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Forest Food Chains, Timber and Rural Livelihoods

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The Political and Social Context of Structural Adjustment in Africa

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Introduction

In recent years, the land question in Africa has become the focus of fresh debate on the content and direction of socioeconomic change on the continent. The introduction of structural adjustment, the rolling back of the state, the decentralisation of the governmental system, the emergence of new agendas of community development relating to people-centred development and popular participation, the growth of NGOs, and the creation of a new role for the institutions of civil society, have all resulted in a call for new land reform programmes that are consonant with these developments.

Old-style land reform emerged in the era when modernisation theory was dominant. The dominant social institutions in the rural areas were seen as backward. They were seen as acting as a brake on the efforts of aspiring and ambitious farmers. Land reform called for the introduction of formal land titling programmes that would give farmers security in land and enable them to use land as collateral for loans from banks for investment in modern agricultural technology. Old-style land reform addressed the need to replace allegedly outmoded land tenure forms, such as sharecropping, with fixed monetary land rental forms.

A more radical form of old-style land reform called for the state to nationalise land and appoint allocative authorities to administer these lands. Land reform was seen as necessary to strengthen security of tenure, abolish private landlordism, equalise conditions of land allocation, reduce litigation, etc. Land should be allocated according to criteria that would permit optimum holding sizes for agriculture and durable conditions of tenure. To prevent abuse by civil servants, the allocative authority could consist of representatives of local and district communities, including the chiefs. However, since the landlord class often has considerable influence in government, it is unrealistic to expect a policy of radical land reform to be easily implemented outside revolutionary conditions and it becomes practical to fall back on a regulatory reform programme to ensure that the terms of tenure are secure (Arhin, 1985). The problems with introducing radical land reform into existing social formations lie with the entrenched political interests of the ruling elite and their allies (de Janvry, 1981).

In recent years, a new perspective on land reform has gained ground. This argues that traditional land tenure regimes should be retained in some form or other, since they embody important principles concerned with equity and social redistribution and the maintenance of ecological balance.

They are also dynamic and exhibit the capacity to evolve and adapt to changing conditions. This position is comprehensively stated by Field-Juma (1996:17-18):

Indigenous resource management systems reflected the way communities organised their lives within the constraints of the environment in which they lived. Decision-making institutions focused on utilising and managing environmental resources based on the knowledge of the community. This was done within the framework of their world view, in other words in accordance with their ethics, norms and beliefs ... Resource use systems relied upon building reciprocal relations among families and communities, for example through livestock sharing, and with other groups and communities through trade, marriage and advisers. These relations redistributed risk and strengthened social obligation to be utilised during times of drought, pestilence or war ... Indigenous natural resource systems were rarely static, and showed a notable degree of change over time in response to social and economic changes, new technologies, natural calamities, migration and population change, subordination and war. It has been observed that over time customary tenure systems in Africa have spontaneously evolved "from more diffuse and collective to more specific and exclusionary individual rights" in response to population pressure and commercialisation of agriculture.

Similarly, Okoth-Ogendo (1994: 23-4) has argued:

In former days, indigenous land use communities recognised the harshness of the environment and sought to cope with it through a number of institutional structures, principles and techniques. Over time these communities also devised ways of addressing the population issue, especially as it approached critical dimensions in particular localities. The most important institutional structure through which communities ensured proper management of agricultural land resources was land tenure. Tenure regimes, it will be recalled, define the manner in which land resources may be obtained and the conditions subject to which they may be used. African tenure regimes did this by distinguishing clearly between rights of access to these resources and the loci of power of control over their use ... The purpose of vesting the control function in the political authority of the community—the head of the family, the common ancestor or a council of elders—was generally three-fold. First and foremost, it was meant to guarantee security of opportunity for all who had access rights to those resources. If there were a possibility that some of these rights would be taken away, the tenure system assured that these would occur only in exceptional circumstances, and only upon a collective decision made at the highest level of social organisation. Second, it was designed to ensure equity between and across generations. Thus the control function determined the rate of expansion or contraction of membership in the unit by means other than birth, and the distribution or redistribution of access rights in response, *inter alia*, to increased demand for land. Third, the control function also determined important land use decisions, such as specific land usages in particular areas of community territory, including planting, weeding and harvesting times, the duration of fallow periods, and the nature of resource preservation or conservation measures, where these required collective action by the community.

These approaches are rooted in conceptions of environmental governance and local-level development. They have developed in reaction to the concept of *the tragedy of the commons* (Hardin, 1968) and argue for the vitality of community land use. They argue that customary land management was concerned with forms of sustainable land management that drew from a broad knowledge base of the environment. These land management systems have been undermined by centralised control of land administration, which emphasises individual land titling and private property rather than ecological stewardship. This results in a situation of conflict between the few within local communities who use modern agrarian reform legislation to appropriate community resources through individual land titlings and the majority of the community who still regard land as community property. While customary forms of land management are undermined through their lack of recognition by the national land administration and a lack of a juridical framework for asserting the "indigenous perspective", national instruments and reforms for land administration have not been incorporated into the social, cultural and economic milieu of the land users. Thus, new forms of administration need to be developed that create a better interface and integration between customary land forms and state institutions for land management.

An important factor that has influenced this emerging of an emphasis on indigenous land tenure has been widespread abuse by state organs of land reform. Governments have used powers over land administration to appropriate land for members of the political elite for the development of modern large-scale agriculture and land speculation. In Ghana, Kasanga (1996: 100) has argued that the land machinery has operated only in the interests of a select minority and has been "inequitable, unjust, callous, inefficient, wasteful and hopelessly corrupt". The institutions for land management at the district level are weak. In contrast with this he contends, the principal tenets of customary land tenure are progressive and have successfully defined the sustainable management of land over the generations and contain checks and balances to control abuse of authority by chiefs. He advocates policies that promote the active involvement of traditional community political structures in land management and the development of a community land secretariat.

In these studies, the positive attributes of traditional land tenure systems—the equity, social distribution characteristics and the checks and balances within the system—tend to be asserted as ideal principles rather than shown to operate in practice through empirical data or case studies. As a policy instrument, there is a danger that this assertion of a democratic principle of traditional land administration may serve the interests of the rural ruling

class and may serve as a means of ideologically justifying their demand for the state to leave rural land administration to traditional rulers.

Many of the arguments for incorporating indigenous land management institutions and land authorities into national land administration are couched in terms of environmental governance, popular participation and preservation of the vitality of cultural forms and local knowledge systems. Many of these studies refer to the specifics and peculiarity of African social formations. However, as will become evident in the next section, many of these arguments originate from and have been drawn from theoretical debates in development economics about the role of land reform in promoting agricultural modernisation.

In particular, they derive from a central paradox that has emerged in the context of introducing land reform into structural adjustment frameworks—while land reform has been promoted as a means of smoothing the operation of market forces in agriculture, land reform involves the intervention of a state, which, according to the tenets of neo-classical liberalisation theory, should be shrinking. The rationale for introducing land reform is promoting efficiency by reducing the transaction costs of a landlord economy. But by promoting land titling and cadastral surveys, the transaction costs of the state are increased. Thus, much of the recent economic literature on land reform is concerned with modes of land administration that will enable communities to absorb the transaction costs of institutional management. In this context, traditional land tenure systems have acquired new significance.

Land reform and agricultural modernisation

The land question first came to prominence in mainstream Western development theory in the early post-war period. Land reform was associated with the aim of stemming the red revolution by promoting the green revolution of technological innovation in the agricultural sector. Myrdal (1968; 1959) argued that industrialisation could not absorb the mass of underemployed and unemployed labour in the countryside and that promoting of an increasing efficiency in agricultural production was a precondition for the development of sustained growth. Land reform was a vital component of agrarian development which would bring about a more equitable distribution of land. A more equitable distribution of land would result in significant expansion of food production, since smallholder farmers exhibit higher productivity per area of land than landlords who gain their incomes from rents or from large farmers who may be unwilling to increase productivity because they suspect that this may lead to lower agricultural prices. Land reform was initially formulated in 1950s development theory as an institutional reform that would facilitate adoption of a package of modern

technologies, inputs, cultivation techniques and credit facilities to foster increased food production by small producers.

The historical peculiarities of the post-war period—the defeat of Japan and occupation of Japan, Taiwan and Korea by American forces, and the collusion of the large landlords with fascism and the Japanese occupation, has enabled radical land reform to be carried out in these countries. However, in other countries, such as Mexico, the Philippines and Malaysia it has floundered, and the political power of the landlord class has enabled it to derail land reform (Hayami *et al*, 1990; de Janvry, 1981). Given the lack of power of small farmers, radical land reform for small cultivators has been supplanted by land reform for the benefit of large farmers.

Land reform in Africa has been considered a special case. The abundance of land in Africa has been regarded as a peculiarity that calls for a new approach to land reform. It has been argued that the lack of a land market in Africa prevents the emergence of private land rights and security in particular plots of land. This hinders the development of more efficient agriculture by preventing ambitious farmers from expanding their holdings, results in considerable expenditure of capital on land litigation and hampers the development of credit facilities for small farmers who could use land titling as collateral. Thus, the essence of land reform in the African setting is aimed at redefining the terms and conditions under which land is held and promoting the development of a land market that will facilitate the emergence of capital markets in land and credit markets for the adoption of new technologies (Harrison, 1987). The original arguments in favour of radical land reform in Asia—the efficiency of smallholder agriculture and the provision of an infrastructure to promote smallholder agriculture—have been replaced by another set of arguments—the need to create security of ownership to promote the interests of more ambitious or aspiring capitalist farmers and entrepreneurs willing to invest in agriculture.

In recent years, this perspective has been questioned and new approaches to the land question in Africa now stress the dynamic evolution of land rights and their responses to market forces. As land becomes increasingly scarce in response to population growth, it will acquire increasing economic value, and institutions will arise that restrict access to land and engender an active land market (Feder and Noronha 1987; Feeny, 1988). Carter and Zimmerman (1994) argue that land markets emerge as a consequence of the shift from economic relations embedded in customary kinship structures to the mediation of the market. This results in individualised and stratified production and risk-coping strategies that replace the social safety net functions of extended kin. In times of stress and underproduction of basic foodstuffs, the poor sell land to smooth consumption needs thereby creating a land market. Better endowed farmers purchase land to increase

their production and wealth. Thus, increasing market integration of rural producers creates endogenous pressures for the emergence of a land market.

The thesis that population pressures and agricultural commercialisation create pressures for private land rights has resulted in a debate over the need to introduce formal land registration and title by the state. Until the late 1980s, the dominant paradigm for land reform in Africa was concerned with the central role of the state in consolidating and formalising private land titling and security in land (World Bank, 1989; Harrison, 1987). Since then, land policy analysts have become more cautious and question the need for the state to interfere in processes that are being defined and managed at the local level (Mightot-Adholla *et al*, 1991; Bruce, 1993; Bruce and Mightot-Adholla, 1994; Platteau, 1992; Okoth-Ogendo, 1993).

Mightot-Adholla *et al* (1991) argue that African tenure systems and Western property rights systems should not be seen as opposites but points along a continuum from communal systems to individual land rights. Drawing on the results of surveys carried out in Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda, they conclude that tenure systems in Africa occupy different points along this continuum in relation to the degree of population pressure and commercialisation within their related agricultural systems. However, they found no relationship between variations in land rights and productivity and argue that the major constraints on land productivity include rural infrastructure, market efficiency, and availability of and information on new technologies. They argue that governments should focus on improving these facilities, which are the major constraints to agricultural productivity, rather than in developing costly land titling programmes. State land titling programmes should only arise in the advent of a demand for change from below and of increased commercial agricultural opportunities.

Similarly, Bruce (1993) has cautioned against developing costly land titling programmes and suggests that "community-based solutions" need to be explored. Platteau (1996) has also suggested that village systems are able to evolve to meet new needs. Regardless of social differentiation, African village communities provide important social security functions to their members and ensure that all can participate in new opportunities. In contrast with this, state intervention to promote individual land titlings may work against particular groups within the community that may have the use of land but no control over it, such as women. Platteau advocates an approach that seeks to reinstitutionalise indigenous land tenure systems and informal procedures in land administration.

A common thread running through these recent approaches to land reform in Africa is the concept of *transaction costs*. In the *new institutional economics*, it has been argued that neo-classical economic equilibrium theory has neglected the costs of transactions that are internalised in the

organisation of a firm, but which enable corporate firms (with economies of scale) to organise more efficiently in the market. Firms do not only carry out economic transactions, but also create an administrative and institutional framework to regulate and enhance these transactions and the flow of information that informs the transactions (North, 1990).

In recent years, development theory has become preoccupied with the problems of creating a favourable institutional framework and transparent regulatory conditions as part of a favourable climate for encouraging international investment in Africa. This concern has grown out of early structural adjustment programme directives roll back the state through divestiture and market liberalisation. In this process, it has been recognised that market mechanisms can only function efficiently when embedded in appropriate social institutions, including a generalised morality that promotes honesty in impersonal transactions and the general participation of institutions of civil society in the management of socioeconomic reform. Creating institutional frameworks for smooth market operation may involve considerable expenditure due to high transaction and information costs. Given these caveats, recent frameworks for economic restructuring are seeking modes of creating appropriate institutional links between the state and the market, and between the administrative functions of the state and the organisations of civil society. This approach is now being incorporated into structural adjustment programmes. It involves a greater devolution of administrative and social welfare functions to community organisations and attempts to achieve better integration between civil organisations and state functions.

As structural adjustment programmes moved from concerns with market liberalisation to appropriate institutional reforms, land tenure reform began to feature on the agenda. The major objective of land reform was to promote secure rights in property by creating a regulatory framework through land registration and title. However, by the early 1990s, concerns about the cost of land titling programmes and the ability of the state to supervise them transparently and honestly has resulted in growing caution about state-administered land reform. Hence, Bruce (1993:50) comments:

Tenure systems are part of larger political and economic systems, and tenure reform decisions are never dictated just by the facts of the case and development theory. Politics often plays a large and legitimate role, with politicians using tenure reforms to build constituencies, to undermine the opponents, and to realise their vision of a good society ... [S]tate leasehold is another form of individualisation of tenure, and where leaseholds are long enough, they potentially offer many of the same advantages as individual ownership. The experience with this system has, however, been seriously marred by abuse of the state's power of land allocation to allow bureaucratic and other elites to grab land.

Having established the lack of neutrality of the state in land administration and its propensity to siphon "economic rents", Bruce (1993:50-1) argues that farmers' interests in title to land may arise from concerns that "a title conferred by the state may be the best way to defend against reallocation of land by the state and its local representatives, whom they see as the major threat to their security of tenure", rather than "from a desire to change agricultural practices and increase production". Thus state-implemented land reform may result in high transaction costs that do not promote market transparency. They are not driven by popular demand and may distort the aims of producing institutional reforms that promote and regulate impersonal relations. Given this caveat, the state should rather facilitate the evolution of indigenous land tenure relations and community organisations that can administer land relations and absorb transaction costs. In this context, the emphasis on the capacity of indigenous land tenure systems to evolve into a land market in response to changing factors of production helps to justify the position that land reform must arise from endogenous demand, rooted in the transaction-cost-bearing institutions of civil society (i.e., that communities and land users must bear the costs of land administration).

This perspective on land tenure, which stresses the capacity of indigenous community development organisations to manage the administration of land, reflects the rise of new paradigms for development based on decentralised and participatory models, the importance of "indigenous knowledge", and the rationality of strengthening local capacities to manage and implement development initiatives and programmes. In place of the aims of post-war modernisation to replace the "traditional" agricultural sector by a modern sector, this new approach seeks to create new modes of integrating rural communities engaged in peasant production into a modern agricultural service sector.

Recent efforts to redefine land tenure reform focus on creating a more flexible, pragmatic and adaptive policy environment. They attempt to integrate various agricultural sectors, strata and interests by developing different programmes of tenure reform to meet differing needs and perspectives. In place of land reform to meet the needs of smallholder farmers or breaking up "traditional" or "semi-feudal" land relationships in order to promote equity and efficiency, the major emphasis is now on promoting endogenous, transaction-cost-reducing rural institutions.

One variant of this approach advocates the development of a dual system of tenure rights, in which individual title coexists with group or collective title, as was the case in settler colonies. This approach has been developed by Platteau (1992:245):

A dual system of land rights would thereby come into existence. Private rights in land would coexist with communal rights and both sets of rights would be officially guaranteed. Moreover private land titlings would not be transferable (owing to the need to contain disequalising tendencies) whereas group titles would remain vested in the community concerned as long as the latter wanted it so.

Behind the plea for a dual system lie concerns with preserving smallholder agriculture as a nexus between land and labour which can develop direct linkages with capital that will not be brokered by land speculators, landlords and large farmer-traders:

Since labour market imperfections in the forms of supervising constraints are inherent in the labour process and are especially costly to overcome when social relations are tense, the government ought to support a programme of land allocation allowing only owner-cultivation to emerge or subsist. Given the pervasive presence of land, credit and insurance market imperfections, the stabilisation of such an agrarian structure would involve both the granting of officially registered individual titles to small peasant cultivators and the checking of restratification tendencies through state regulation of land market transactions (Platteau, 1992:248).

A second variant argues that the distribution of farm sizes and the existence of institutions such as sharecropping is based on factor scarcities and product demand. The neo-classical approach to sharecropping—which argues that it is irrational, inefficient and exploitative because the amount of the crop surrendered by the producer to the landlord is out of proportion to the land rent and the landlord's contribution to the arrangement—is being challenged. According to the new institutional economics, sharecropping continues to exist because it is rational and efficient and serves the needs of both parties to the transaction. It is attractive to the tenant who may not have sufficient capital to rent land and who has no access to markets for credit and insurance. Its risk-spreading features (in which the producer gets a share of the profits or a share of the losses at harvest, rather than paying a fixed rent in advance) are important in providing a market for credit and insurance. For the landlord, it has important functions in reducing the transaction costs of searching for, screening, and supervising hired labour (Bardhan, 1984). Paradoxically, these are the very attributes that were identified as characterising the efficiency of smallholder farmers.

Lipton (1993) has argued that the evidence suggests that both family smallholder farms and large-scale farms can be endogenous-incentive compatible institutions. The family farm is regarded as the most efficient system of farm production for the reason that it has residual claims to profit and higher incentives for members to work harder than hired labour (Binswanger and Deininger, 1993). However, the family farm suffers from

problems of economic scale which make it difficult for it to introduce some types of technology and services. Banks and marketing firms prefer to transact in large quantities rather than deal with many small production units. The strengths of large-scale agricultural units lie in the provision of economic functions such as processing, transport and marketing; services such as tractors, combine-harvesters and irrigation machinery, where the cost of the machinery may be too high for individual small family farms to bear, and credit, security and risk-insurance that are a prerequisite for smallholders to operate. These economies of scale can be met by well-designed marketing and credit cooperatives and by institutions that organise group lending schemes. The costs of assembling products from many sellers and the provision of inputs for small farmers can be reduced by eliminating barriers for traders and by promoting contract farming (Binswanger and Deininger, 1993) or "power compatible" approaches (Lipton, 1993) that support new structures that create a synergy between small farmers and larger agricultural units. This new paradigm replaces the earlier concerns with control over farm production that informed land reform for agricultural modernisation in the 1950s, with a new institutional framework for the integration of production—from input production to processing and marketing—that characterises agribusiness.

The argument that endogenous institutions are efficient because they continue to exist has been extended from small family farms to sharecropping arrangements and other forms of production relations that used to be considered as unequal or exploitative. However, this argument is essentially tautological—an institution is efficient because it exists and it exists because it continues to be efficient. It neglects the importance of power structures: many institutions continue to exist because the poor do not have the power to modify them. Although sharecroppers may lack capital to rent land, this is a result of their poverty and powerlessness. To raise sharecropping on a pedestal as an efficient, endogenous-incentive institution may serve to institutionalise the powerlessness and poverty of the rural poor. This search for the utility of endogenous institutions may sacrifice the aspirations of rural producers to the objective of reducing the transaction costs of development. It places the burdens of impoverishment and the provision of a safety net on the people.

Endogenous institutions, global restructuring and colonial precedents

Beyond concerns with reducing transaction costs, the focus on endogenous institutions may resonate with some of the underlying concerns of global economic restructuring, which seeks to foster greater small-farmer participa-

tion in global markets. Reforms which seek to integrate small farmers with larger farm enterprises may form the basis for the expansion of agribusiness and the development of contractual relations that make small "family farms" dependent on agribusiness. The modernisation project sought to create labour relations in the image of advanced capitalism and siphon-off underemployed and unemployed rural labour to the urban industrial and rural capitalist agricultural sector.

By contrast, global economic restructuring seeks to maintain casual forms of labour and replace wage labour by contract arrangements that effectively remove the safety nets provided by the state and the industrial sector. This serves to minimise the costs of labour to industry and allows for the flexible augmentation and shedding of various forms of labour according to market needs. Many of the contemporary land tenure concerns and policy debates associated with structural adjustment and the World Bank, reflect policy issues that have emerged in the restructuring of US and European agriculture as a global transnational enterprise (McMichael, 1996; Marsden and Whatmore, 1994; Goodman and Redclift, 1991).

A fundamental weakness in the new institutional economics approach to land tenure and the new emphasis on indigenous land systems is the thesis that existing land relations in rural areas arise from endogenous factors associated with systemic features rooted in population and market pressures. This approach fails to examine the impact of global relations in moulding the institutional framework of land administration at the local level. Many of the endogenous institutions that are theorised are the outcomes of colonial rule which sought to refashion "traditional institutions" to obtain labour and land for capital penetration without creating a costly administrative structure. Imperial domination and colonialism resulted in a restructuring of African society in which some areas emerged as "micro-rich" export-crop producing areas, others as mining enclaves, and the rest as labour reserves for the export-producing areas (Amin, 1972). Chiefs were used as the agent of this restructuring, responsible for administering land in the export-crop producing areas and in initiating labour control (forced labour and tax policies that ensured young men migrated to the export-producing areas to gain wages for tax payment).

Given the changing political and economic environment, the institutions that developed at the local level to cope with change and provide social safety nets cannot be regarded as "traditional" precolonial institutions. While they made use of pre-existing organisations, the content of these organisations was dramatically changed by their incorporation into the world market and the world of capitalist commodities. In many cases these institutions had to adapt to conditions of impoverishment and growing social stratification. The chiefs and headmen of local institutions were

accountable to the colonial state, yet maintained roles whose power was justified in terms of tradition and "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm, 1983). The world of the cocoa farmers, with their land-purchasing companies, innovation of land transactions, processes of litigation, fleets of transport and other businesses, and their vulnerability to world trade cycles of boom and bust is hardly traditional. Tradition has been fashioned in the modern world of commodities.

Community, state, social differentiation and commerce

In the contemporary period, the alienation of land by the state for agribusiness and large-scale capitalist agriculture cannot be separated from developments at the community level. The alienation of this land usually occurs with the collaboration of political leaders at the community level. Like the chiefs of colonial times, these leaders are allowed to exist in national policy as representatives of the community because this enables the state to integrate rural communities into its vision of the development project. In the present period of globalisation and market liberalisation, the process of land alienation is increasingly driven by foreign capital. In the process of reorganising the economy, the state continually defines and redefines what constitutes the traditional community and refashions the levers that link the rural areas to national administration.

African traditional systems of land tenure are commonly seen as based on multiple land rights in which farmers have user-rights in agricultural land and chiefs have *de jure* rights in land, including rights to the extraordinary wealth of the land, such as mineral and timber wealth. While these rights are defined with recourse to tradition, the concession system, through which these resources are granted to national and international firms for production for the world market, has nothing to do with tradition. In this setting, traditional rights are anachronisms and through the authority of the chief the world of preordained status and tradition's chains is transformed into the world of free markets, in which commodities become *antiquated before they can ossify*.

Given the linkages between rural settlements, districts, the state and international capital, communities cannot be regarded as autonomous groups with a common interest. Political and economic interests cut through and across communities and integrate them in diverse ways with capital and the state. In the contemporary period, with its fashion for populist theories of participatory development and people-centred development, structural analysis of social stratification is relegated to the background, since it introduces unwanted noise that may undermine the new paradigm for development and create difficulty in charting a new "participatory" development

agenda that can coexist with present globalisation trends. Participatory development thus focuses on the contradictions between the state and the popular masses. This serves the overriding objective of globalisation and structural adjustment to shrink the state's control over the national economy and create new market opportunities for international capital. Without dissecting local communities and examining the processes of social differentiation within them, a genuine investigation into the impact of globalisation on the life of the people cannot be made.

In the contemporary period, in mainstream development studies, it is in the field of gender studies that notions of the undifferentiated community with a single interest have been most questioned. The presumption of a hegemonic community interest has often led to the marginalisation of women in development projects, where it is assumed that a woman is part of the household of a husband or father and that her interests will be represented by the male household head. Through this delegation of representation, the interests of women have been neglected. On irrigation projects, women farmers often lost their individual plots of land in the compulsory acquisition of land, but in the reallocation of land on irrigation projects land was given to the male household head instead of to women. This effectively transformed them into dependent household labour on male plots or forced them to hire themselves out as landless labour (Watts, 1993; Konings, 1986; Botch way, 1993). In the expansion of cash crop farming, women often found their interests in land displaced as rich male farmers began to develop interests in export crops and acquire larger areas, diminishing the areas in which female food crop farming could develop. Although women are often able to gain access to land, they rarely have control over the allocation of land, which is carried out by male lineage and household heads. As a result, women often have access to the poorest and smallest areas of land, rather than equal access with men to quality land (Bortei-Doku Aryeetey, 1996; Mackenzie, 1993; Davison, 1993).

While gender studies draw attention to structures of inequality within communities, they frequently fail to place this in the context of social stratification. The nodes of power and administration within rural communities do not affect only women, but also the youth, migrants and poorer strata of peasant households that are unable to command large shares of land and capital. The challenge is to understand how the interface between community organisations, commercial pressures and political relations works to differentiate landholdings and access to land, and embed land distribution within wider processes of the commodification of agriculture and social differentiation.

These factors are largely neglected by the new institutional economics which tends to equate community lineage structures with the atomistic

family farms of Western agriculture. It sees the family structure as a functional production unit absorbing transaction costs rather than as a structural unit that defines rights in land in relation to dominant sociopolitical interests. These sociopolitical relations define the distribution of land between various autonomous household production units and lead to social differentiation within lineage structures. Paradoxically, while the new institutional economics cautions that the impact of individual land titling may result in the erosion of women's access to user rights in land (Platteau, 1996), it is less concerned about the lack of women's rights to control land and rights to determine the allocation of land within pre-existing community structures.

The new institutional economics has opened up the study of the organisational structure of local communities, the rationality of individual behaviour within the constraints of existing institutions, and the interface between local processes and wider macrostructures. However, its concern with functionalism and the utility of low transaction costs—which panders to current policy concerns about rolling back the state and displacing the burdens of social welfare and infrastructure—prevents it from examining structural aspects in the transformation of agriculture, and the rise of new social and political alignments in rural areas that result from the impact of globalisation and the expansion of transnational agribusiness.

Defining the scope and methodology of the study

This study argues that the debate between state-induced and community-driven land tenure reform is fruitless, since both these levels of organisation have become closely intertwined from the inception of colonialism, when the community was redefined as an endogenous institution that carried out the self-administration of colonial policy. Thus, a need exists to critically analyse the ideological conceptualisation of community-based development in the present period, and the role assigned to the community in the globalisation project administered under the trusteeship of the World Bank, IMF and other development policy centres.

This study is critical of the rhetoric of community-based development as an adjunct to rolling back the state and lowering transaction costs. It is also critical of a defence of the state made on the basis of the contrast between an era of state intervention in which the welfare and social development of African people was made paramount in development planning, and the era of structural adjustment in which all the social developments of the 1960s-80s have been eroded to promote liberalisation and privatisation. The early period has seen abuses of the rights of the people, suppression of their struggles and mass organisations, and the organisation of state machinery to further the interests of the dominant class and their alliance with inter-

national capital. By the mid-1970s, when nationalisation and indigenisation had reached their zenith, African states began to develop mechanisms for negotiating joint economic ventures with international capital. It is this period which marks a turning point and laid the foundation for the rhetoric of structural adjustment.

The major reasons why African governments introduce economic liberalisation and deregulation is to make their countries more attractive to foreign investment. This is intended to create an enabling environment that will encourage inflows of foreign investment. Since private investment was already a feature of economic life in the 1960s to 1980s, the significance of the implementation of adjustment is that it opens up new spheres for international capital investment. This builds upon policies introduced in the 1970s to encourage foreign investment.

Recession in the 1970s eroded the favourable terms of trade for primary commodities dating from the 1950s and 1960s. International capital became a scarce commodity in developing countries, resulting in a weaker position for developing countries in the international arena. Developing countries could no longer set the conditions for the operation of international capital within their borders. Thus, structural adjustment was initiated by the IMF and the World Bank to regulate and set conditions favourable for the penetration of global capital. Prior to this, the basic needs framework of the World Bank had established the framework for the incorporation of rural producers into capital markets and the national economy (World Bank, 1975). Structural adjustments aim to complete this process by facilitating the incorporation of national economies into the global market.

In the context of the land question in rural areas, the fundamental question that needs to be posed relates to the repercussions of globalisation on land relations and the nature of the penetration of capital in the agricultural sector. To understand the transformations that the dominant policy frameworks of the World Bank seek to achieve, it is necessary to understand the fundamental changes that have occurred in agricultural capitalism during the post-war period, and how World Bank policies for the small farmer sector in developing countries and for land reform fit into these changes. This requires a framework for understanding the structural transformation of agriculture within world capitalism in the post-war period.

Within the nationstate in Africa, it is necessary to understand the changes in land relations that were brought about in the colonial and early periods, and the factors that have influenced changing alignments between the nation state, national capitalism and international capital. This requires a political economy framework that examines various class alliances and antagonisms that emerge within the nation state in its transformation from colonial subjugation to independence.

At the farm level, it is necessary to analyse the internal pressures within the agrarian sector that have brought about crisis in the old modes of production and increasing incorporation into international capital markets. This task is approached by developing case studies that examine the development of the rural economy in response to different pressures and forms of incorporation by the state and capital.

The penetration of capital is uneven, involving different types of incorporation into distinct productive sectors and markets. Therefore, the aim of case studies should be to document the effects of particular forms of capitalist development on particular communities. It should not attempt to project local-level research on to the whole rural economy, distilling an archetypal rural structure or an average village for the rural sector. The case studies should be informed by the life experiences of individuals within communities, rather than solicited from household heads and lineage heads and community representatives. The workings of the land system need to be distilled from the living experience of ordinary farmers, women and youth rather than formulated from recitations of the ideal operation of customary land tenure solicited from community representatives in group meetings or discussions with chiefs, notables and elders. Beyond examining the social relations of production within specific communities, it is also important to document farmers' perceptions of changes in their livelihood and access to land, and their relations with the state and international capital.

In this research, an attempt has been made to develop case studies of different socioeconomic situations in a single regional setting. This includes two communities that have been incorporated into the economic sphere of an agribusiness company, the Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation, as contract farmers. One of the two communities has had a large proportion of its land expropriated by the company while the other retains its land. The other two case studies examine communities that have had lands expropriated for the development of forest reserves. The case studies are drawn from the Akyem area of the Eastern Region of Ghana, an area with a long history of land purchases and involvement in export-crop production. The area is rich in resources, including forests and minerals, and enables the impact of multiple land rights and international market penetration into regional resource extraction to be observed.

The interrelationship between the penetration of international capital, the restructuring of the economy, the political economy of social and class formations, and local livelihood struggles for access to resources inform the structure of this work. The first chapter examines the emergence of the modern agrifood system in the post-war economy. This system comprises a constellation of private capital, state support structures and state-sponsored research that favour agribusiness. The chapter traces the influences of this

system on agricultural policies and structural adjustment in the Ghanaian economy and in the conceptualisation of the land question. The second chapter traces the evolution of land relations in Ghana from the colonial period to the present. It examines how the concept of tradition and customary land rights has been manipulated to ensure that the peasantry have no secure rights in land and to ensure control over the land by a class of landowning chiefs at the beck and call of the state. The landowning chiefs have become the pivot of rural development and the processes through which capital can gain access to land and control over productive ventures. The third chapter examines the struggles of communities over land and livelihood issues and popular perceptions that have developed about the state, the economy and development in the Akyem area. In the fourth chapter, we offer a general review of the land question in the light of the evidence we have marshalled in the study and make the case for a new perspective in the study of land rights.