes of commercialisation

Theoretical perspectives on agricultural commercialisation that depart from agricultural economics stress the transformative potential of linking smallholders to markets and to global value chains. Inspired by the historical experiences of the Global North and the Asian Green Revolution, this scholarship argues that commercialisation reduces poverty, increases material wealth through shifts into higher value agricultural products and eventually enables an exit out of agriculture (Haggblade et al., 2007). Over time, raising smallholder productivity through technological advances, in combination with increasing commercialisation and a shift into higher value crops, is hypothesised to lead to a macro-level shift towards nonfarm livelihoods accompanied by a demographic redistribution between rural and urban areas (Timmer, 2009). Although more recent contributions in this field acknowledge the difficulties of directly applying this smallholder-based model to the empirical context of SSA, they nonetheless uphold a faith in commercialisation as a source of livelihood improvement (Masters et al., 2013).

Empirically, there is a large body of literature showing how women are marginalised in commercial processes. Examples of this include the exclusion of women from contract farming schemes and higher value crops (Maertens & Swinnen, 2009; Schneider & Gugerty, 2010), resulting from poorer access to productive resources. Relatedly, Lambrecht (2016) notes how women's commercialisation efforts are limited by structural land and non-land-based determinants, such as inputs and capital (see also Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003). A number of studies, from multiple disciplines, periods of time and geographical settings, show the relative exclusion of women in the production of cash/tree crops and in the production and commercialisation of what have traditionally been women's crops (Andersson Djurfeldt, 2018b; Bergman Lodin, 2012; Negin et al., 2009). A complementary body of literature also suggests that women diversify their livelihoods out of agriculture or withdraw their labour from their husbands' plots in response to increasing male commercialisation (Dolan, 2002; Whitehead & Kabeer, 2001).

Scholars concerned with theoretical perspectives on agrarian class differentiation similarly emphasise the polarising effects of commercialisation. The commodification of land encouraged by commercialisation leads to rising entry costs and to increasing capitalisation of agriculture. In turn, this leads to a process of accumulation and class

⁷Andersson Djurfeldt, 2018a outlines how the two concepts can be reconciled.

differentiation in which vulnerable groups of farmers are not able to subsist on agriculture or are rendered landless altogether (Bernstein, 2010). The related processes of de-peasantisation and de-agrarianisation involve moving away from smallholder agriculture as a source of livelihood and a shift in agricultural production to accommodate the needs of agribusiness capital (Hebinck, 2018). Though these processes have been slower among women in comparison with men who maintain high labour mobility, women and particularly poor women in SSA are also considered to be vulnerable to these dynamics, with consequences for their access to land (Bryceson, 2019). Theoretical perspectives from the broader field of political economy stress the importance of contextualising gender relations geographically, socially and historically to elucidate intrahousehold dynamics of cooperation as well as conflict during processes of agrarian change (Jackson, 1999; Jackson, 2007; Okali, 2012; O'Laughlin, 2007).

3.3 | Land tenure relations and commercialisation

Hence, the theoretical literature emanating from the field of political economy and agrarian class differentiation makes an explicit link between commercialisation and growing landlessness among vulnerable groups, including women. The empirical literature on women's customary land access also generally points to inequities and deprivation based on gender. Alternative perspectives exist, however, which see the development of rural land markets influenced partly by commercialisation interests as an opportunity for women generally to gain better land access (Chitonge et al., 2017; Colin, 2018). With fixed rent, Hayami and Otsuka (1993) find that land rental markets prove important for improving efficiency and equity in land distribution by transferring land from land-rich households to capital, skill or labour-abundant households (see also Deininger & Mpuga, 2008; Holden et al., 2011).

4 | METHODOLOGY

4.1 | Research design and study site description

The study is exploratory in design as it follows the mechanisms of commercial smallholder farming among different groups of women and analyses how the commercialisation incentives provided through the PFJ and PERD have affected their land rights. Data collection was conducted in two communities, namely, Nkwabeng and Dromankese in the Bono East region of Ghana (see Figure 1). The study area (Bono East region) was purposively selected because of the conducive nature of climate, bimodal rainfall and the ability to support two cropping periods. The study sites were selected based on their production capacity, proximity to district capitals and access to markets. Whereas Nkwabeng has less land and small farm sizes averaging 1.7 acres, the Dromankese community controls more land with larger average farm sizes ranging from 3 to 10 acres (Ministry of Finance, 2014; MoFA, 2021). These contrasts are useful for understanding the dynamics of land rights as commercialisation interests increase in the communities. Thus, the study keeps in focus the similarities and differences in land access and commercialisation potential among two distinct groups of women identified during the course of field work: native Akan-bono⁸ women and non-native Akan women.

Both study communities are located within the forest transition zone of Ghana, which comprises a vegetative mix of semi-deciduous forests and savannah grasslands. Whereas much of Nkwabeng's lands are located within the semi-deciduous forest zone, Dromankese has a mix of extensive grassland and semi-deciduous forests. Though both

⁸The Akan people are a constellation of several clans and sub-ethnicities that have a common culture, including matrilineal descent and root language (despite different dialects). They are found in present day Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. As a meta-ethnicity, they comprise the largest ethnic group in Ghana. For the purposes of this paper, the term native is loosely equated to usufruct and indigene and denotes persons who belong to the land-holding community.

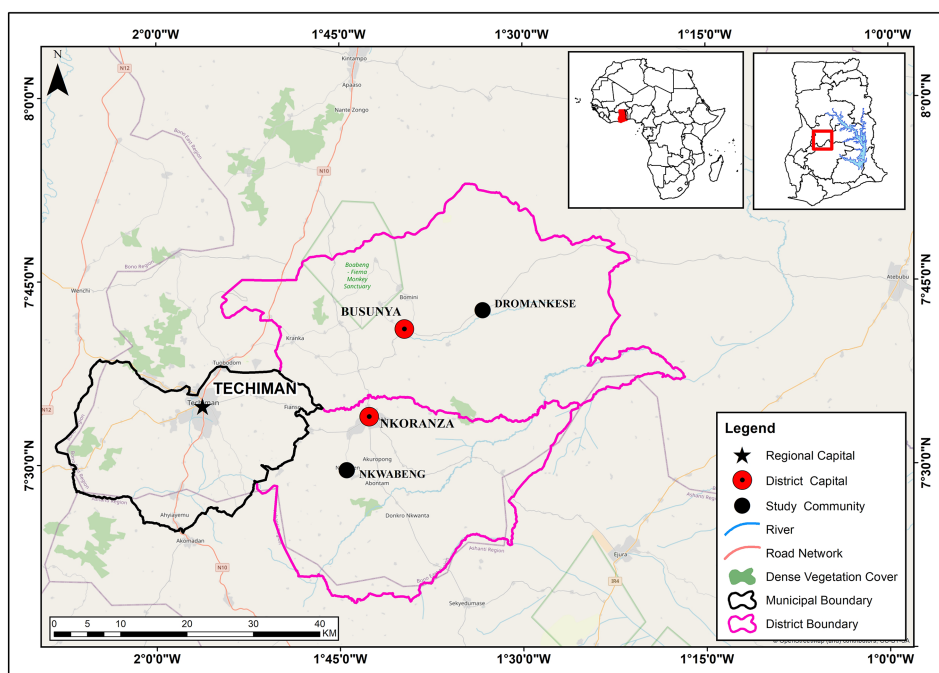


FIGURE 1 Map showing study communities Source: Authors' construction using ESRI's ArcGIS Pro (2020)

study communities manage land in a customary manner, the nature of the vegetative cover and land endowments in Dromankese has encouraged customary licenses⁹ in the grassland areas, whereas forested lands are rented. However, in Nkwabeng, customary licenses are rare, and most market-based land transactions are conducted through rentals. These dynamics determine the mechanisms of land use and access among non-native Akan women who depend on land markets or affinal relations for land access. It further determines the nature of land allocations to native women.

Though the Akan-bono ethnic group dominates the study communities, there are other Akan groups, including Akwapim, Akyem and Ashanti. In consonance with Akan culture, land rights are managed by customary land tenure institutions along a hierarchy of chieftaincy from paramount chief through lower-level divisional chiefs and subchiefs. By virtue of traditional chieftaincy, both study communities are located in the Nkoranza traditional area. However administratively, Nkwabeng is located in the Nkoranza South Municipality, and Dromankese is located in the Nkoranza North District. Both are considered to be important production and market hubs in Ghana, and they consistently rank among the highest producers of maize and cashew. The study communities form part of Ghana's bread basket and tree crop production zone. Thus, they prove important for the commercial production of priority PFJ food crops and PERD tree crops.

4.2 | Sampling techniques, data collection and analysis

Data were collected on the basis of semi-structured individual/household interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) conducted between February and October 2020 (see Table 1). Although the paper concerns women's land rights, it also includes the views of men. These views are important for understand-

⁹Land use in exchange for the payment of an annual token (cash or farm produce or both). Customary license agreements typically exist between chiefs/family/clan heads and non-natives.

TABLE 1 Summary details of interviews and focus group discussions

Area/data collection instrument	Nkoranza traditional area	Nkoranza south district (Nkwabeng)	Nkoranza north district (Dromankese)	Total
Focus group discussions	None	Two women-only Two mixed-gender	None	4
Individual/household interviews	None	20 household interviews of which (a) 12** include women's views (b) Five female-headed households	17* household interviews of which (a) Six comprise women's views	37
Key informant interviews	One paramount chief (Akyeamehene/chief linguist) of the Nkoranza traditional area.	One agricultural extension officer of Nkwabeng One district agriculture officer One divisional chief of Nkwabeng	One agricultural extension officer of Dromankese One district agriculture officer One paramount chief of Dromankese	7

*Five out of the 17 household interviews conducted in Dromankese were done via telephone.

**Jointly solicited or rescheduled complementary interviews with women.

Source: Author's construction (2021).

ing gendered perceptions and determining the social relations of land access. A mix of systematic and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting households. This process first involved creating a sample frame of farmer households in the study communities based on data from the district agricultural offices. A total sample frame of 193 farmer households for Nkwabeng and 247 for Dromankese was created. The sample frame was compiled based on available lists of PFJ and PERD beneficiaries, non-beneficiary cultivators of priority PFJ and PERD crops and functional farmer groups in varied localities within the study communities. Although the list created was useful, it was not exhaustive. For instance, it did not include the totality of PFJ beneficiaries, due to the change in incentive distribution from a coupon system managed by district agricultural officers in 2017 to direct purchases using ID cards by 2019. Thus, the list provided as potential beneficiaries for 2019 could not be substantiated due to the recurrent narratives around farmers registering for inputs without receiving it. Following on, a systematic sampling procedure was used for identifying a preliminary sample of interviewees. The procedure involved determining the sampling interval,¹⁰ choosing a random starting point using Microsoft Excel tools and creating a list of the households to be interviewed based on the sampling interval. The resulting list from the systematic sampling process was purposively adapted to include or to replace some selected individuals/households based on the knowledge of the agricultural extension officers, status (migrant or native), gender (male or female), beneficiary/non-beneficiary status and telephone calls to confirm the availability and interest of farmers in partaking in the study. The emphasis on a household-based study however meant that in many cases the researcher jointly interviewed men and women or first spoke to men as household heads before rearranging follow-up interviews with women. In the latter case, complementary interviews with women were short and focused on verifying claims and understanding gendered dynamics. A total of 37 household interviews, comprising 55 individuals, were conducted, with 20 households (32 individuals) interviewed in Nkwabeng and 17 households (23 individuals) in Dromankese. Whereas five of the interviews were conducted with women heading their own households, an additional 18 included the views of women living in dual-headed households.

¹⁰Sample frame of Dromankese or Nkwabeng divided by a targeted number of households (30). The n^{th} household was selected for the study.

To complement the individual interviews, two women-only FGDs and two mixed-gender/status¹¹ FGDs were conducted. Each FGD comprised at least six participants who were purposively selected on the basis of already organised cooperatives and women groups or at the invitation of the researcher. Women-only FGDs were conducted to clarify issues relating to gendered roles and to solicit information that could not otherwise have been expressed for fear of victimisation in the mixed-gender/status FGDs. The methods of data collection were adapted due to Covid-19 restrictions and a ban on gathering. The Covid-19-related ban was declared after data collection had been completed in Nkwabeng and within a few days of the researcher's arrival in Dromankese. Thus, in line with observing ethical protocols in research, no FGD was conducted in Dromankese. Instead, 12 face-to-face and five telephone interviews were conducted. The telephone interviews proved difficult to conduct due to poor mobile phone availability and connectivity issues and the unwillingness of some interviewees to have lengthy discussions over the phone. Nonetheless, data solicited via telephone interviews proved useful for analysing the nature of women's rights in the study communities.

A total of seven key informant interviews with persons who hold privileged information on the agricultural commercialisation process, the land tenure aspects and the potential implications on women's land rights were conducted. Iterative questioning methods were used during interviews and FGDs. This included periodically summarising and repeating answers to ensure clarity in responses. All interviews and FGDs were conducted in the local language of the study community (Twi), digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. The transcribed texts were supplemented with data from field notebooks. Data were analysed in two cycles of coding using NVivo data analysis tools. First, descriptive codes were used for organising the data based on similarities in text and meaning. These descriptive codes were further merged to establish secondary codes. The secondary codes that reveal patterns within the data were deductively related to theory, and they form the basis of the study findings. Although the research first sought to focus on the state's PFJ policy, it was difficult to decouple the effects of already ongoing processes of commercialisation and the influence of allied policies that encourage the commercialisation of tree crops among smallholders, such as the PERD. Thus, the PERD is discussed relative to its implications on land tenure and the PFJ policy. The PFJ and PERD are evolving policies with many ongoing modifications. The authors acknowledge that there may be future add-ons to the policies, although the findings herein depict ground-level narratives at the time of data collection.

5 | DISCUSSIONS

This section is structured around the research questions posed at the outset of the article. We start by addressing the first question, by discussing how women's interest and ability to commercialise their agricultural production are related to their differential access to land and gendered priorities around intrafamilial land relations. In Sections 5.2 and 5.3, respectively, we show how and why cultural norms surrounding the gendered division of labour affect the gender dynamics of food crop commercialisation, as promoted by the PFJ (Section 5.2), and how this leads to gendered changes in access to land within the food crop sector (Section 5.3). Finally, we point to the possible emergence of different gender dynamics in the tree crop sector, especially for women holding native tenure rights.

5.1 | Gendered disparities in land allocations among different groups of women

Native women did not view themselves as land poor in either study community. They control their own lands, albeit small plots (two to five acres), which were inherited from parents,¹² received from fathers as customary gifts or allo-

¹¹Native and non-native

¹²This includes (a) land that is considered to be personal property of the parents or lands that devolve from mother to children. Self-acquired property typically includes purchased/leased lands and excludes lands annexed by virtue of first cultivation, (b) gifted land from the father's maternal family to the father for which a thanksgiving offering has been made and related divestment from the father's maternal family, which has been concluded. Such land is considered to belong to the father or the father's nuclear family and can be inherited by children.

cated to them for purposes of their subsistence by the extended family. Their rights in land are however constrained by inequitable allocations where men are allotted larger parcels to support their traditional role as family heads. In most cases, women were trained by their mothers to maintain a small farm close to the homesteads, to cultivate varied crops that support the household's dietary needs, to perform domestic tasks and to support their husbands on the farms. Conversely, men were trained by their fathers to be providers by cultivating staple crops. Resulting, men are disproportionately favoured because they can show evidence of the historical cultivation of large parcels. This signals *de facto* ownership and use rights over continuously cultivated land regardless of size. While explaining the gendered disparities in land ownership, a 63-year-old widow noted that "My father didn't share the land equally. At the point of his death, he simply said whichever one you are farming, you should take it. And I used to farm small areas so I got less land than some of my siblings". This disparity was further confirmed by a 56-year-old male farmer who questioned the notion of equality in land allocations by observing that "If you are 4 siblings. 2 girls 2 boys and your father has 4 acres of land, do you think they will share it one each? No they won't. The men will definitely get more". Fathers and grandfathers ensure that the majority of the land goes to the male heirs. The assumption is that when it goes to the women, the land will be eventually lost because it will ultimately be owned and controlled by the husband who could annex it into his own maternal family.

Although native women feel aggrieved and cheated by this customary preference for male children during land allocations, they often do not seek equality. They attribute this to the nonconfrontational nature of customary land management processes that prioritise avoiding conflicts rather than ensuring equality in allocations. This was observed by a FGD participant in Nkwabeng who asserted that "you can't tell them [your brothers] to reduce their farm size so that the land is shared equally among the siblings. You will be labelled as a divisive person who is jealous of your own sibling". So, for reasons of peace and preventing family tensions, women tend to avoid agitations for equal treatment. These perspectives are common because women consider themselves as secondary members of society while viewing men as frontliners. Though the customary system is characterised by constant renegotiations of tenure, women's weak negotiation power and the unwillingness of male kin to give up their privileges prevent equitable access to land. Although women do not feel land constrained, the nature of land allocations in a manner that favours men discourages them from engaging in commercial food crop cultivation, which they presume comprises farmland expansion and related renegotiations of tenure or potential land rental costs.

Non-native women¹³ hold differential access and negotiation rights depending on whether they belong to the larger Akan ethnic group¹⁴ or have husbands who do. In these cases, they are accorded rights of secondary citizenship in the communities. Even then, intrafamilial prioritisation is common; hence, women holding affinal claims are either not allocated land or given token allocations—often small noncommercial parcels—which are rarely renegotiated. The logic of such prioritisation of land allocations was expressed by a 56-year-old farmer when he asked the question "If you are eating and you are not satisfied, do you give an outsider some of the food?...besides when you give the [consanguineal] family member some land, his or her husband or wife also benefits". Akan women who do not have consanguineal family relations nor have been allocated lands by their husbands or affinal families often rent land for subsistence and semi-subsistence cultivation in Nkwabeng. Such rentals can be done without a male representative. Thus, even though the family incomes are often controlled by the men, women in dual-headed households reported some independence in spending within the limits of what was considered standard expenditure, including land rentals. Most of these women have claims to land in their home communities but are not able to access such land for food crop cultivation when they migrate to join their husbands.

The differences in land endowments mean that affinal land allocations are more generous in Dromankese than in Nkwabeng. There was no instance of land rental or negotiation through customary license agreements among non-native Akan women who hold affinal claims to customary land in Dromankese. Generally customary license agreements are the established avenue for land access by all non-natives, but in Dromankese, it is used only by

¹³Non-native women in the study community comprise nonindigenous Akan women, most of whom are married to natives.

¹⁴Women who belong to the larger Akan ethnic group may invoke remote relations to natives. This may provide some advantages in land access.

persons who lack consanguineal or affinal claims to land. The differences in the trajectories of land access among non-native Akan women in Nkwabeng and Dromankese are attributable to the corresponding differences in per capita land endowments. In Nkwabeng, many non-native women depend exclusively on the land rental market. They are either not allocated lands by their affinal families or consider their husband's allocated parcels too small for further subdivision. These women are affected by increased rental costs of land, resulting from increased demand for land for commercialisation purposes. Meanwhile, similar commercialisation interests and related competition for land have not encouraged market-based land access, either through land rentals or through customary license agreements, among non-native Akan women who hold affinal relations in Dromankese.

5.1.1 | Cultural (mis)conceptions and prioritisation of the family farm

In Akan culture, women are usually accorded a lower social status than men. Thus, if a woman is married and she acquires property, it is as if she has done so on behalf of her husband. The Akan Proverb "Obaa to tuo a etwere barima dan mu", literally meaning when a woman buys a gun, it is kept in a man's room, was used by women to give a picturesque illustration of the secondary nature of their land rights in the Nkoranza traditional area. This proverb further connotes a continued reliance on men to negotiate what is thought to be a masculine domain on behalf of women and to prevent them from being cheated by other men. Thus, women are restricted and systematically excluded from negotiating customary property rights under the guise of protection. Another interpretation of the proverb lies in the ownership of a thing and the effective capacity to use it. Thus, it depicts a situation where one may hold legal rights to a resource; however, the use rights may be exercised by another person. This dynamic adequately captures the nature of native women's land rights in the context of commercialisation.

Although women may own land through customary gifting, inheritance or customary allocation, growing interest in agricultural commercialisation among men has encouraged some women to allow husbands to use their uncultivated lands to temporarily expand the family farm. Although this is a common response to good harvests and high profits, women observed that fertiliser subsidies tied to the PFJ have encouraged this behaviour. Men increasingly expand their farms through asserting temporal or seasonal user rights over women's unused, fallowed or rotated lands. Thus, there exists an intrafamilial prioritisation of commercialisation of the family farm, which is primarily controlled by men. This reduces women's ability to rotate between fallowed plots or to engage in commercial cultivation themselves. Periodically, accommodating men's commercial interests is common and is associated with acts of farmland expansion, high financial investment and chemical application, which are considered men's prerogatives as household heads. Nonetheless, land meant for women's subsistence cultivation of crops necessary for supplementing the family meal is left untouched and not used for accommodating the expansion of the family farm. Here, women's access to land remains undisputed; however, the user rights practically rest with men. As such, the food security of the family is safeguarded, whereas the opportunities for women's commercialisation are curtailed.

5.2 | Gender-based narratives and division of labour

Narratives of male physical strength and female weakness are central to women's inability to engage in food crop commercialisation. Men are thought to be physically stronger than women; hence, they have the advantage of exerting physical strength and providing most of the labour needed for cultivating and maintaining a commercial smallholder farm. Many women bemoaned their physical limitations in undertaking activities, such as land preparation, which precedes each annual or biannual cultivation cycle of priority food crops. Such inadequacies are further explained by requirements of ploughing, tilling and creating ridges that accompany land preparation for commercial food crop cultivation but are not required when preparing subsistence parcels. These conceptions of masculine physical strength are interpreted through religious precincts of male superiority and women as mere helpers to men. A

male focus group participant in Nkwabeng observed that “the women don't have strength. We were the first ones to be created and God only used one of our ribs to create them ... so, we [men and women] don't have the same physical strength and it can never be the same”. These views are corroborated by women themselves who contend that in as much as they try, they will not be able to farm like the men. They fear facing repercussions of sickness when they exert as much physical strength as men on the farms.

Women's domestic roles include preparing the family meal and nurturing children. These conceptions directly affect the gendered division of labour between productive and reproductive tasks. Even in instances where women had bigger lands or the capacity to request the same, they were constrained by their domestic responsibilities. These constraints were observed by a 48-year-old woman who opined that “As a woman, you need to have your own farm and also help on the man's farm [family farm]. So, how can you farm profitably with this double burden? He doesn't come and help you on your farm as much as you will go and help him on his farm. And if the men go to the farm, they will say bring us food, water. But as for you whether you will eat or not, the man doesn't care”. Men agreed that women may not be able to engage in commercial farming because they need to perform some domestic and reproductive responsibilities that aid the men's commercialisation efforts and that reduce the incidence of conflict and divorce.

Within agriculture, women are resigned to so-called soft roles, including fetching water, farming legumes and seed planting. The activities are thought to be feminine because they require patience and involve less physical activity. Conversely, farm management activities that are considered dangerous and arduous (handling of chemicals and land preparation) are masculine activities. Women in general do not challenge the narratives of their weakness, whereas male respondents on their part rationalise the division of tasks as acts of protection to prevent women from bearing the brunt of hard work or risks of exposure to chemicals that may affect their reproductive health.

The gendered division of labour that springs from these narratives has direct consequences for the gendered opportunities surrounding commercialisation. Although the state-led commercialisation process has a strong emphasis on chemicalisation and more specifically fertiliser subsidies, commercial production also requires the handling of nonsubsidised chemicals, including pesticides and weedicides, which women can only do through hiring male labour. In response to the emphasis on chemicalisation, commercialisation on the ground is evidenced by farmland expansion. Some farmers reasoned that the availability of subsidised inputs presents a unique opportunity to maximise profits through farmland expansion. Others observed that the application of chemicals requires better farm management, with farm expansion being necessary to attain profit margins commensurate with their efforts. Additionally, the preference towards low-yielding local seed varieties necessitates farmland expansion to compensate for increases in farm expenditure. These views resonate with findings by Houssou et al. (2018) who noted that changes in agriculture in Ghana are aligned with labour-saving motives rather than land-saving motives. The process of extensification being prompted by these drivers excludes most women who are perceived to lack the physical strength required for farmland expansion. Women's relatively weak financial position further prevents them from engaging in commercial farming. In both study communities, women have higher farm expenditure because they depend more on waged labour. Women therefore perceived that nonfarm pursuits, such as trading, provided better value for their money. They reasoned that commercial farming requires continuous investments until harvest, whereas petty trading, which they are presumed to have a natural ability for, provides periodic returns that can be reinvested. In essence, women's maintenance of small noncommercial plots is a mechanism for household income diversification, with women using their perceived feminine advantage to engage in nonfarm economic activities with quick returns while enabling them also to conduct their domestic chores.

Conceptions of physical strength and relatively better access to financial capital form the basis for masculine biases in commercialisation and access and use of PFJ inputs. Men clamour for the inputs to support their cultivation because they perceive they can leverage on their physical strength for much of the farm management duties. Although some women acknowledged interest in commercialisation and receipt of the state-mandated maximum

quantities of PFJ fertilisers (10 NPK¹⁵ and five urea), women in dual-headed households often do so for the benefit of the family farm controlled by the man rather than using the inputs themselves on their own farms. For women, the increased costs of farming that come with commercialisation are prohibitive because they are unable to manage such costs through farm expansion. The implication of inequitable PFJ incentives on women is the consolidation of men's land holdings and entrenchment of already existing inequities in land distribution.

5.3 | Land tenure implications of PFJ: A summary

The foregoing discussions show that women's tenurial rights in the context of commercialisation are affected by two parallel processes. First, through the auxiliary demands that the PFJ policy incentives bring and secondly the social and economic incompatibility between women's modes of production and food crop commercialisation. The PFJ policy conditions tenure to the extent that its implementation requires auxiliary expenditure on pesticides, weedicides and land preparation that women are unable to bear. This is explained by financial limitations and the high dependence of women's modes of production on hired labour. Meanwhile, their male counterparts who have better financial standing reduce their farm expenditure through expending their own labour. Furthermore, the prevailing context of the study communities conditions the resultant gendered opportunities for commercialisation. These opportunities are limited for women due to inequitable land-sharing arrangements, sociocultural (mis)conceptions, prioritisation of the family farm and the gendered division of labour. These culminate in reducing women's interest and capacity to assert their inherent land holding rights over communal lands that are held by male caretakers and often distributed on a need-to-use basis. Men, however, are not limited by these factors. The effect of these two parallel processes is different levels of participation between men and women in commercial smallholder production and similar differential participation levels in the demand for and cultivation of communal land resources. Thus, the low level of women's land holdings in the context of commercialisation is not entirely because they are structurally prevented from doing so as shown, for example, by land allocations that favour men. Instead, their ability to assert their hold on communal land is mediated by restrictive factors that limit their capacity for commercialisation. Similar arguments are made by Whitehead and Tsikata (2003) and Lambrecht (2016) who observed that women's control of less land and smaller parcels is not fully a function of their inability to access land but is partly explained by the lack of related factors of production, such as inputs and financial capital.

5.4 | Cashew cultivation as a more gender-neutral alternative?

Although much of the inequities relate to the cultivation of food crops, native women feel that their land rights are substantially improved with the cultivation of cashew because it neither requires the exertion of much physical strength, extensive use of chemicals nor access to significant amounts of financial capital. Cashew cultivation simply requires women to source seeds often freely from other farmers, to nurse, to plant, to harvest and to sell while undertaking periodic farm management functions, such as weed control and creation of fire belts in the dry season. Women are also willing to bear the one-time cost for land preparation because such cost constitutes a negligible proportion of their expected future returns from the cashew crop. Thus, with little money or strength, a woman can own a cashew farm and can hold reasonable expectations of reaping long-term benefits from the perennial crop. Because cashew does not need daily care, it, for instance, allows women to dedicate time to fulfilling their domestic tasks or to engage in other economic activities that they are socially construed to have competitive advantage in, such as trading. While fulfilling these social roles that have little bearing on land tenure, cashew farming allows women to seek and to maintain active hold of communal land. Meanwhile, the time commitments required for commercial food crop cultivation

¹⁵Fertiliser that contains significant proportions of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium

rarely give them the possibility to perform domestic tasks, to engage in other economic activities and to still maintain active hold of communal land.

Though women are prevented from farming cashew on their affinal family lands, they seek land and cultivate cashew on their consanguineal family lands. Rather than sharing agreements with family, which is common in cashew farming in the study communities, native women simply renegotiate land averaging two to five acres from male kin for the establishment of their cashew farms. Thus, although native women's land rights remain unclaimed for a long time, they are not extinguished in their consanguineal families; they are simply dormant and held by men. These women's inability to overcome socio-economic barriers and to make claims to land for commercial food crop production partly explains their low control of communal land but does not signal perpetual loss of their land rights. Practically, women reserve the right to request and be granted land as long as they hold direct lineage claims to such land and the land is not under active cultivation by another sibling or male kin. These requests for land by women are common when the male kin have already established cashew on part of the land. In Dromankese, the requests for land are dealt with by demarcating new parcels; however, the same requests in Nkwabeng are managed by allocating farther, less fertile lands or by converting rotated food crop lands to cashew farms. These distinctions in the mechanisms of accommodating women's requests for land in either study community are explained by the differences in land endowments with Dromankese having larger land reserves than Nkwabeng.

Additionally, the mechanisms of land access by male kin determine whether and why women's requests for land will be granted. Most female cashew farmers in Nkwabeng claim joint ownership of the land that was gifted to uterine siblings but held by the male sibling who acts as a caretaker. Male kin also have a customary obligation of care to his sister and to his nephews/nieces and may fulfil this obligation by allocating land upon request for cashew cultivation. Conversely, women in Dromankese may request for and establish cashew on family land. Whereas this practice is outlawed¹⁶ in Nkwabeng as a proprietary claim to communal land, it is allowed in Dromankese upon express permission of the family or stool and as long as the size of the cashew farm corresponds with the local average of five acres and below. Interviewees reasoned that cashew farms below five acres were established for subsistence reasons and falls within the remit of subsistence obligation that the family owes to natives. Beyond five acres, a sharing arrangement with the family is often agreed. The practice of establishing cashew on family land is common because Dromankese has large land reserves. In both study communities, women are not so concerned about the location and quality of the land granted because cashew farming does not require daily attention, yet they perceive the crop as resistant and able to thrive under difficult conditions.

Relatedly, the customary recognition of cashew cultivation as proprietary claim to land with the potential to lead to individual annexation of communal land is central to women's claims in Nkwabeng. They recognise that most farmers engaged in food crop commercialisation exercise primary rights of subsistence that can be renegotiated at the end of each planting period. Thus, the inherent rights of existing and future generations who may not necessarily exercise active cultivation rights are protected. However, the perennial nature of the cashew crop risks extinguishing these inherent land rights and with it the caretaker responsibilities of male kin. Thus, some women's request and consequent allocation of communal land for cashew production partly arise from their desire to secure their share of communal land. In explaining this, a 45-year-old women from Nkwabeng opined that "Oh that land that was given to us by our mother for all of us to eat on [communal land]if I see that my brother is planting cashew on it, I will also ask for my share to plant cashew ... Because that cashew farm will be inherited by his children and grandchildrenWhen he [brother] dies, the family will only take a small share of the cashew farm as custom demands and the large share will go to my brother's children. There will be nothing left for my childrenSo I must also ask for my

¹⁶The practice is outlawed because of the prolonged lifetime of tree crops that often transcends the lifetime of the cultivator. In a few instances, it is allowed with conditions of (a) equally sharing the farm with the family or (b) lifetime benefit of the farmer after which the entire farm becomes family property.

share of the land to farm cashew". Still, women are guided by the customary principle of avoiding conflicts rather than requesting a fair share of land.

5.4.1 | Land tenure implications of PERD—A summary

Although the reach of PERD is relatively low in both study communities owing to already existent interest and knowledge of cashew cultivation, a few women noted that they had benefited from the state's free cashew seedling¹⁷ support and extension services. Their interest in cashew cultivation is further honed by the expectation of minimum guaranteed prices set by the tree crop development authority as part of PERD's policy objective of regulating the nontraditional tree crops sector. With this, some native women expressed interest in expanding their cashew farms to improve their economic outcomes. This perspective is captured in the words of a 47-year-old female farmer when she asserted that "I heard that the government wants to treat cashew like cocoa ... the price will already be established so the aggregators can stop cheating us. Ei.. if they treat cashew like cocoa, we will be very happy. We will even farm more". The women acknowledge that such farm expansion may warrant renegotiations of their land tenure rights or commitment to land-sharing arrangements with their families. Regardless of the shape or form of the consequent tenure, women's land use rights are significantly improved when they assert cultivation rights over communal land. This is in contrast to the hands-off approach reinforced by financial and sociocultural constraints women face in their quest to undertake commercial food crop production, allowing men's use rights to take precedence over theirs in the process. Thus, whereas PFJ has only served to consolidate masculine hold on land, the cultivation of cashew as encouraged by PERD has improved women's commercial cultivation of low-investment and low-maintenance tree crops and along with it improved native women's demand and access to land. Nonetheless, these improved land rights still place men at a significant advantage as they retain the right of first choice and often choose to cultivate more fertile and strategically located parcels. Thus, women are often recipients of lands for tree crop cultivation that the male heirs do not prioritise. These lands may be marginal, far from homesteads or costly to prepare for planting.

In summary, the contrasts in land access capabilities for commercial food crop or tree crop production are varied due to the requirements women need to fulfil for either. On the one hand, they are limited by restrictive barriers in their quest to cultivate priority PFJ food crops on a commercial scale, which in turn limits their demand for communal land. On the other hand, however, cashew cultivation is not as capital- and labour-intensive; hence, it fits the nature of women's production in the study communities. Additionally, the proprietary nature of cashew cultivation as understood through the prism of prevailing customary law has encouraged land renegotiation and sharing that benefit women more than land rights that emanate from food crop commercialisation. The arguments advanced do not seek to depict improvements in women's land access solely as a function of PERD. Instead, it highlights how already ongoing local interests in cashew cultivation are further heightened by PERD. It further shows how the barriers to commercialisation are comparatively lower for tree crops than food crops, which in turn improves the potential and capacity for women to seek and to cultivate communal land.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

The paper shows how many women are limited by structural factors that prevent them from equitably benefiting from the state's PFJ policy. These factors are embedded within a mix of financial, cultural and religious motivations that hold land and non-land-related implications.

¹⁷quick-maturing, disease-resistant and high-yielding seedlings

The effect of this in land-constrained areas is depicted by increased land rental costs as a result of competition encouraged by interest in food and tree crop commercialisation. Meanwhile, women in the land-abundant community rarely engage in land rentals or customary license agreements (often used by non-natives) and instead depend on affinal family land allocations. The differences in affinal claims to land in both communities are defined by the related community land endowments. Theoretically, the findings show that food crop commercialisation has few positive impacts on land access and redistribution among women when they are constrained by other already existing confounding factors. In this case, the PFJ policy conditions women's commercialisation capacity because its implementation on the ground requires auxiliary factors, such as pesticides and weedicides as well as recurrent land preparation costs that women who already have weaker finances are unable to bear. Additionally, the prevailing sociocultural and economic state of the study communities, which encourages a gendered division of labour, prioritisation of the male-managed family farm and disparities in land allocation, limits women's capacity for commercialisation. With many attributes of commercialisation favouring men, women's demands for communal land remain low, allowing men to consolidate their hold onto the land albeit without dispossessing women. This further deepens already existing inequities in masculine and feminine hold of communal lands. Women compensate by engaging in nonfarm activities, typically petty trading, that they view as their natural economic domain.

Conversely some native women have been encouraged by organic interest in cashew farming as well as the PERD policy to renegotiate or to reclaim usufructuary land access. These improvements in land rights are explained by the particular nature of cashew as a crop that requires low capital, low labour and low maintenance costs yet provides a good long-term return. Empirically, the finding suggests that native women's land rights in their consanguineal families are not entirely extinguished. Their rights to family land or to lands held by male uterine siblings are simply dormant. Given the right circumstances that do not interfere with their social duties or do not require high financial capability and exertion of physical strength, women are able to reactivate some claims to these dormant land rights. Their claims are further embedded in the need to secure a share of communal land and to avoid its total annexation by male kin through establishment of long-maturity tree crops. This notwithstanding, land allocations for commercial cultivation of tree crops still favour men, leaving women with lands that the male kin do not prioritise. Thus, the gendered attributes of food and tree crop commercialisation processes are shaped and contribute to shaping land tenure outcomes for women.

Although the commercialisation intentions of PFJ and PERD are laudable, it is essential that policies of such magnitude do not serve to negatively offset the balance of land rights against women groups who hold already tenuous land rights. Future policies could consider the characteristics of beneficiary zones and could provide targeted solutions while also leveraging on the potential of low-investment and low-maintenance tree crops to improve women's land rights. Though the findings are contextual and limited to the study communities, they provide insights into the nature of land tenure in a food crop and cashew production zone in Ghana. These competing cropping dynamics and their implications on food security and the rural economy could be the subject of future studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research acknowledges the contributions by Agnes Andersson Djurfeldt and Magnus Jirström who both offered advice for the production of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Selorm Kobla Kugbega undertook literature review, data collection and analysis. Agnes Andersson Djurfeldt reviewed the relevant theories. Both Selorm Kobla Kugbega and Agnes Andersson Djurfeldt reviewed the entire manuscript and made conclusions and recommendations.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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How to cite this article: Kugbega, S. K., & Andersson Djurfeldt, A. (2022). Gendered dynamics of state-led smallholder commercialisation in Ghana. The case of Nkoranza traditional area. *Journal of International Development*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3707>