RURAL YOUTH AND THE RIGHT TO A LIVELIHOOD IN GHANA

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In contemporary Ghana, youth are often treated as a problematic element in society by
the mass media and in political discourse. Youth are portrayed as wayward, prone to
western decadence, drug taking, and crime. They are frequently accused of debasing
African culture by adopting foreign elements, despite the fact that the culture that is held
up for them to emulate is itself based on cultural borrowings by the elder generation.
Rural youth are frequently portrayed as footloose lazy, and lacking in respect. They are
accused of migrating to the urban area in search of quick and easy money, instead of
helping their ageing parents on their farms. National development policies for rural
youth are concerned with finding ways of preventing the youth from migrating to the
cities. It is frequently argued that measures must be introduced to instil moral values into
them, and to get them to take up agriculture.

In Ghana, the concept of youth is closely associated with that of young men
(mmerantee or nkankwa in the Akan dialects). This carries two different
connotations. Firstly, it refers to the physically active stratum of the population, the
younger people within households, who perform services for elders, who can be sent on
erands by elderly people, and who are not in control of property. In the nineteenth
century this was the strata of the population who performed military service, were
organised into companies, and in peacetime maintained the infrastructure of the
settlements, such as roads and sanitation. Secondly, it is used as a class concept to refer
to commoners, those people without significant property and significant positions and
office in the administration of lineage and state property. Young men, in the Ghanaian
context refer to people who can be in their late forties. As a concept, it is more related to
notions of economic independence rather than mere physical age. In the context of
females, the youth concept is more curtailed, referring to women who are single,
unmarried, and who are not rearing children. The fact that women often marry and give
birth to children at and earlier age than men, results in the differentiation of youth status
by gender, with female youth being younger than male youth.

In contrast with the position of youth, chiefs and elders are presented as the
bastions of tradition and defenders of African culture. They are seen as being
progressive, and carrying out a successful harmonisation of tradition with modernity.
The institution of chieftaincy is seen as a manifestation of the positive attributes of
African culture. To challenge chieftaincy in the contemporary period is often presented
as holding African culture in low esteem. Chiefs are upheld as paragons of virtue who
stand for democratic concepts based on intrinsic African values.
However, this contemporary perspective on the institution of chieftaincy is one that is largely a product of the colonial period, and its rural administration based on native authorities and alliances with chiefs. This contemporary position, is in contradiction with popular perspectives on chieftaincy that were developed in the terminal colonial period in the nascent nationalist struggle, when chiefs were seen as stooges of colonial government who used the resources of the rural areas for their narrow selfish interests. Commenting on the political scene during the early 1950s Amamoo (1958:99) writes:

many people were beginning by the end of 1950 to associate the chiefs with British rule. The situation was worsened by the rather too close friendship between some of the chiefs and the British officers, by a statement from Nkrumah to the effect that reactionary and other chiefs who refused to move with the people would be destooled, and by the spasmodic waves of “destoolment” of chiefs which swept the country between the period 1949 to 1952. The chiefs, therefore, felt their position was at stake; and their institutions in danger of being abolished.

In 1948, a series of riots occurred on the Gold Coast directed against the colonial administration and the system of Native Administration. A Commission of Enquiry was organised, which was known as the Watson Commission (1948). The commission interviewed many commoners and youth and found a deep resentment against the system of native authorities based on chiefs and their exactions from commoners. The Watson Commission (1948) recommended the end of Native Authorities and a clear separation of traditional chiefly councils from local authorities. During the 1950s local government was reformed and made more representative. In the 1951 Local Government Ordinance, two thirds of representatives were elected and one third appointed by the chiefs. In the 1953 Municipal Councils Ordinance, the members appointed by chiefs were reduced to one third and in 1959 chiefs were excluded from representation in local councils which were wholly elected. By the 1960s local government had been restructured into 69 elected local and urban councils.

Although the position of chiefs waned in the independence period, chiefs were often used pragmatically by governments. When they supported government, government entered into alliance with them, and when they were against government, the government sought to weaken their power, destabilise the incumbent, and get new chiefs appointed who supported the political administration. At independence, the Convention People’s Party (CPP) had a strong popular commoner and youth base. However, they also had an influential elite support basis of aspiring capitalists, who
made demands for the state to further their narrow selfish interests. This was met in the policies of indigenisation, which followed independence. They often appropriated resources for these national elites from the people rather than deepening popular reforms. Popular aspirations were often sacrificed for aspiring capitalist and bureaucratic elites, resulting in forms of patronage politics. The popular democratic aspirations of the anti-colonial movement was transformed into a state apparatus, which promoted top-down centrist policies based on nationalist development that conformed to international development notions of modernisation. The town development committees, which prevailed in rural political life, came to reflect the aspirations of a small rural elite, which supported modernisation policies.

This pattern of development continued to prevail until the crisis of the 1970s, which resulted in the re-emergence of populism, demands for accountability, voluntarism, and youth politics, as symbolised by the emergence of Jerry John Rawlings, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), and of the People’s Defence Committees in which youth were dominant. However, the crisis of the 1970s was not to be resolved by these forces, but by surrender to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the implementation of a policy of structural adjustment in 1983. This was to transform the state and result in more decentralised forms of administration. In rural areas the characteristics of this has been the implementation of development administration based on notions of community participation. This notion of community participation has increasingly moved from notions of spontaneous movements of youth and commoners to the resurgence of notions of chiefs and chieftaincy organisations as representing the community. This paper examines the impact and implications of the resurgence of chiefly influence in natural resource management and land on the youth and youth livelihoods, and examines the relationship between contemporary development frameworks and those within the colonial period.

**Youth, land and labour**

Since the early colonial period, youth issues have become highly politicised in Ghana and other areas of West Africa. Having abolished domestic slavery, colonial regimes faced difficulties in recruiting cheap labour for public works and for the main colonial enclave economic activities. Colonial powers instigated policies based on forced labour and local taxation to gain labour recruits from particular areas that were designated as labour reserves. Invariably, the focus of labour recruitment was young men. To
instigate these policies colonial authorities built up alliances with political authorities and ruling elites in rural areas, who were used to recruit labour. This formed the basis of *indirect rule* in the British colonies and *association* in the French colonies. Forced labour was recruited by paying chiefs a fixed sum for a recruit. Under taxation schemes, youths were forced to migrate to work for wages, which were used to pay tax. In some areas, such as the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, colonial currencies were deliberately withheld from circulation to ensure migration into the main colonial enclaves. These policies frequently led to alliances of chiefs and elders with the colonial authorities to exploit the labour of youth. In some areas, elders controlled women and marriage to ensure that youth provided them with services and labour (Meillassoux, 1981). However, migration was a doubled-edged sword. The migrants often returned with new sources of wealth, which threatened the exiting status quo. Skinner (1965) describes how Mossi migrants to the cocoa zone of Ghana, often returned with new wealth, which they used to undermine the authorities of elders. Young women began to elope with young men back to the cocoa belt. While migration was the product of structures of indirect rule and strengthening of the power base of traditional rulers and their customary rights, migration exposed the migrants to new ways of life and new value systems, which ultimately undermined the basis of customary values. Thus, the youth, or young men, the main economic migrants, were viewed as social categories that could undermine customary values and the position of the chief.

In the main export crop enclaves (as opposed to labour reserves) a set of different factors operated. These areas were the recipients of migrants, including labour migrants and migrant investors in land (Hill, 1963). The influx of migrants resulted in the rapid alienation of land and a process of land accumulation. In some areas, such as Akyem and the Western Region, chiefs sold large areas of land to migrant cocoa farmers. Large farmers and elders could also accumulate large areas of land for their own personal investment, hire migrant labour to work these lands, or place them under migrant sharecropping tenants. Local youth began to experience land shortage and responded by opposing chiefs, or by developing anti-migrant sentiments. In the Akyem area, from as early as the late nineteenth century, youth responded to land sales by “destooling” (dethroning) chiefs (Amanor, 1999). Although, youth in the cocoa export-producing zone were not coerced into forced migrant labour, they could be used by chiefs for communal labour and labour could be extracted from them for work on the royal plantations. The chiefs frequently found many ways of raising revenues from their
“subjects”, which produced considerable resentment among the population. In the Akyem area during the 1920s and 1930s, there was considerable unrest among youth, and local youth organised alongside migrants to oppose chiefs. During the 1930s, the paramount chief in Akyem Abuakwa only survived attempts to destool him by the timely intervention of the colonial police force (Simensen 1975; Rathbone, 1993). In neighbouring Kwahu, the youth successfully destooled two paramount chiefs in 1915 and 1927, and in 1927 marched against the Governor of the Gold Coast on an official visit to Mpraeso. The Governor had to make a hurried retreat to Accra (Asiamah, 2000).

In both the Akyem and Kwahu area, the youth reorganised asafo companies to oppose the excesses of chieftaincy. The asafo were originally military companies, in which young men were organised to perform military service. During peacetime, these companies played important roles in maintaining the infrastructure of settlements, maintaining and clearing road boundaries and the sanitary infrastructure. In the colonial period, youth in the Akyem and Kwahu area, perceived that with the support of the colonial government, chiefs were abusing their powers to make increasing exactions from the people. They transformed the asafo into political institutions, which began to make demands upon chiefs for reforms and demonstrate against their exactions (Simensen, 1975; Rathbone, 1993; 1996; Addo-Fenning, 1997; Asiamah, 2000). Asiamah comments:

Since the youth who initiated the actions were mostly illiterate…. They decided to work around the asafo, which was already an organised body in every town and village, but which only existed in a loose form.

In fact they could not have organised any new youth movement, nor a Scholars Union, since they were not educated and there were practically no educated persons at the time. Consequently, it was planned to rejuvenate the “sleeping” traditional Asafo, and make it the vanguard to lead the people to fight for their legitimate right in Kwahu.

In other areas, chiefs were able to manipulate local youth and mobilise them against migrants. In the Sefwi area, Boni (2005) describes how in the 1950s, chiefs made increasing exactions on migrant farmers to whom they had alienated land. When these migrants began to resist the exactions, local youth were mobilised by the chiefs to expel the migrants, under the guise that they had abused the hospitality extended to them, encroached into areas not allocated to them, and were now damaging the interests of locals. Local youth were aggrieved by growing shortage of land, which was perceived as arising from the influx of migrants.
By the late 1940s and 1950s the role of the militant youth *asafo* declined as youth were mobilised on a national scale in the anti-colonial movement and the CPP. Their demands were taken forward into self-government and the replacement of native authorities ran by chiefly councils with elected local councils. However, without any agenda for land reform or radical social transformation within rural localities the plight of youth was to continue unresolved.

**The cocoa frontier and youth**

The cocoa economy in Ghana has been organised as a family venture along an expanding frontier (Hill, 1993; Amanor, 1999). The large and successful cocoa farmers have mobilised both extended family labour and migrant labour. Migrant labour was usually contracted on sharecrop arrangements or on a hired annual basis, in which the labourer was employed for a whole farming year and remunerated at the end of the cocoa harvest. Youth from within the extended family were mobilised to open up new farming areas and create new plantations. Implicit in the generalised reciprocal arrangements was an understanding that in return for help in the present, the cocoa farmer would allocate the family youth a portion of plantation in the future, in recognition of their service.

This system worked well as long as the frontier was expanding and labour was more highly valued than land. However, as the frontier contracted and land became scarcer conflicts began to emerge over the allocation of land. In systems based on matrilineal forms of inheritance, as among the dominant Akan people, the elders within the matrilineage began to challenge the granting of land by fathers to sons. Matrilineal nephews who had worked with their mother’s brothers (*wofa*) also found that the brothers of their *wofa* would usurp ownership of cocoa plantations which they had expended labour in creating. Okali (1983:107) records that one son who had seen the cocoa plantation he helped to develop slip into the hands of his father’s matrilineal heir, bitterly commented: “If you follow your father you are a fool for nothing”. With the increasing influx of migrants from Sahelian countries during the 1950s and 1960s cocoa farmers were able to play off migrant labour against family youth labour, and make increasing exactions upon family labour. By the late 1960s and 1970s intense generational conflicts emerged within families over control of land and labour. Many youth began to abandon work on family farms when it became evident that their futures
were not secure. The main alternative avenues for an agricultural livelihood were sharecropping and labouring. However, in these spheres, the youth had to compete against migrants who were willing to work for much lower remuneration.

In 1969, during a period of economic recession, the Busia government in Ghana launched an Aliens Compliance Act, which arose out of attempts to blame the woes of the economy on immigrants. The Aliens Compliance Act largely focused on the repatriation of nationals from neighbouring West African nations engaged in the trading sector. However, in many rural areas, particularly in the Eastern Region, disaffected youth took advantage of the situation to harass and expel migrant labourers. From this period onwards, youth labour within the farm sector has replaced migrant labour. Daily labour and contract labour has replaced annual labour and youth have emerged as the main sharecroppers (Adomako-Sarfoh, 1974).

Intergenerational tensions continue to pervade the farm sector. Farming has become increasingly commoditised with farmers forced to rely on hired labour rather than family labour. Youth frequently work as labourers or engage in sharecropping contracts with other farmers rather than work on family land. Farmers without sufficient capital to hire labour are forced to give out plots on sharecropping arrangements with youth. Youth often find that their rights to family land are challenged by family elders. Even when they are allocated land by a family elder, this can be challenged later with the succession of elders. Successful young farmers on family land often find that elders make so many demands upon them that they prefer to gain access to sharecrop land rather than work family land (Amanor, 1999; Gyasi, 1994).

These intergenerational conflicts have been further exacerbated by conditions of life under structural adjustment. Parents are frequently unable to cater for their children’s needs as social welfare provisioning decline, and youth are increasingly forced to fend for themselves. Youth perceive that their parents and society have failed to provide them with an education and a stable future.

**Agribusiness, development and the youth**

The onward march of development and agribusiness often has a negative impact on the youth. The creation of large agricultural and agribusiness schemes has led to the appropriation of much land by government for development projects and by agribusiness companies (Konings, 1986). With the imposition of structural adjustment, many of
these projects have now been privatised. The alienation of land has severely affected the access of youth and women to land, who are those most vulnerable when land shortage occurs.

In the Kwae area of Akyem, a modern agribusiness plantation, the Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation (GOPDC) has been established since the mid 1970s. This started life as a joint Government of Ghana and World Bank project, which has subsequently been privatised, and is now run by SAIT of Belgium. The creation of the plantation resulted in the expropriation of 9,000 hectares of land which was been worked by 7,000 cultivators (Gyasi, 1992). The expropriation was carried out through an alliance of government and chiefs. The government approached the paramount chief in Akyem Abuakwa for land on which to site the project, and the paramount chief identified the Kwae area. Expropriated farmers were only compensated for the crops on the land and not the land. Compensation for the land was paid to chiefs, since it was argued that under customary tenure cultivators only held user rights and that the allodial rights lay with the chiefs. Farmers were not provided with alternative land.

GOPDC is organised along three sectors: a nucleus plantation worked with wage labour, smallholders and outgrowers. Smallholder farmers are contract farmers who have been allocated a portion of the expropriated land by the company. They are contracted to grow oil palm crops according to procedures laid down by GOPDC and must deliver their harvest to the company. Failure to comply can lead in expulsion from the land. Outgrowers are contracted by GOPDC to grow oil palms on their own land. They are given loans to establish oil palm plantations, which are subtracted from the harvest with compound interest. Again, the farmers must sell their harvest to GOPDC. Failure to comply can result in the company occupying their palm plantation until the loan has been paid off from the proceeds of the plantation.

Outgrowers and smallholders are mature farmers: one of the conditions laid down is that the participant must be married. Thus, youth are marginalised from participating in the project. The youth have suffered from the expropriation of land. The expropriation of so many farmers has created a serious land shortage within the area. Many of the youth in the settlements immediately adjacent to the plantations sought work as labourers on the plantations. However, in interviews I conducted at Kwae in 1999, youth allege that they are no longer employed by the company since they went on strike (Amanor, 1999). They claim that the company prefers to employ people from outside the area who do not have grievances about the expropriation of their land. Many
of the youth are unemployed within the area and largely make their living by raiding the oil palm plantation at night for oil palm fruits, which women in the settlement process into palm oil for sale. The youth justify this by arguing that the land has been taken away from them unfairly, and that they have a moral right to harvest fruits from the plantation, since they also need to “eat” (Amanor 2005). In many areas of the Kwae plantation farmers have resisted the expropriation, and the GOPDC has not been able to occupy more 4,000 hectares of its concession.

Many farmers consider GOPDC to be an exploitative company and dislike the outgrower scheme. However, modern oil palm hybrid plantations are regarded as highly profitable and many farmers have aspirations of saving capital to invest in independent palm plantations. A dominant trend now is for family elders without the capital to establish oil palm plantations to give out land to sharecroppers. The arrangements involve a half share of the plantation between the landholder and the tenant. Within this area, increasing areas of land are being transformed into plantations, and most land is held under sharecrop arrangements. As a result of this trend, youth can no longer secure land by virtue of family membership. Land only goes to those who have capital to establish plantations. New forms of customary tenure have been invented which require payments of customary fees that are beyond the means of poor farming youth (Amanor with Diderutuah, 2001). Thus, in this area, increasing commodification of agriculture is resulting in the exclusion of many youth from farming.

**Customary land reform and the youth**

In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on introducing new land reform programmes that conforms to neoliberal frameworks. These seek to promote community-based solutions and a more decentralised framework of land administration (Bruce, 1993), or to harmonise customary and statutory land tenure into one framework (Toolmin and Quan, 2000). In Ghana, under the Land Administration Programme (LAP), these community based solutions revolve around the creation of customary land secretariats focused on traditional rulers, and work to strengthen the capacity of chiefs to manage land.

A major concern is in promoting a more transparent system of land administration, which will facilitate the purchase of land by investors. At present, land transactions take a long time to register and are plagued by uncertainty, disputed
ownership and multiple sales of the same piece of land to different people. A popular adage in Ghana states that if you want to buy land you need to pay for it at least twice over. The objectives of LAP are to streamline land markets, maintain a digital database of land plots within Ghana, and create decentralised registers of land within chieftaincy secretariats. It is argued that chiefs are the rightful owners of land, and therefore any land initiative needs to revolve around them. However, much of the framework for customary land tenure is based on the assumptions of the colonial period, and the reinvention of tradition in the colonial period. This concept of customary land as vested in chiefs was contested in the colonial period. It gave rise to much unrest that materialised into the anti-colonial independence movement. As discussed above, the movement for independence was as much a movement against Native Authorities and the rule of chiefs as against British rule.

Although contemporary land reform is dressed up in a cloak of promoting poverty alleviation and equity, it very much addresses the interest of elites in the rural areas and investors. Contemporary land reform frameworks argue that state administration of land in the past led to abuses in the 1960s and 1970s. Land was appropriated by the state for politicians, bureaucratic elites and their close allied. It is argued that decentralising land to chiefs, who represent community interests, will result in more equitable forms of land administration that meet rural needs. However, this ignores the fact, that during the 1960s and 1970s the alienation of land by compulsory acquisition of the state, was carried out in partnership with chiefs, as in the example of the GOPDC plantation at Kwae. In the cocoa sector, chiefs have also sold off large areas of land to rich migrant farmers at the expense of local citizens and the youth. In the present period, many chiefs are intensifying their alienation of land as land values increase and expropriating the land of citizens. This is particularly evident in the periurban sector where chiefs are appropriating the land of farmers and selling them out for real estate, and claiming that their ownership of usufruct gives them rights to sell the land of cultivators (Ubink, 2004). Given the power accorded to chiefs by the state and the influence and power of the new purchasers of land, it is difficult for poor farmers to oppose these new appropriations. Tradition and custom are once again been fashioned by the powerful.

The expansion of land markets, global capital, and customary chiefly secretariats are likely to undermine the rights of the youth to land, as their rights are sidestepped to
encourage new investors. For instance, an article in Ghana Regional News of 18 September 2005, states:

The Eastern Regional Minister, Mr. Yaw Barimah, has suggested to the chiefs of Manya Krobo Traditional Area to take a second look at their land tenure system with a view to releasing land for commercial mango farming. He explained that mangoes grow well in the area and their cultivation could form the raw material base for the development of agro-industry to provide employment for the youth of the area.

The implication of the speech of the Regional Minister is that the chiefs should use their power to recreate new forms of tenure which will facilitate the release of land to investors for the development of mango for the export trade. There is no mention of support for local people and peasant farmers to engage in this new promising agricultural sector. The local youth are envisaged as playing the role of providing labour for the commercial farmers, which presumes their expropriation and inability to engage in an independent livelihood. Thus, the assumptions made in this speech reveal the dangers that the present strengthening of chiefs and customary land tenure hold for the youth, as investors move in to occupy land at the expense of the new generation of farmers.

**Youth and off farm livelihoods in the forestry sector**

Off-farm livelihoods have historically been important for youth, who combine farming with other activities, particularly during the slack farming system. For instance gold-mining and alluvial panning for Gold were important activities in the Akyem area during the nineteenth century. In 1882 Captain Rumsay wrote:

> The population of Eastern Akim [Akyem Abuakwa] is very uncertain, a great influx taking place during the Gold Mining season. There appears with the exception of Gold Mining and a little Palm oil making no other industry.

During the colonial period, the colonial authority attempted to limit the informal indigenous gold mining sector, and timber and other forest resources arose as an important off-farm incomes for youth. During slumps in cocoa production, labourers and youth would move into small-scale timber production with pitsaws. The amount of pitsawn timber production varied inversely with the cocoa price: when prices for cocoa

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were high labour gravitated from timber into the easier work on cocoa plantations. In times of cocoa price slumps labour moved from cocoa into timber¹.

In recent years, with increasing land shortage off-farm incomes have become increasingly important for youth. In the Enyirisi and Asamankese area of the Eastern Region land shortage for youth began to become acute in the 1950s. Youth responded by moving into cane basket weaving. A parastatal rattan factory was also established at Enyirisi in the 1960s. As rattan became increasingly scarce in the Eastern Region the rattan weavers were forced to relocate following supplies. During the 1980s they established themselves in Accra and drew on supplies of rattan from the Western Region. Specialised rattan gatherers also emerged who built up networks of collectors in the Western Region.

During the 1950s many youth in the Asamankese and Enyiresi area took up rattan weaving as an alternative industry to agriculture. As rattan became scarce, they were forced to relocate to Accra from where they could draw on a large source of cane from specialised gatherers. The Enyirisi and Asamankese weavers are mainly situated on the Switchback Road in Accra. Specialised gatherers also emerged who relocated to Accra to service the weavers, but built up networks of collectors in the Prestea and Gwira Banso areas of the Western Region. They compete against a rival network of gatherers operating in the Prestea area who source the Kumasi market.

In the Aburi area of Akuapem in the Eastern Region, land hungry youth began to learn woodcarving from some old men in 1979 and develop it into an alternative livelihood. The numbers of apprentice woodcarvers swelled in 1983 following the expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria. Youth returning to Aburi found few prospects in getting access to land for farming or employment in other sectors and took up woodcarving. In the early 1980s, a Reverend Quansah found some support from German organisations to establish a youth training workshop in Aburi which became the Aburi Industrial Centre (AIC). The AIC provided training in a number of crafts and vocations, but with the exception of woodcarving, all the others have declined. There are now more than 600 people carving at Aburi (Amanor, 2000).

The economic crisis in the late 1970s offered opportunities for many rural youth, outside of agriculture. In the forestry sector, most timber companies collapsed since they lacked the capital to acquire spare parts for trucks and plant. Youth moved in to supply

¹See Gold Coast Forestry Department Annual Report 1937.
the domestic sector, and government encouraged chainsaw operators. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, chainsaw operators were the main suppliers of timber for the domestic market. However, with the introduction of a structural adjustment programme in Ghana in 1983, the timber sector was identified for promotion of export-oriented growth. Between 1983-1986 $140 million of soft loans were made available for the timber industry through the export rehabilitation project (Friends of the Earth, 1992). This resulted in the rapid expansion of logging capacity and increased volume of exports from 400 cubic metres in 1981 to 1,200 cubic metres in 1988. This resulted in a rapid expansion of timber companies and sawmills, and the milling capacity in Ghana rapidly grew to exceed sustainable harvesting of the timber resource. By the late 1980s a largely unregulated timber industry had depleted much of the stocks of timber in Ghana and an exposé by Friends of the Earth (1992), gained the Ghanaian timber sector a bad name internationally. The Forestry Service (then known as the Forestry Department) limited the annual cut in the forest reserves, and timber companies began to increasingly source timber from farmland, competing with chainsaw operators. By the early 1990s over 80 percent of timber exports were sourced from farmland and there were growing conflicts between timber companies, farmers and chainsaw operators over access to timber resources. During the 1990s, three important developments occurred in the forest sector:

1. The Forestry Service gained control over the management of off-reserve timber, which had previously lain with district assemblies;

2. The Forestry Service initiated a collaborative forest management project, in which they built up community forestry projects. However, the communities were largely represented by chiefs, rather than the youth who made up the majority of chainsaw operators;

3. In 1994 a ban was instigated against chainsaw timber, criminalising the activities of many youth and the concession system was extended into farming areas, monopolising timber resources for the timber industry.

While chiefs have been recognised as important civil society actors that represent communities, this does not reflect the economic realities and interests on the ground. Chiefs have very different interests from farmers and from the youth. In the Ghanaian National Constitution, chiefs are recognised as the owners of forest resources. Forest resources are vested in the government to manage on behalf of the chiefs. The chiefs alongside local government gain access to royalties from the sale of timber. However,
farmer’s have no rights to timber on their farmland, and no rights in the trees they nurture on their land. While this is the law of the land, this deviates considerably from established practice up until the early 1990s in much of southern Ghana, where farmers transacted trees with pitsawyers and then chainsaw operators. Many chiefs are also timber concessionaries or are represented on the Boards of Governors of timber firms. They thus have interests in timber beyond those of the community. The recognition of chiefs as the representatives of communities by the state results in timber rights being appropriated for concessionaires and the export trade.

Chainsaw operators and the youth have been made scapegoats for the decline of Ghanaian forests, for illegally cutting timber and operating beyond control. However, despite the introduction the ban on chainsaw timber, the destruction of the forests has carried on unabated. Many timber companies are guilty of sourcing illegal timber to increase their supplied. Although timber companies monopolise timber resources, they are reluctant to supply the domestic market, but prefer to export their resource for what is perceived as more lucrative markets. Most of domestic timber continues to be supplied by chainsaw timber. However, with the ban on chainsaw and police and custom checkpoints along the major routes, most of the chainsaw timber is no longer produced by small scale independent youth chainsaw operators, but organised gangs often financed by big business interests, with the connections to bribe their way through the various checkpoints of the security services.

Prior to the banning of chainsaw timber, chainsaw operators organised a National Sawyers Association, which was founded in 1989. Chainsaw operators began to organise in 1988 in the light of unfavourable media coverage and in 1989 a ban was instigated against chainsaw operators by the Sub-Committee on Timber of the National Investigation Committee. The main reason for the ban was the allegations that chainsaw operators were destroying forests, and did not register to pay taxes and royalties. A group of chainsaw operators protested to the committee that these allegations were unfounded. After many negotiations it was agreed that they could operate provided they formed an influential organisation of chainsaw operators, able to regulate the operations of their members. The group of chainsaw operators took up the task of building this organisation and decided to affiliate their organisation with the Timber and Woodworkers Union (Amanor, 2000). The National Sawyers Association undertook to monitor the conduct of its members. It ensured that its members were all registered with the Attorney General Office, district assemblies, and with the FSD. It ensured that they paid taxes and royalties, and gained permits. Its members were issued with membership cards, which they presented to the FSD when applying for felling permits. The association endorsed the good
character of the chainsaw operator. After gaining a conveyance certificate, the association presented its members with a way bill. The association represented the needs of its members to government and educated its members on timber laws, regulations and codes of conduct. Despite organising a large membership, the National Sawyers Association was unable to bring all chainsaw operators within rural areas under its umbrella. It therefore decided to play an instrumental role in the Timber Task Force which was set up in 1993 to monitor and regulate the movement of legal timber along roads. This was intended to protect its image. However, it rapidly became disillusioned with the Timber Task Force. Members of the National Sawyers Association allege that many of the personnel in the Timber Task Force, drawn from the Forestry Service and other government agencies, were corrupt. The National Sawyers Association was also concerned with the ambitious role it was given without logistic support, particularly when it was asked to confiscate the vehicles of illegal operators on the roads, many of whom were armed. When a member of the National Sawyers Association was killed by illegal timber operators at a road check, they decided to withdraw from the Task Force. The Timber Task Force was eventually disbanded in 1997 as a result of lack of transparency. With the banning of chainsaw timber the National Sayers Association became illegal in 1994 and had to disband.

Similar patterns characterise other forest resource sectors. During the 1990s charcoal production has become a flourishing sector in many settlements in the transition zone of the forest, where trees with good charcoal producing qualities occur in abundance. Charcoal production is a strenuous activity, which is mainly taken up by the youth. However, the youth are increasingly being blamed for destroying the environment by burning charcoal and chiefs are being encouraged by local government to introduce byelaws banning charcoal production. This situation is frequently exploited by chiefs to raise rents for themselves. They periodically introduce and remove bans on charcoal. Bans are removed when the youth collect payments to appease them, and bans are declared when the chiefs intend to gain payments from youth. In the past, charcoal burning was largely carried out by professional migrants, who made payments to chiefs in return for rights to exploit charcoal. These rights were often given by chiefs to exploit charcoal resources on farmers’ fallow land. This frequently resulted in conflicts between burners and farmers. However, during the 1990s, young farmers with limited access to land began to perceive charcoal burning as a lucrative activity and began to burn charcoal on their own land as a supplementary activity, which often developed into their primary activity. As citizens, they refused to make payments to chiefs for charcoal exploitation, which they claim to be a right of citizens. With the rise of local youths
replacing migrants as the main charcoal burners, chiefs are concerned by the loss of a revenue source and attempt to ban charcoal as a way of attempting to regain control over fallow resources. The Forestry Service is also keenly aware of the value of charcoal and potential revenues to be made from its control by commercial exploiters. The Forestry Service is keen in portraying youth involvement in charcoal burning as a major source of deforestation, and the need to establish greater controls over charcoal burning and promote more commercial modes of exploitation. In a report on sustainable woodfuel production the Traditional Energy Unit of the Savannah Resource Management Centre states:

> There exists a need to establish new institutional and legal arrangements that promote direct public and private sector investment in a more efficient production and consumption techniques. Thus, the sub-sector will have to shift towards an economy of conservation with incentives to integrate environmental values into business practices and promoting long-term investment and capital gains, rather than short-term profit maximisation. This requires a new approach to woodland management, harvesting techniques, taxation and a new corporate vision. (Traditional Energy Unit, 2002:5).

This radical restructuring of the industry is to be achieved by:

- Promotion of investments in more efficient energy consumption for large-scale users
- Exploring alternative income generating sources for non-wood products

(Traditional Energy Unit 2002:6).

At the community level, this requires the displacement of existing small-scale charcoal producers, who will be provided with alternative livelihood support, based on:

Introducing farmers especially women’s groups and the unemployed youth to alternative income generating activities like small ruminant rearing, dry season gardening, bee keeping, improved Shea butter processing, and breeding of wildlife in captivity (Traditional Energy Unit 2002:10)

Thus, the claim that existing methods of charcoal production are unsustainable, serves as a rhetorical device which justifies appropriating the livelihood resources of youth and women.

Youth forest resource users are often well organised. They often form hometown associations for the exploitation of particular resources, particularly when they are mobile, build networks across rural hinterlands, and settle in the urban areas. These hometown associations organise production and co-operation, represent the interests of the group in policy circles and organise social welfare functions and apprentice-based training. Other groups of forest producers have successfully organised national
associations, which lobby government services for the needs of their members, explain institutional structures and norms to their membership, vouch for their members, and develop codes of conduct. Other groups have linked up several livelihood activities under one organisation and have affiliated to trade unions. This includes chainsaw operators who linked up with canoe carvers, fuelwood and charcoal burners, and tree planters within the Informal Sector of the Timber and Woodworkers Union (Amanor, 2000). These organisational structures are often a response to hostile policy environments and unfavourable reports in the media. However, as the forestry sector emphasises the importance of community participation and chiefly representation, these organisations have become increasingly marginalised. Community participation emphasises the representation of local communities against outsiders, and since many of these youth associations are highly mobile and regionally organised, they fall outside of the structures of local communities. Current emphasise on chiefs as representatives of civil society, also tends to marginalise the associational models that are influenced by unions.

While many youth forest activities are increasingly criminalised, youth also experience difficulty in moving legitimate forest products along roads, and face much harassment and extraction of rents by security forces, even when they have the right documents and permits. Youth are also harassed in the rural areas by security services when they engage in legitimate livelihood activities. While there is much rhetoric about the criminal activities of youth and much extraction of rents from them, there are very few arrests for violation of laws within the rural areas. This results in little confidence in security services among the youth, who try to evade them as much as possible, and build up a sense of injustice and grievances.

**Youth and small-scale mining**

Similar patterns of activities can be found in the small-scale gold mining sector. Initially, with the introduction of liberalisation, many youth found new opportunities to engage in mining. However, as increasing areas of mining concessions have been allocated to foreign companies, small-scale miners, who again are mainly youth, find the areas in which they can mine are increasingly diminishing. Many miners find that their settlements and areas of work are now situated within concessions granted to foreign firms and are forced to encroach within these concessions to continue their livelihoods.
This has led to many conflicts between youth, mining companies and security services, and a growing number of deaths of youth caught encroaching in concessions by security firms.

Conclusion

In recent years the introduction of neoliberal policies promoting global markets, the development of civil society participation through concepts of community participation, and the resurgence of chiefs as a powerful force with control over natural resources has created fairly hostile environments for rural youth. The initial phases of neoliberal market reform created openings for youth to engage in alternative livelihoods. However, these are increasingly constrained, as large-scale investors move into the rural sector and displace youth access to land and other natural resources. Chiefs are also being encouraged by the state to make resources available for external investors. This often results in coercion being exercised against the youth, whose livelihood activities are frequently criminalised and frustrated. The rolling back of the state has often resulted in declining social welfare and education opportunities and many youth complain that their education has been curtailed by the inability of their parents to afford school fees. While the youth are often portrayed as lacking in moral fibre, their experiences of life are often filled with a sense of injustice and grievance, as state agencies and security services frustrate their initiatives, extract rents from them, and harass them, without offering them viable alternative futures. From the perspective of the youth, the immorality of the economy and state administration of the economy is being projected upon them, and they are being made scapegoats for the malaise within society.
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