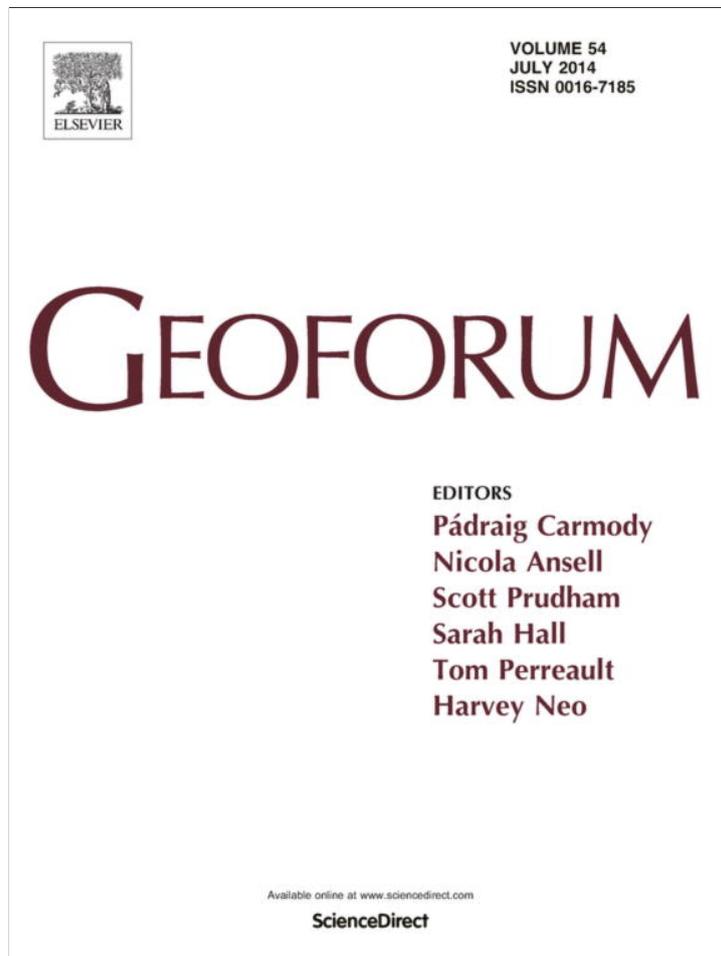


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# Imageries of the contested concepts “land grabbing” and “land transactions”: Implications for biofuels investments in Ghana



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## ABSTRACT

In Ghana, the contested concepts of “land grabbing” and “land transaction” are strategically applied by proponents of critical and win–win discourses respectively to describe outcomes of land deals. Using case study methods and discourse analysis, this paper explores four cases of biofuels investments in Ghana and the implications of the choice of concepts used to represent them. Proponents of the critical discourse use the “land grabbing” concept to invoke imageries of “illegality”, “theft” and “food insecurity” when describing land deals. Consequently, some biofuels investments have been hampered in their potential to generate profit and local employment. The biofuel investors in this study, whose projects have been labeled “land grabbing”, therefore switched to food production to downplay public scepticism. Proponents of the win–win discourse portray biofuels investments as “pro-poor” projects and use the “land transaction” concept to pre-empt possible public criticisms in the media and elsewhere. Such representations of these biofuels investments are therefore mainly intended to pre-empt criticisms or attract public praise. Some projects with potentially promising outcomes have thus been terminated, while others with problematic outcomes have continued to be promoted. In contexts characterized by weak land regulations and ambivalence towards large-scale agriculture, the trajectory and outcomes of biofuels investments are often influenced by land deal representations drawn from global discourses and how they interact with pre-existing local discourses.

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## 1. Introduction and the argument

*The environment and how we acquire, disseminate, and legitimate knowledge about it are highly politicized, reflective of relations of power, and contested* (Roderick P. Neumann, 2005, p. 1)

Land acquisitions or land deals have been an important part in the history of most states. At the turn of the 21st century, debates about land deals which seemed to have died out following the emergence of modern sovereign states have flared up again with greater intensity—now re-presented either as “land grabbing” or “land transactions”. These terminologies around land deals are drawn from the competing global “win–win” and “critical” discourses which have underpinned land deals debates at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and among Civil Society Organizations at several international fora during the past decade. The “win–win” discourse expresses potentially positive outcomes of land deals for both host regions and investors (IFAD, 2011, 2010), whereas the “critical” discourse

portrays detrimental outcomes for the poor especially in host regions with weak state institutions (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, 2009; Foodfirst Information and Advocacy Network [FIAN] International, 2010). Proponents of the “critical” discourse use the “land grabbing” concept to describe potentially negative consequences of land deals for food security, land tenure and livelihoods in host countries (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, 2009; FAO, 2012; Rahmato, 2011). Proponents of the “win–win” discourse however prefer the “land transactions” concept due to what they argue are potentially promising outcomes especially for developing countries (BBC News Africa, 2012; IFAD, 2011, 2010).

Using either the “land grabbing” or “land transaction” term to describe potential outcomes of large-scale land deals creates conceptual dilemmas due to the different imageries they invoke and their political implications. An important contribution of post-structuralism to the field of political ecology has been the introduction of discourse analysis and the importance of exploring and revealing the ways in which the environment and its problems are discursively constructed (Neumann, 2005). Some studies during the past decade illuminate what they describe as “false knowledge” or “myths” produced from value-laden representations of environmental problems and prompt a need for critical engagement with so-called “scientific explanations” to ensure a better formulation of environmental policies (see Forsyth, 2011, 2003;

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Leach, 2007; Guthman, 1997; Fairhead and Leach, 1995). Many recent studies have equally used value-laden concepts to describe possible social, economic and political outcomes of large-scale land deals (see Wisborg, 2012; Matondi et al., 2011; IFAD, 2011; von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, 2009). Land deals representations in these recent studies often involve the use of persuasive value-laden concepts and framings intended to invoke strong emotions, heated debates and reactions, but they seldom highlight the implications of the associated imageries for public perceptions about large-scale agricultural investments. This paper shows how and why value-laden concepts used to describe large-scale land deals influence the trajectory and outcomes of biofuels investments<sup>1</sup> in Ghana, which is largely characterized by ambivalence towards large-scale agriculture amongst the population.

Ghana predominantly has a customary land ownership regime, with about 80% of land held by customary landowners; mainly families, clans and traditional authorities<sup>2</sup> (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001). The remaining land areas are privately owned or under state control. In this customary land regime, land embodies the rights of “primordial” groups such as villages, stools,<sup>3</sup> families and kinship groups (Aryeetey et al., 2007) and radical land transformation are often perceived by small-scale landholders as a recipe for potential land dispossession. For example, the fear of possible land dispossession and disruption of small-holder production systems among Ghanaians during the 1890s by the British Colonial Administration, which aimed to vest in the British Crown all unoccupied land areas, forest lands and minerals, led to resistance (Fold and Whitfield, 2012). The incidences of “forceful” land dispossession in Ghana to develop large-scale plantations by post-independence governments of Ghana are also cases in point (Fold and Whitfield, 2012).

Despite the pre-existing skepticism towards large-scale agriculture among some Ghanaians, many post-independence governments of Ghana, receptive to neo-liberal economic policies in the area of agriculture, have shown continued support for foreign direct investments in land (Fold and Whitfield, 2012; Våth and Kirk, 2011; Technoserve, 2007). The governments’ ostensible motivations in supporting these investments have been premised on possible improvements in employment creation and food security (Brew-Hammond, 2009; Våth and Kirk, 2011). Some chiefs in Ghana have also given out many large land areas categorised as “marginal” or “unused” during the past decade with the aim of creating development opportunities for rural communities (Boamah, forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b; Tsikata and Yaro, 2011). Most of these recent land deals have involved the cultivation of jatropha for the production of liquid biofuels primarily to improve energy provision and the employment situation in Ghana, as well as for export (Ghana Energy Commission, 2005; Schoneveld et al., 2010; Brew-Hammond, 2009; Technoserve, 2007). However, the ambivalence of the general population towards large-scale agriculture draws attention to the co-existence of two competing local discourses in Ghana. Firstly, there is a discourse that identifies land as a means of social cohesion (Aryeetey et al., 2007) and large-scale agriculture as potentially dangerous to pre-existing small-scale landholdings (Amanor, 2001). Secondly, there is a discourse that identifies investments in land as a potential engine of development for deprived rural communities endowed with large areas of “unused” or “marginal” land. These respective local discourses correspond with, or are reinforced

by, the “land grabbing” and “land transaction” concepts, which are now being used to describe outcomes of the surge in large-scale land deals in Ghana during the past decade.

Analyses of the implications of the use of the “land grabbing” and “land transaction” concepts is particularly important in contexts characterized by ambivalence towards large-scale agriculture that simultaneously lack strong land regulations. For instance despite the surge in large-scale land deals for biofuels investments in Ghana, the Draft Biofuels Policy (2005), Renewable Energy Act (2011) and Draft Bioenergy strategy (2011) developed by Ghanaian governments failed to address key issues such as land acquisitions processes, biofuels markets and government incentives that are critical for biofuels development. Similar lapses can be found in a new land regulation developed by the Ghana Lands Commission in 2012 to regulate large-scale land deals for agricultural investments in Ghana (Ghana Lands Commission, 2012). Whilst this new regulation retains the pre-existing land transfer prerequisites of mutual agreement between prospective land grantors and land grantees, and EPA<sup>4</sup> approval, the only innovation is the referral to the National Land Commission for deliberation for land allocations exceeding 400 hectares. The transfer of land allocation registration from the Regional to the National level is yet to register any demonstrable impacts as it is an extension of usual bureaucratic processes. In this context of weak regulation on biofuels and land transfers, Civil Society Organizations, chiefs, researchers, the media and other non-state actors in Ghana consistently use the “land grabbing” and “land transaction” concepts to describe possible outcomes of land deals for biofuels investment. The author neither intends to indict users of the two concepts nor offer alternatives, but rather to illuminate the imageries associated with the concepts and their implications for the trajectory and outcomes of biofuels investments in Ghana. The trajectory here refers to the changes from biofuel crop to food crop production, whereas the broader outcomes refer to the impacts on energy provision, livelihoods and social responsibility measures in the project areas.

In contexts characterized by weak land regulations and ambivalence towards large-scale agriculture, the trajectory and outcomes of biofuels investments are often influenced by land deal representations drawn from global discourses that correspond with pre-existing local discourses. This argument is elucidated by examining three main issues. Firstly, the conventional criteria for the conceptualization of land deals based on possible outcomes, procedures, the size and actors involved are discussed. Secondly, the polarized representation of biofuels investments by researchers, chiefs, media and NGOs in Ghana is analysed. The final section examines the relative effectiveness of the imageries associated with the two contested concepts in influencing the trajectory and outcomes of biofuels investments in Ghana. The central argument is expatiated by exploring the cases of four biofuels investment projects. Case I is based on an earlier study on jatropha biofuels project in Northern Ghana. Cases II and III are also based on jatropha biofuels projects in Southern and Central Ghana respectively. Cases II and III are based on an on-going PhD study and constitute the main cases in this paper. Case IV focuses on another jatropha project in Northern Ghana which was visited during the main PhD fieldwork. For analytical purposes, although equally contested, the term “land deals” is used throughout this paper as a neutral concept.

### 1.1. How concepts become contested

Debates are framed, phenomena are represented and ideas are communicated through discourses. Foucault perceived discourses

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the term “biofuel” instead of “agrofuel” is used because most policy documents and debates on renewable energy in Ghana often discuss biofuel as synonymous with fuel from crops plants.

<sup>2</sup> A Traditional Council comprises paramount chiefs, village chiefs and elders of communities. A Traditional Council is headed by a Paramount Chief. Migrants cultivating lands under the trusteeship of traditional councils pay agricultural tributes in return to acknowledge chiefs’ authority over such lands.

<sup>3</sup> Stools refer to the traditional heads of communities or villages, usually village chiefs.

<sup>4</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. Its core mandate is to protect and improve the environment in Ghana.

as statements believed to be ‘objectively true—and therefore important, worthy of respect and capable of supporting responsible action’ (Peet and Hartwick, 2009, p. 205). For Foucault, ‘discourses claimed the status of truth to gain power’ (Peet and Hartwick, 2009). When a discourse dominates thinking and is translated into institutional arrangements, it becomes “hegemonic” (Adger et al., 2001). To produce authoritative knowledge, narratives are used in discourses. Narratives have the common characteristics of a story—‘a beginning, middle, and end (or premises) . . . and revolves around a sequence of events or positions in which something happens or from which something follows’ (Roe, 1991, p. 288). Development practitioners, bureaucrats and policy makers use narratives to simplify ambiguities and uncertainties in development processes (Roe, 1991). The over-simplification of otherwise complex real-world situations in narratives pinpoints their persuasive power in defining problems as well as the solutions (Cornwall et al., 2007).

Narratives involve the use of rhetorical devices such as “metaphors”. The essence of using metaphors in representations is to understand and experience situations in terms of other familiar ones (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Metaphors however involve the use of words or symbols which convey particular connotations. Connotations are the additional meanings of words or symbols that imply particular associations, beyond their dictionary definitions—denotations (Aase and Fossåskaret, 2007). Representations of phenomena drawn from certain narratives to conceptualize experiences are bundled with ideas about “what ought to be” or “what ought not to be”. Certain concepts are therefore legitimized and the alternatives undermined. These different representations of real world phenomena generate contestations over the proper use of concepts. For Collier et al. (2006), the “proper” use of concepts still depends on specific contexts and the normative valence attached to particular specifications employed by both users and analysts. The different framings of competing concepts equally dominate the field of political ecology—how power and politics influence knowledge of and access to environmental resources. For Escobar (1999), conceptualizations of environmental problems are the reflections of values, specific backgrounds and positions of power rather than absolute “truths” about the environment. Neumann (2005) further explains that knowledge about the “environment” and its dissemination are mainly reflective of power relations and is therefore contested. For Robbins (2004, p. 12), political ecology ‘stresses not only that ecological systems are political, but also that our very ideas about them are further delimited and directed through political and economic processes’. So-called scientific explanations of “environmental problems” are thus imbued with the ideas generated through the social interest of “science” of the environment and the particular framings of those interests (Forsyth, 2011).

Framings of environmental problems, perceived causes and solutions are underpinned by certain priorities. The use of the “land grabbing” and “land transactions” concepts to describe possible outcomes of large scale-land deals and the calls for “appropriate” interventions (see Roe, 1991) are similarly underpinned by certain narratives. This paper illuminates the imageries associated with the use of the two concepts, the public reactions to those imageries and the implications they have for biofuels investments. The term imageries, which is often called connotations, is used because representations of the “land grabbing” and “land transaction” concepts in Ghana are made through activism; through the use of texts and photos to invoke particular imaginations about possible outcomes of land deals, for example.

## 2. Selected cases and methodology

The cases of the four biofuels projects (see Table 1) explored in this paper were selected for three reasons. Firstly, they cultivate

jatropha (or once cultivated jatropha) for biofuels production. Secondly, all of them set out the objective to improve energy provision and livelihoods in Ghana. However, whereas Case IV is a non-profit-making investment because it is an “aid project”, the other three aimed to make profits from the sale of biofuels both in Ghana and abroad. Finally, the four projects were given publicity about their possible outcomes in the respective project areas.

Case I involved follow-up field visits in 2010 and 2011 on an earlier study (Boamah, 2011a, 2011b; Tsikata and Yaro, 2011) to show the impacts of public representation of the project’s possible outcomes. Cases II and III are drawn from a PhD project. The research on cases II and III involved a 2-month preliminary fieldwork period (April–June, 2012) followed by a 6-month fieldwork period (August, 2012–January, 2013). The preliminary fieldwork involved key informant interviews, focus group interviews and reviews of literature on biofuels in Ghana in order to gain the relevant contextual information in preparation for the major fieldwork. The major fieldwork involved a survey of 40 farming households in each of these cases to examine livelihoods impacts of the projects. Case IV involved a 3-day visit to a project village called Kparigu, which was first incorporated into another biofuels project in 2010. A jatropha oil pressing facility was also established in this Kparigu village. During the visit in January 2013, two groups comprising 30 farmers each had been formed in this village. The first group of 30 farmers, who had harvested some jatropha nuts, was interviewed. Out of the 30 farmers, 16 (10 women and 6 men) shared their experiences about the livelihoods impacts of the project. Phone conversations with some of the project partners were also held to follow up on this project after the visit.

All four cases involved analysis of interview texts, public documents, as well as observations in the project plantations and residents’ farmland areas. The author analysed public representations of the projects, the choice of concepts and framings used in the representations and consequently how these influenced public reactions towards the projects.

## 3. Biofuels initiatives, regulations and politics in Ghana

Jatropha plants have been used in Ghana for decades either as hedge plants for protecting more valuable plants or in farms to deter livestock entry due to its ability to form a knitted physical barrier. The jatropha species cultivated in Ghana are perceived as inedible and also thrive in “marginal” land areas. As an inedible plant perceived to be viable in “degraded” or “marginal” land areas, the promotion of jatropha for biodiesel production seemed convincing to many Ghanaians (Technoserve, 2007; Energy Commission, 2005). The jatropha biofuels debate gained momentum in Ghana during the oil price hikes in the 2006–2007 periods. Subsequent debates focused on the strategies to be adopted in order to improve energy provision without undermining land tenure arrangements, food security and livelihoods in Ghana (Brew-Hammond, 2009; Technoserve, 2007; Ghana Energy Commission, 2005).

The pioneering interest in biofuels development in Ghana began in 2003 when Onua Amoah, a Ghanaian bio-chemist and Chief Executive Officer of a biodiesel processing company, Anuanom Industries Ltd., announced plans to produce biodiesel from jatropha nuts (interview, 2012; Brew-Hammond, 2009). Amoah called for government support for the cultivation of jatropha, the training of interested farmers and the creation of a market (interview, 2012). After Amoah successfully processed jatropha oil into biodiesel, the government’s interest in biofuels increased. Ghana’s Energy Commission later set up a Biofuel Committee in 2005 to prepare a National Biofuel Policy to accelerate biofuels development in Ghana (interview, 2012; see also Brew-Hammond, 2009). A Draft

**Table 1**  
The characteristics of the four cases.

CASES	Year started	Crop(s) cultivated	Type of Land deal	Size of land area	Size of area cultivated	Location	Current status
Case I	2008	Jatropha but switched to maize in 2010	Lease agreement	10,696 hectares	400 hectares	Northern Ghana	Collapsed
Case II	2008–2009	Jatropha but switched to maize/soy beans since 2010/2011	Lease agreement	13,000 hectares	Approx. 1000 hectares	Southern Ghana	On-going
Case III	2008	Jatropha and intercropped with maize since 2010	Joint Venture	13,000 hectares	Approx. 4500 hectares	Central Ghana	Temporarily suspended since May 2012
Case IV	2009	Jatropha	Land from the participating farmers	500 hectares	Approx. 450 hectares	Northern Ghana	On-going

Policy developed by the Biofuel Committee highlighted Ghana's plan to promote alternative energy to reduce high import bills from fossil fuels and to reduce poverty (Ghana Energy Commission, 2005). Due to its optimism in private sector investments, the New Patriotic Party (NPP)<sup>5</sup> government established the National Jatropha Project Planning Committee in 2006 to plan for jatropha biofuels development. The government thereafter offered funding for training workshops under the supervision of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. Jatropha cultivation was expected to be undertaken under an out-grower system where a government marketing board would buy jatropha nuts from farmers for processing by Anuanom Industries Ltd. These efforts led to the selection of areas categorized as “marginal” or “degraded” in 53 districts in the savannah and forest/transitional ecological zones in the country perceived as suitable for jatropha cultivation by interested farmers. The rationale for the selection of so-called “marginal” areas in these 53 districts was to avoid possible competition between jatropha cultivation and food crop production because those areas were categorized by the government as falling outside of the major food production zones (popularly called the “food baskets”) of Ghana.

According to an Agricultural Extension Officer from one of the selected districts, training of the interested farmers and jatropha biofuels sensitization workshops started in 2006 (interview, 2012). A few months after the training workshops Amoah died. The death of the inspirational biofuels pioneer and the discovery of offshore oil and gas in Ghana in 2007 reduced the government's interest in biofuels. Consequently, the government announced its withdrawal from biofuel activities but pledged support for interested private investors (interview, 2012). The retreat by the government, together with international enthusiasm for jatropha led to the inflow of foreign biofuels investors into Ghana—including companies from Norway, Italy, Canada and Japan. The NPP government was replaced by the New Democratic Congress (NDC)<sup>6</sup> government in January 2009. Having discovered oil, this new government welcomed the biofuels idea though was more concerned with the potential competition with food security (Brew-Hammond, 2009; interview with an Agricultural Extension Officer from one of the 53 selected districts, 2012). It is striking to note that, despite the initial efforts by both the NPP and NDC governments to provide policy frameworks for biofuels development, there is no ready market for jatropha nuts in Ghana except those occasionally sold (or bought) for cultivation or oil production on an experimental

basis. The political will to regulate the “infant” biofuel industry in Ghana has also been quite low.

#### 4. Representations of the “land grabbing” and “land transaction” concepts

The increasing commoditization and privatization of natural resources during the last decade has led to a corresponding surge in the activities of Civil Society Organizations advocating equitable access to natural resources (Suárez, 2012). Prominent among them are ActionAid International, via Campesina, Oxfam International, FIAN International and their affiliates across the world. Through their advocacy, in collaboration with international policy institutes—egs. FAO and IFAD, some of their proposals are accepted by governments for environmental resource governance (Suárez, 2012). Central to the natural resource governance debates by Civil Society Organizations, policy institutes and researchers is the surge in large-scale land deals in the global south.

Land deals hailed as inherently beneficial for deprived regions are labeled “land transactions” whereas critics of land deals prefer the “land grabbing” concept. The different conceptualizations of land deals are drawn from the two competing narratives: *neo-colonialism and development optimism*. The *neo-colonialism* narrative emphasizes potentially negative livelihoods and food security impacts of land deals by foreign entities in poor countries and draws attention to possible foreign domination of indigenous land, reminiscent of “colonialism” (Rahmato, 2011; FIAN International, 2010). The *neo-colonialism* narrative prioritizes the “actors”, “outcomes” and “size” of land areas involved. This narrative expresses a “critical” discourse. Conversely, the *development optimism* narrative acknowledges the inherent dangers of large-scale land deals but expresses potentially promising consequences for governments and the populace if effective policies are made to improve land administration, institutional capacity of host regions for contract management and to ensure transparency in land deals (Cotulla, 2011; IFAD, 2011; FAO, 2012). This narrative focuses mainly on “outcomes” regardless of the actors and the size of land parcels involved, expressing a “win-win” discourse. The criteria adopted in the conceptualization of land deals are illustrated by the definitions below.

‘The catch-phrase, “global land grab”, refers to the rush for commercial land in Africa and elsewhere by private and sovereign investors for the purpose of growing food and bio-fuel crops for the export market, and, in which, the land deals concluded have gone largely to benefit foreign capital’. (Dessalegn Rahmato, 2011, p. 1)

‘... land grabbing is defined as taking possession of and/or controlling a scale of land for commercial/industrial agricultural production which is disproportionate in size in comparison to the average land holding in the region.

(FIAN International, 2010, p. 8)

<sup>5</sup> This political party prides itself as “property-owning democracy” that supports private sector investments. It ruled between 2001 and 2009.

<sup>6</sup> This political party prides itself with “social democracy” is inclined to socialist ideologies. Its economic philosophy claims special concern for the poor especially by them against exploitation. It ruled between 1981 and 1992 as a revolutionary party, Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) and continued (1993–2000 with National Democratic Congress as a successor party when Ghana was ushered into democratic rule (2009 till date).

The definitions above illustrate the *neo-colonialism* narrative. This narrative argues that large land deals, especially by foreign entities, benefit foreign capital and simultaneously limit access to land, which form the mainstay of livelihoods of residents of the host regions. Interventions to streamline or perhaps suspend large-scale land deals to safeguard the livelihoods of host regions are the implied recommendation in this narrative.

'While there is renewed concern about 'land grabbing', the trend is not new. ... Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that not all investments in agriculture by outsiders are illegitimate. Some have followed due process and can provide positive benefits for rural communities'.

(IFAD, 2011, p. 5).

The *development optimism* narrative conversely implies that large-scale land deals, whether by domestic or foreign entities, can have potentially positive impacts for host regions especially when legitimate procedures are followed. This narrative creates hopes of development opportunities and implicitly recommends the formulation of effective guidelines to generate win-win outcomes for all actors involved. The conceptualizations of "land grabbing" and "land transactions" decidedly describe the phenomenon of transfer of tenure rights but express different possible economic and political outcomes. Whereas the "grabbing" imagery qualifies land deals as illegal or possibly undermining livelihoods, the "pro-poor" imagery associated with the "land transaction" concept downplays perceived negative outcomes.

As noted earlier, Ghana has been a major "hot spot" of land deals during the past decade, though characterized by ambivalence towards large-scale agriculture amongst the general population. Each of the two local discourses expressed in Ghana around large-scale agricultural investments can be reinforced or suppressed when they align with powerful global discourses. Users of the two polarized concepts therefore strategically frame perceived outcomes of large-scale land deals in ways that resonate with these two local discourses in Ghana in order to make their respective representations more compelling and persuasive. The next sections illuminate the polarized representations of land deals and the implications of the associated imageries for the trajectory and outcomes of four biofuels investments in Ghana.

#### 4.1. The BioFuel Africa Jatropha project (Case I)

This project involved a land deal for 23,000 hectares for a jatropha biofuel investment in Northern Ghana by the Norwegian company, BioFuel Africa Ltd (now called Solar Harvest). The EPA Permit for the BioFuel Africa jatropha project involved land areas in the Yendi and Central Gonja districts in Northern Ghana. The company also developed an 850-hectare jatropha test farm in the Volta Region of Ghana. The main jatropha plantation was implemented in the Yendi district in March 2008. The project was in operation for over a year until April 2009 when an area of 10,696 out of the 23,000 hectares was officially registered at the Ghana Lands Commission.

The pioneering opposition to this project, based on claims of possible land tenure and livelihoods insecurity, came from the Ghanaian NGO Regional Advisory and Information Network Systems (RAINS). Its article captioned 'Biofuel land grabbing in Northern Ghana' states:

'This is the story of how a Norwegian biofuel company took advantage of Africa's traditional system of communal land ownership and current climate and economic pressure to claim and deforest large tracts of land in ... Northern Ghana with the intention of creating "the largest jatropha plantation in the

world". ... Many have now lost their incomes from the forest and face a bleak future (RAINS, 2008, p.1). ... We need a more aggressive campaign to halt land grabbing' (RAINS, 2008, p. 6).

The above publication influenced the NGO ActionAid Ghana (AAG), an affiliate of ActionAid International. ActionAid Ghana similarly reported livelihoods being destroyed through the destruction of valuable economic trees as a result of the BioFuel Africa jatropha project. An article captioned 'The biofuel debate' states:

'... , when we noticed that large tracts of land were being taken for biofuel production, we (AAG) initiated the research to determine its implications for food security in particular and development in general. The results indicate that the plantations pose a potential threat to food security of the people. ... What happens to the poor women and their families who hitherto earned their livelihoods from these economic trees after the good numbers of them have been destroyed?' (ActionAid Ghana, 2009).

However, a study which examined the effects of the Biofuel Africa project in the Yendi district of Northern Ghana rather found improved livelihoods as well as increased food production in the project villages through employment creation and a "Food First Policy" adopted by the company, at least initially until the project was abandoned (Boamah, 2011a, 2011b). The "Food First Policy" refers to the company's commitment to increase food crop production in project areas (See Solar Harvest News, 2009a,b). The company cultivated 400 out of the 10,696 hectares with jatropha. Before the project, the 400 hectare land area was cultivated by 25 small-holder farmers. Whilst 4 out of these 25 farmers faced land dispossession and a consequent decline in crop yields, the remaining 21 continued farming within the leased land area without any incidence of livelihoods destruction (Boamah, 2011b). Adjacent village residents, especially women, who were employed in the jatropha plantation, were also able to intercrop maize in the jatropha plantation, used monthly wages to expand their own farms and for food purchases, as well as for the general upkeep of their households (Boamah, 2011b). BioFuel Africa also provided one maize hammer mill and three water dams for the nearby villages (Boamah, 2011b; see also Tsikata and Yaro, 2011).

As shown above, NGO reports publicized livelihoods destruction through the felling of valuable economic trees. The project affected some shea nut<sup>7</sup> trees and other plant species in the project area. However, interviews with residents revealed that massive tree destruction (through charcoal production and farming) predated the project. To pre-empt further negative reports, BioFuel Africa advertised in the Ghanaian media its ability to successfully produce and use jatropha oil in their tractors and other machinery to raise hopes of energy provision in Ghana (Modern Ghana News, 2009; Solar Harvest News, 2009a,b). Despite these efforts, the negative publicity by NGOs and bribery allegations against the BioFuel Africa project forced its investors and prospective investors to pull out by the end of 2009 (Boamah, 2011a, see also Tsikata and Yaro, 2011). Without alternative funding sources, the jatropha project closed down and 300 out of its total of 400 workers were laid-off. During follow-up visits after the failure of the project, residents of the project villages accused NGOs over negative publicity that undermined a project which once provided them with incomes, especially during dry seasons when farming is impossible (Boamah, 2011b). BioFuel Africa Ltd, however, gained government loans in Ghana in 2010 to support its "Food First Policy" but not jatropha production. Describing the "Food First Policy" and Ghana government's commitment to

<sup>7</sup> Nuts derived from the plant are used for making cosmetics, food and sometimes medicines. It is the major source of income for women in the savannah and transitional ecological zones of Ghana.

food security, the Chairman of the Ghana Energy Commission during a Bionergy Conference in Accra said:

'I wish to salute companies like Biofuel Africa Ltd who share our cardinal principle of sustainable biofuels for local agro-industrial development. Their food first policy is one that we would want to see more biofuels companies adopt in Ghana. I am aware that Biofuel Africa's claims are disputed in some NGO and academic circles. . . . I personally admire Biofuel Africa for leading the way in our journey from talk to action, . . .'. (Brew-Hammond, 2009, p. 4).

To counteract public criticisms of the project, BioFuel Africa Ltd published on its homepage this speech by a celebrated Ghanaian renewable energy expert (see Solar Harvest news, 2010). After receiving these accolades, the granting of government loans was not surprising. It is important to note that, the company had cultivated about 400 hectares of jatropha before it collapsed. Interestingly, when the investor received the loans, an additional area of about 300 hectares out of the same leased land (10,696 hectares) was cleared for food production for sale in Ghana, but no negative publicity resurfaced. Meanwhile land tenure and livelihoods issues that reinforced the opposition to the jatropha project had not fundamentally changed. Possible reasons for the earlier opposition to the project by NGOs could be that it initially involved a fuel crop instead of a food crop.

#### 4.2. The ScanFarm Project (Case II)

ScanFuel (now ScanFarm Ghana Ltd) is an affiliate of a Norwegian Company, ScanFuel AS. The project initially involved a 50-year land lease agreement with the Agogo Traditional Council (henceforth called the ATC) in Southern Ghana, signed in 2008 for jatropha biofuel production. ScanFuel began jatropha cultivation in 2008–2009 but switched to maize production in 2010 due to perceived inadequate economic returns from jatropha investments prompting the change of name from ScanFuel to ScanFarm (interview with ScanFarm Management, 2012). ScanFarm further claims that expectations of quick profit from jatropha by the company were not forthcoming as finding markets for the harvested jatropha nuts was quite difficult (ScanFarm Management, 2012). Although public agitation about the land deal led to the reduction of the lease tenure from 50 to 15 years, ScanFarm still claims that the switch to maize was in no way influenced by local resistance (see also Wisborg, 2012). In 2010, ScanFarm received the award "2010 Best Maize farmer in Ghana" from Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA). A letter confirming the award certificate, signed by the then President of Ghana (Professor John Evans Atta Mills) and issued by MOFA, was put on the various notice boards at the premises of ScanFarm to be read by visitors. In 2011, ScanFarm added soy beans production to the ongoing maize cultivation in the project. The ScanFarm project is still on-going. Case II focuses on one of the project villages called Nsonyameye.

The chiefs who sanctioned the land deal sought to pre-empt public criticisms by subscribing to the *development optimism* narrative. 'The lease covers only *mfofoa*<sup>8</sup>. . . , farming will not be compromised. There will be employment for our unemployed youth' (Interview with an ATC chief, 2012). These representations imply "pro-poor" expectations from the project. Interviews with residents of the project villages showed that, the "pro-poor" representations of the project by the ATC downplayed fears of livelihoods destruction and land dispossession at the outset. This was particularly striking

during the first year of maize production when ScanFarm allowed residents of nearby villages to collect the left-overs of maize in the plantation after maize harvesting by the combine harvester. According to a resident of the Nsonyameye village, 'the ATC announced that a company [ScanFarm] is here to produce oil from *nkane dua* [jatropha] but we later heard of maize production. . . . The maize benefited us but we are no longer allowed to pick maize from the plantation' (interview, 2012). Village residents benefited from this free maize collection to feed their respective households until the end of 2010 farming season when ScanFarm banned it on the grounds of increasing incidence of theft in the plantation. However, the employment opportunities created for the village residents were mainly temporary due to the mechanized farming system adopted by ScanFarm (Boamah, forthcoming-b). Expressing his disappointment over the provision of casual jobs by ScanFarm, a 28-year old male resident of Nsonyameye stated, 'the *odikro*<sup>9</sup> [village chief] told us that, there would be jobs for us. . . . Now all friends of mine who were initially employed by ScanFarm are laid off. I don't need this type of job' (interview, 2012). Out of the 40 households surveyed, the livelihoods of 14 households were undermined by the project as a result of limited access to productive land resources whereas the remaining 26 did not experience any significant livelihoods improvements due to the temporary positive spin-off effects (Boamah, forthcoming-b). Furthermore, contrary to the ATC's claim that only "marginal" areas were leased out, some residents' productive land areas were also used by the project. This results from the fact that, chiefs' description of the leased areas as *mfofoa* applies to almost all land areas in the project villages because most land areas undergo alternating fallowing and cultivation periods due to the relative scarcity of virgin land areas.

Whilst chiefs used the "land transaction" concept to describe the project favourably, the "land grabbing" concept was used by other actors to describe the same project. In one of its periodic newsletters, ActionAid Ghana (ActionAid Internal Biofuels Newsletter, 2010) described the ScanFarm project as a "land grabbing spree" and advocated for a government audit of the project. A subsequent report by ActionAid Ghana (2011) communicated to the public the "positive" impacts of its advocacy in the ScanFarm project area.

' . . . On 19th January, 2011, there was a meeting of Agogo/Scanfuel land grab victims called by the Agogo Traditional Council for discussions on private lands grabbed by the council and Scanfuel, in attendance was the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE) of the Asante Akim North Municipal Assembly, Ashanti region. Some positive changes effected include a reduction of a lease period of 50 years to 15 years; payment of ground rent by Scanfuel to the land owners and not to the Council and yearly payment of land use for cultivation to the private landowners' (ActionAid Internal biofuels Newsletter, 2011).

A Norwegian NGO, Spire, inspired by Norwegian media reports about the ScanFuel project also initiated a study in Ghana. The report of the study captioned 'Norwegian land grabbers in Ghana—The case of ScanFuel' begins with doomsday scenarios by showcasing a photo of a warning sign-post erected by ScanFuel bearing the inscription:

'You are entering ScanFuel OPERATIONAL AREA. Beware of Heavy Duty Equipment. Jatropha Seeds are not edible. You enter this zone at your own risk. Scanfuel is not liable for injuries to unauthorized persons. All visitors should report to Scanfuel Base Camp for instructions' (Bull, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Ghanaian dialect which refers to land areas that are either temporarily abandoned to regain fertility or not under intensive crop cultivation. They are often perceived "bush" or "marginal lands", but not always so as most farmlands are subject to similar practices.

<sup>9</sup> A Ghanaian dialect (Akan twi) which refers to a village chief. Village chiefs are the messengers of Paramount Chiefs or representatives of traditional councils at the village level.

Beside the perceived threatening sign-post, Spire described the potentially negative impact of the project as:

'In 2007, the Norwegian company Scanfuel AS, through its Ghanaian based daughter company ScanFuel Africa Ltd. leased vast amounts of land (400 000 hectares), for a period of 50 years in Ghana. ... Over 20 companies from countries like Brazil, Italy, China, Germany and India are currently pursuing this venture on Ghanaian land – the Ghanaian government warmly welcomes the investors' (Bull, 2010, p. 2). '... From our observations, this seems to serve Scanfuels interests, and might undermine vulnerable stakeholders. The fact that Scanfuel did not recognize the land tenure controversies might suggest that the unsatisfied landowners have been silenced' (Bull, 2010, p. 7).

Spire and ActionAid Ghana's representations of the land deal portrayed illegality and potential food insecurity in the context of weak governance. Interviews with residents confirmed some incidences of land dispossession created by the ScanFarm project. However, subsequent interviews with key informants revealed that some claims of land dispossession linked to the ScanFarm project were influenced by earlier sensitization workshops and public demonstrations organized by NGOs, which aimed at prompting the village residents to protect their land against large-scale deals. Similar claims of land dispossession were made by some residents to a researcher (Wisborg, 2012) on the same project. For example, whilst Wisborg (2012) corroborates negative livelihoods impacts of the ScanFarm project, some residents mostly "indigenes" made claims of livelihoods destruction as a result of shea nuts and *dawadawa*<sup>10</sup> trees destroyed by ScanFarm. These claims were intended to pre-empt potentially negative outcomes of further land deals (interviews, 2012). Meanwhile, the ScanFarm project is located in the forest ecological zone of Southern Ghana where rural livelihoods depend on economic trees such as oil palm trees, mango trees, whereas shea nut and dawadawa trees are of similar economic value in the savanna/transitional zones of Central and Northern Ghana. This neither dispels evidence of tree destruction nor land dispossession created by the ScanFarm project but rather indicates the kind of responses that may be generated by respondents when influenced by narratives that correspond with local discourses.

An understanding of the local land politics sheds light on how and why the residents' reactions towards the projects may be either reinforced or suppressed by global discourses. The ATC sanctioned the lease agreement partly to re-establish authority over stool land,<sup>11</sup> which was occupied by "migrants" who were accused by chiefs of often evading payment of agricultural tributes (Boamah, forthcoming-a). Due to the non-existence of clearly demarcated land boundaries between stool land and family or privately-owned land areas, ScanFarm used family and privately-owned land without prior consultations (Boamah, forthcoming-a, -b). Some families and private individuals who have allodial land rights, often called exclusive land rights, were thus affected. This land deal was followed by other controversial land allocations sanctioned by the same paramount chief of ATC for Fulani herdsman. This land allocation generated many controversies locally because the activities of the Fulani herdsman created fears of further land losses, destruction of farms as well as alleged murder cases (Modern Ghana News, 2009; Boamah, forthcoming-a).

Spire's speculation that ATC had entered into 400,000 hectares land deal with ScanFarm (see also Dogbevi, 2010, 2009) and

ActionAid Ghana's representations of the land deal revived local scepticism, with associations to "neo-colonialism". Undoubtedly, advocacy by ActionAid Ghana led to re-negotiation of the lease agreement and consequently compensation for affected land areas increased from GHS<sup>12</sup> 15 to 30 per acre per year (interview with the Registrar of ATC, 2012; interviews with village residents, 2012). The lease tenure was also reduced from 50 to 15 years and the affected private land owners or allodial landholders were permitted to negotiate directly with ScanFarm. However, influenced by the NGOs' negative publicity, some residents perceived the re-negotiation phase as an opportune time to make many controversial claims to counteract land dispossessions. According to a successful land claimant, 'After the company [ScanFarm] cleared our [family] land without prior notification, I decided to make bigger claims for compensation because the trees marking the boundaries were no more. I must protect this family property' (Interview, 2012). The land deals representations by the NGOs therefore provided promising avenues for some allegedly "affected" residents to gain access to much bigger land areas than before, in addition to compensation payments. Nonetheless, the attendant negative impacts were shifted to some neighbouring farmers. For instance, after observing multiple compensation payments and land claims, ScanFarm rejected several subsequent land claims, even including some made by "allodial landholders" who were either not present during the project implementation or the re-negotiation phase (Boamah, forthcoming-a).

Furthermore, some "indigenous" residents made a petition to the King of the Asante<sup>13</sup> to oust the paramount chief of ATC for leasing out many indigenous land areas. The petition stated: 'Recalling the Oath of Allegiance sworn before you, ... and the entire Asante Nation by [name withheld] to protect the lands our forbearers fought for and left behind, and to protect and defend the citizens at all times, he has failed woefully and miserably to honour this Oath and thereby does not deserve to serve you and the people of Agogo'.<sup>14</sup> Indisputably, this petition was a reaction to land dispossessions faced by some indigenous residents primarily as a result of land allocations for ScanFarm project and Fulani Herdsman. However, according to the leader of this community-based activist group, '... through our advocacy, some affected *kuromanfo* [indigenes] have gained new land areas plus compensation payments from ScanFarm. We will keep up the fight because we won't allow *Akwasi Broni*<sup>15</sup> [European] to take our land again. ActionAid Ghana officers have promised us of their support' (interview, 2012). This shows that, the resistance was influenced not only by the negative local impacts of the land deals but also the land deals representations re-activated the pre-existing local discourse, which prompts "indigenes" to resist land dispossession. Currently, the continued scepticism about possible land losses to foreigners has compelled local activist organisations to further negotiate a joint venture agreement with ScanFarm instead of the current lease (interview with the Registrar of ATC, 2012).

#### 4.3. The Kimminic project (Case III)

The Kimminic project involves a 40-year joint venture land deal with six traditional councils in the Brong-Ahafo Region of Central Ghana for the cultivation of *jatropha* for biofuel production. The entire project involves a total land area of 65,000 hectares. This

<sup>12</sup> New Ghana Cedis. GHS 1 = US\$ 1.

<sup>13</sup> One of the ethnic groups in Southern Ghana, to which the indigenes of Agogo belong.

<sup>14</sup> Public notification of a formal petition against land allocations sanctioned by the Paramount Chief of the ATC. This petition was made by community-based organisations called "Concerned Citizens of Agogo" and "Agogo Youth Organisations" in 2011 and 2012.

<sup>15</sup> This name, used by Ghanaians mostly in Southern Ghana, refers to European visitors to the country.

<sup>10</sup> Fine-powdered material derived from the plant is used in diets for their nutritional values and also to enhance taste and flavor. It is prevalent in the savannah areas and a major source of income for women.

<sup>11</sup> Land areas under the direct trusteeship of chiefs, and excludes family and other private landholdings.

case focuses on the village of Bredi near one of the Kimminic project areas in the Nkoranza Traditional Council<sup>16</sup> (henceforth referred to as NTC) involving a land area of 13,000 hectares. A profit-sharing allocation of 75% and 25% for Kimminic and NTC respectively per annum was agreed. This type of land deal, unlike a lease agreement, involves a joint plantation ownership between Kimminic and the local communities represented by chiefs. Funding sources for the Kimminic project came from Canadian investors and Ghanaian residents in Canada, including the Chief Executive Officer of the company. As a joint venture, the Ghanaian investors together with chiefs of the NTC advocated for the protection of land areas cultivated by residents of the project villages. In 2010, Kimminic intercropped jatropha with maize purportedly to ensure food security in the project village. Plantation workers, and sometimes their spouses and relatives were allowed to cultivate food crops in the jatropha plantation.

The company advertised the project's potential for the communities as:

'KIMMINIC operates a unique model of joint plantation ownership with the local communities ... KIMMINIC's acquisition process from the traditional councils is consistent with the Office of Administrator of Stool Lands Act ... (Act 481). KIMMINIC explained the benefits and impacts of the projects to the chiefs before the lands were acquired' (Kimminic, 2010).

Furthermore, according to an NTC chief, 'We gave out the lands to the company so that the youth can secure jobs. Most occupants [migrants] of our land have not paid anything to us lately. ... It is not a lease, the land areas are not sold out. Local people [indigenes] are also owners of the project' (Interview, 2012). The "pro-poor" imagery of the Kimminic project is evident in the quote above. The project improved the livelihoods of 23 out of the 40 households surveyed through employment and the related income-generating activities, until its suspension in May 2012 due to funding problems (Boamah, forthcoming-b). Interviews with residents after the lay-offs illustrate how land deals representations can rekindle local discourses of resource utilization for improved livelihoods. 'Our chiefs negotiated with Kimminic to employ the *kuromanfo* [indigenes] and we all benefited from the project. Most of us are now still in the house [unemployed] after the lay-offs. We don't know when the company will resume work (interview with a former worker of Kimminic, 2012).

During transect walks in the jatropha plantation, reserved areas had been created by Kimminic for the use of residents. Also, farmland areas within the jatropha plantation were protected as required by the joint venture land deal. Migrant households in the survey, whose farmland lay within specific plots demarcated for the plantation, however lost portions of farmland areas or sometimes lost entire land areas. ActionAid Ghana sensitized local activist groups to oppose the Kimminic project on the grounds of possible land dispossession and livelihoods destruction. Despite this advocacy, the NTC strategically labeled some migrant farmers as "noncompliant" land users and this pre-empted opposition to the project by most affected migrant farmers (Boamah, forthcoming-a). This is a classic case of a biofuel project in Ghana whereby land deal representations, underpinned by the *development optimism* narrative, correspondingly translated into improved livelihoods for most households in the survey for nearly four years (Boamah, forthcoming-b). Nonetheless, in January 2013, portions of the Kimminic jatropha plantation were burnt down by irate migrant residents who had been influenced by ActionAid Ghana's advocacy. 'The NGO advised us to protect our farmlands. We don't know the source of the fire that burnt the jatropha farm but ...

jatropha cannot occupy land areas that can be used to produce food (interview with a migrant farmer, 2012).

#### 4.4. The European Union Project (Case IV)

The 500-hectare European Union-funded Jatropha project (henceforth called the EU project) was launched primarily for income-creation for vulnerable groups, especially women in fourteen villages in Northern Ghana. Unlike the others, this was therefore labeled as an "aid" project. The project is coordinated by the University of Sassari, Italy, in partnership with four reputable Ghanaian research institutes to promote successful implementation. The partners include Technology Consultancy Centre of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the Savannah Agricultural Research Institute, the MOFA and an NGO, New Energy. The farmers who expressed interest in the project were encouraged to use "marginal lands" so that the project would not undermine local livelihoods and food security. This advice was given to the residents so that higher expectations of incomes from the project would not mislead farmers to swap their usual productive farmland for jatropha which has a longer gestation period compared with food crops. Farmers then indicate land areas they categorise as "marginal" and hence suitable for jatropha cultivation. So-called "marginal" land areas are recorded with a GPS device and registered for both free ploughing and seed or seedlings. The project adopts an out-grower system where farmers produce jatropha nuts and then receive free training from the EU Project about the processing of the jatropha nuts into oil. The farmers would then decide whether or not to use the oil for soap-making or as a fuel in hammer mills, tractors and lanterns. Others may sell the jatropha nuts or the jatropha oil to fellow village residents. The EU project would also negotiate with the farmers to set prices for the jatropha oil or jatropha nuts for the benefit of the project villages. This project was advertised in the media as:

'... The five years pro-poor EU funded project also targets at creating income generating-activities as an integrated approach to ensure sustainable livelihood conditions of residents of the identified underserved communities in the northern region. ... This ... will go a long way to reduce desertification effects on the environment and also improve the livelihood of residents of the beneficiary communities through the implementation of a participatory approach at the rural community level' (Northern Ghana News, 2010).

In addition, according to one of the EU project partners, 'We did not take away any land from the farmers. The participating farmers offered their land areas willingly' (interview, 2013).

As the project aimed at improving the livelihoods of perceived vulnerable groups such as women, group interviews based on gender were conducted to examine the impacts of the project on the livelihoods of men and women. According to a project representative, 'the first groups of farmers [30] were dominated by women. Most of them [women] stopped food production and started jatropha cultivation' (interview, 2013). Interviews with female farmers revealed that most women, who were fully convinced by the project's objectives, strategically categorised productive land areas as "marginal" in order to be integrated into the project. Out of the 10 women interviewed, only 3 intercropped the jatropha with food crops. Interviews with the 6 men indicated rather scepticism towards the market for the jatropha nuts. Men therefore continued with food crop production and in rare cases did intercropping with jatropha plants. The gendered ambivalence towards the project was because the men claimed high profitability of large-scale food crops production compared to women, and were thus doubtful of the comparative advantages of jatropha cultivation. In addition,

<sup>16</sup> A Traditional Council in the Brong Ahafo Region of Central Ghana.

women, being the main target groups of the project, perceived jatropha cultivation as a new income-generating opportunity compared to their usual smaller farm sizes meant solely for domestic consumption. However, besides free ploughing and seeds provided by the project, the participating farmers bear the maintenance costs of the jatropha farms. Most women hired labourers for the maintenance of jatropha farms but not men (interview, 2013).

The high expectations of income-creation by the participating farmers have not however been met. Since the start of jatropha cultivation in 2010, with the exception of jatropha nuts bought from a few farmers for experimental oil processing, there have been no markets for the harvested nuts due to the delays in the training of farmers. For example, the first training of the farmers for jatropha oil processing which was eventually scheduled for October 2013 has been postponed again to November 2013 as a result of requests to involve a machine fabrication company, *Gratis Foundation*,<sup>17</sup> in order to expedite the training of farmers (Phone communication with one of the project partners, 8 October 2013). A contract finalized in October 2013 confirms that *Gratis Foundation* will collaborate with the Technology Consultancy Center both in the provision of hands-on experiences as well as in the installation of subsequent jatropha processing facilities. Contrary to the project's main objective of reducing the vulnerability of women to poverty, the reverse is the case. Despite these disappointing outcomes, one project partner stated that no negative publicity has been observed since its inception (interview, 2012; phone conversation, 2013). Currently, the project partners have identified soap-makers in the nearby cities who have expressed interest in switching to the use of jatropha oil due to the high prices of palm oil, which is often bought from Southern Ghana. This is intended to secure markets for jatropha oil after the training of the project participants. Proper consultation processes were followed though and no land dispossession occurred during the project implementation. However, productive land areas that could be used for food production are converted into non-lucrative jatropha farms. The 3-year old project has escaped public criticism despite its disappointing outcomes perhaps because there was no incidence of land dispossession and the supposed beneficiaries were farmers rather than agro-conglomerates. Other possible reasons could be its alignment with powerful partners (including an NGO), the small land area (500 hectares) involved or the willing offer of land areas by the participating farmers. Nonetheless, if avenues for jatropha markets are developed, the seemingly well-organized project will hopefully translate into positive spin-off effects for the village residents.

### 5. Why are the choice of framings and concepts so effective in Ghana?

The choice of framings and narratives adopted in the debate about outcomes of land deals, using either “land transaction” or the “land grabbing” concepts, clearly indicates certain political priorities. The advocacy by NGOs and how it reinforced the residents' opposition to the ScanFarm project area attest to the influence of *neo-colonialism* narratives. The residents' preference for a community partnership with ScanFarm instead of a lease attests to this. Conversely, the “pro-poor” association with the “land transaction” concept was emphasized by the NTC to express possible “win-win” outcomes of the Kimminic project. It is worth noting that,

<sup>17</sup> It is a Ghanaian Machine Fabrication company that offers services to micro, small and medium scale enterprises including food processing, textiles and light engineering sectors. Through its branches in the ten regions in Ghana, the company offers entrepreneurial and technology-based training, equipment manufacture services, technical and business advisory services, equipment on hire purchase. Its branch in the Northern Regional capital of Tamale has been officially enrolled into the EU Jatropha project as a fifth partner since October 2013.

whilst the NTC used the “land transaction” concept to describe the project favourably, the NGOs preferred the “land grabbing” concept. This highlights conflicting standpoints referring to the *development optimism* and *neo-colonialism* narratives respectively. Similarly, arguments reinforced by the *development optimism* narrative were advanced by ATC despite some incidences of land dispossession created by the ScanFarm project. Furthermore, the “pro-poor” representation of the EU project and the claim that farmers “willingly” offered their land areas for participation in the project clearly denotes reference to the *development optimism* narrative whilst pre-empting public critiques that may be reinforced by the *neo-colonialism* narrative. Finally, whilst media and NGOs' critiques of the Biofuel Africa project reinforced by the *neo-colonialism* narrative contributed to the failure of its jatropha project, praise corresponding with the *development optimism* narrative revived its “Food Production Project” though nothing fundamentally changed during the second phase of the project.

As neither the biofuels policy frameworks nor the new land regulation by the Ghana Lands Commission gave comprehensive guidelines for biofuels investments in Ghana, the choice of concepts used by powerful non-state actors (NGOs, researchers and chiefs) have become the available alternatives. The polarized framings of outcomes of land deals by the use of the concepts “land grabbing” and “land transaction” effectively corresponds with Ghanaians' ambivalence towards large-scale agriculture. For instance, due to its claimed “social democracy” philosophy, the NDC government is sensitive to reports highlighting potentially negative food security impacts of biofuels investments. The government loan for BioFuel Africa to support food production only and the “2010 National Best Maize farmer Award” for ScanFarm indicate the current government's preference for food supply in large-scale agriculture. It is therefore not surprising that ScanFarm's initial sign-post, publicized by Spire as “threatening”, was later replaced by the “Best Farmer” award as its first official sign-posts, which were erected along major roads in the project areas. Furthermore, ScanFarm's proud public display of the government award and the display of the letter by the Ghanaian President confirming the award intended primarily to project its contribution to food security in Ghana suggests that, the switch to maize was influenced by the government and some Ghanaians' perceptions about what “what ought to be” an ideal large-scale agriculture. Moreover, ScanFarm's justification for the switch from jatropha to maize on the grounds of limited profitability of the latter is illogical because it is not possible to meet profit expectation from investments in jatropha in less than two years.

Conversely, the public perceptions of “ideal” agricultural investments have equally necessitated the use of appealing concepts by investors and chiefs in order to attract praise from the government, the media and NGOs or pre-empt public critiques. As a consequence, disappointing outcomes of some biofuels investments are often not subject to public scrutiny. The discussions above implicitly illustrate lack of political will, funding problems and biofuels investors' poor forecasting of biofuels markets as additional factors that have influenced the trajectory and outcomes of biofuels investments in Ghana. The paper has however mainly focused on the choice of concepts and framings used in land deals representations and their centrality in political debates in Ghana.

### 6. Conclusion

The paper does not deny that political will, poor funding and investors' poor forecasting of biofuels markets influence the trajectory and outcomes of biofuels investments. Neither does it downplay the important role of NGOs, researchers and other actors as “watch dogs” in environmental resource governance in the global

south. These actors have indeed become not simply “watchdogs” but active shapers of policy and outcomes of investments through the use of particular concepts and transmission of selective interpretations for political purposes. In contexts characterized by weak regulations and uncertainties, the dominant concepts used in debates define “authoritative knowledge”. Whereas reverence for the chieftaincy institution in Ghana has given prominence to the “win–win discourse” expressed by chiefs, the “critical discourse” expressed through the political activism by NGOs and other Civil Society Organizations, which often involve the mobilization of perceived affected residents (or prospective victims), have equally claimed another form of “truth”. The ambivalence towards large-scale agriculture expressed by Ghanaian governments and some Ghanaian citizens has also reinforced the two “truths” claimed by the two competing discourses. By normatively portraying biofuels investments as necessarily detrimental, unrestrained posturing of so-called “watch dogs” may rather pre-empt the possible positive impacts on livelihoods and energy provision. Conversely, one-dimensional portrayal of projects as “pro-poor” may promote problematic investment projects. With strong pre-existing scepticism towards large-scale agriculture in Ghana, the strategic uses of concepts prompting residents of project areas to mobilize themselves against possible land dispossession (or livelihoods destruction) becomes more persuasive than those expressing “win–win” outcomes. NGOs and other Civil Society Organizations are therefore more powerful in their representations of outcomes of land deals than other actors. The relative power asymmetries between the actors producing, disseminating and controlling global discourses and how these global discourses correspond with local discourses influence local level responses to new developments. Labeling biofuels investments as “land grabbing” hampers their potentials for local development and profit-making. Biofuels investors whose projects are labeled as “land grabbing” often either switch to food crop production, which is perceived as beneficial to the country, or to the adoption of production models that are perceived as potentially non-detrimental to the land use rights of small-holder local residents. To ensure an effective regulatory framework for expeditious implementation of biofuels investment projects in Ghana, the author recommends environmental impact assessments encapsulating the following:

- Land use patterns of proposed project areas; criteria and procedures for compensation payments for possible affected residents; evidence of prospective markets for biofuels and of the sustainability of funding sources for proposed biofuels investment projects.
- Documented evidence of public sensitization programmes and of informed consent between chiefs, prospective biofuels investors and residents of proposed project areas for perusal by the Lands Commission, Environmental Protection Agencies and the related state institutions.
- Expeditious delivery of decisions on environmental impact assessment reports to avoid bureaucratic processes which may either unduly delay project implementations or create a recipe for clandestine land deals.
- Creation of periodic fora to deliberate on feedback or reports about observed outcomes of biofuels projects for follow-ups by appropriate agencies after project implementations.

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