

**Contemporary Large-Scale Farmland Acquisitions and Food Sovereignty:  
The Case of Smallholders in Sierra Leone**

By

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## **Abstract**

### Contemporary Large-Scale Farmland Acquisitions and Food Sovereignty: The Case of Smallholders in Sierra Leone

By Saidu Timbo

Despite increasing modernization in agriculture globally, the majority of people in developing countries are still dependant on low input, limited technology smallholder farming for their food and livelihood. The 2007-2008 global economic crisis saw a surge in the proliferation of private and foreign investors in Sub-Saharan Africa seeking to acquire farmland for the commercial production of export products consumed, with major impacts on smallholder agriculture. Using Sierra Leone as a case study, this thesis examines the impact of such acquisitions on the basis of a food sovereignty approach, highlighting the socio-economic livelihood opportunities available for smallholders in the face of a global land rush. Findings demonstrate that farmland acquisitions can present more challenges than opportunities for small farmers in affected communities. Evidence suggests the lack of access to local food, loss of control over land and other productive resources, and loss of reliable livelihood opportunities.

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## List of Abbreviations

ABC	Agricultural Business Centres
AGRA	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
ASRP	Agricultural Sector Rehabilitation Project
ASSP	Agricultural Sector Support Project
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India and China
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program
CFSVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Act
CRP	Crash Rice Programme
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EEP	Economic Emergency Program
ERRC	Economic Rehabilitation and Recovery Credit
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FBO	Farmer Based Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FDP	Farmer's Development Program
FFH	Freedom from Hunger
FFS	Farmers Field Schools
FLGI	Farm Lands of Guinea
FSP	Food Security Policy
GAA	Global Agro-ecological Assessment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRDP	Gbondapi Rice Development Project
GRP	Green Revolution Program
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
HDI	Human Development Index
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IADP	Integrated Agricultural Development Projects
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IIED	International Institute of Environmental Development
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
ISI	Import Substitution Industrialization
JI	James International
KSW	Kebuye Sugar Works
MAFFS	Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MTASP	Medium Term Agricultural Strategic Plan
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NRS	National Recovery Strategy
NSA	North-South Alliance
NSADP	National Sustainable Agricultural Development Plan
PACC	Pan African Commodity Corporation
PRAI	Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investment
PRGF	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
REDD	Reduce Emission from Deforestation and Degradation
RSADP	Rhombe Swamp Agricultural Development Project
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
SCP	Smallholder Commercialisation Programme
SEZ	Special Economic Zones
SILNORF	Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food
SLIEPA	Sierra Leone Investment and Promotion Agency
SLPMB	Sierra Leone Producing Marketing Board
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSA	South-South Alliance
TBRDP	Torma Bum Rice Development Project
TIC	Tanzania Investment Centre
UAE	United Arab Emirate
UK	United Kingdom
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNGAO	United States General Account Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program
WB	World Bank



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 The Challenges of Smallholder Agriculture**

A significant transition from traditional subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture in many African countries has given rise to many types of concerns in recent years. Despite increasing modernization in agriculture globally, the majority of people in developing countries are still dependant on low input, limited technology smallholder farming for their food and livelihood (Rosset, 2006, p. 304). Smallholder agriculture is the main source of food and livelihood for about 60 percent of the population in developing regions (McIntyre, et al., 2009, p. 2). The majority of smallholder farmers live in remote areas. Approximately 1.2 billion are living on less than US\$ 1.25 a day, and 2.4 billion are living on less than US\$2 (Akram-Lodhi, 2013, p. 4). In Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, where smallholders are particularly pervasive, the total number of poor people continues to increase, especially during the last “lost decades” of the 1980s and 1990s, when the total number of poor people increased from 200 million in 1981 to 380 million by 2005 (Fridell, 2013, p. 3).

The FAO (2013) estimates that there were about 842 million hungry people globally between 2011 and 2013, representing 12 percent of the world’s population. This means that one in eight people does not have sufficient food for an active and healthy life (p. 9). Developing countries in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, where the surge in land acquisitions and appropriation is most prevalent, are home to 98 percent of the number of hungry people in the world. In Africa, the number of hungry people increased from 177.6 million in 1990-92 to 226.4 million in 2011-13, leaving Africa as

the region with the highest prevalence of undernourishment with one in every four people estimated to be undernourished (FAO, WFP & IFAD, 2013, p. 9).

Africa has experienced the most rapid growth in recent large-scale land acquisitions, accounting for 70 percent of cases documented in developing countries, according to the Global Agro-ecological Assessment (GAA), which is the internationally accepted standardized framework for land evaluation (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 58). Private and foreign investors perceived the continent as having the most underutilised and cheap fertile land for acquisition in the world. About 870 million hectares of potential agricultural land was mapped through satellite imagery during the period of 1995-1996 and about 197 to 227 million hectares was found to be under cultivation, raising the argument of the notion of underutilized land in Africa (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 58). Critics have raised concerns that the current spate of land acquisitions for corporate agriculture could marginalize smallholder farmers. However, in Africa, commercial agriculture for export crops has continued to be promoted as a viable development approach, part of a wider set of policies around a neoliberal global food regime, which involve privatising agriculture and food systems to promote capital accumulation (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 127; Dauvergne & Neville, 2010, p. 649).

In the last decade, many governments and donor agencies have recognised the importance of smallholders and have pledged their support to boost agricultural growth and productivity through smallholder farming (Resnick, 2004). According to the FAO (2012), a smallholder-based agricultural sector with guaranteed access to fertile agricultural land and rural labour will lead to a rapid reduction in food insecurity, hunger and poverty (p. 29). In Ghana, the involvement of smallholder farmers in a set of

smallholder-centered agricultural development policies increased per capita food production by 55 percent between 1990-92 and 2008-10. This lifted about 5 million people out of hunger, and extreme poverty in Ghana declined from 51.7 percent in 1991 to 28.5 percent in 2006 (FAO, WFP & IFAD, 2013, p. 32). In Sierra Leone, domestic rice production increased from 152,000 tons in 1999-2001 to 465,000 tons in 2009, attributed predominantly to an increase in the amount of land put under cultivation by smallholder farmers (CFSVA, 2011, p. 18).

Smallholders' contribution to the total value of agricultural output is also reported in many countries of Asia. In India for example, although smallholders' cultivate only 44 percent of land, their contribution to total farm output was reported to exceed 50 percent. This remarkable contribution was driven by rapid advances in research and development, access to land and substantial public investments and policy support for agriculture. In the 1980s, China as part of its national structural agricultural reforms introduced a smallholder-based Household Responsibility System. In addition to allocating land to peasants, smallholder farming households were granted the rights to make their own production decisions and to market their produce. This intensive smallholder-based initiative has sustained food production for a permanently dense population (Tilt, 2008, p. 190; Thapa & Gaiha, 2011, p. 7).

Similarly, in Brazil, small to medium-scale local farmer organizations have been reported in creating vibrant seed production enterprises through various government assisted programs. With initial funds from the National Development Bank of Brazil, government subsidies for farmers' cooperatives and technical advice for local research

and development institutions, smallholder farmers increased soybean production from 2800 tonnes in the 1970s to 20,000 tonnes in 2008 (FAO, 2010, p.6).

In the wake of the 2008-2009 global economic crisis, however, agricultural development programs in Sub-Saharan Africa have transitioned to large-scale corporate agriculture, based on mono-crop production of crops consumed mostly in countries of the North and emerging economic leaders in the South (Havnevik, 2011, p. 20). Such agricultural development practice requires acquisitions of large tracts of land, many of which were previously owned or occupied by smallholder farmers. This practice, frequently referred to as “land grabbing”, has since 2008 gained momentum in many Sub-Saharan African countries<sup>1</sup> (Grain, 2012, p. 5: Cotula et al., 2009, p. 15). Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced the most rapid growth in recent large-scale land acquisitions, accounting for half of cases documented in Africa (Matondi, Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 3).

Proponents of corporate agriculture have mostly based their arguments around productivity levels, stating that smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa are mostly unproductive and economically inefficient (Thondhlana, 2014, p. 4). Commercial agriculture is seen as a means for spurring productivity, income and economic growth, while displaced communities can receive adequate compensation for their loss of land (von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 1). This development model, it is argued, will bring rapid agricultural modernization, create employment, and provide the conditions

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<sup>1</sup> The term “land grabbing” in this context refers to the acquisition of large swaths of land by foreign corporations for the production of export crops and is used synonymously with “large-scale acquisition of land” (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 135).

necessary for food security (Baglioni & Gibbon, 2013, p. 1559; Zoomers, 2011, p. 13; Pauw & Thurlow, 2011).

The most recent highly publicized acquisitions have been by foreign investors, often for speculative purposes, at very low prices and in ways that appear to be neither conducive to local welfare nor consistent with basic human rights. This has been driven by the increase in the global need for food and energy security, the latter attained through biofuel production derived from crops such as sugarcane, oil-palm and jatropha (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 52). The perception that Sub-Saharan Africa has the most underutilised and cheap fertile land for acquisition, coupled with other government provided investment incentives such as zero import duties and tax holidays for many years, has made the region an attractive place for investment in agribusiness (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 58).

The World Bank has been the main international financial institution promoting large-scale land acquisition. In 2010, the bank estimated a total of between 445 million and 1.7 billion hectares of potentially arable land globally, assumed to be marginal, underutilized, empty and available, most of which were classified as “public lands” (Borras Jr & Franco, 2012, p. 49). In the North, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) are major players in large-scale land acquisition for corporate agriculture in developing countries. In the South, emerging countries including China, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are major players (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 135; Cotula et al., 2009, p. 15; von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 1; Oakland Institute, 2014).

According to Saturnino M. Borras Jr. and Jennifer C. Franco (2012), many of these land deals are driven by the interests of transnational corporations (TNCs) working in collaboration with national governments seeking investments in land (p. 37). Some of the main agribusiness corporations involved in large-scale land acquisition include those often referred to as the “ABCD” companies: Archer Daniels Midland with revenues of US\$89 billion in 2012; Bunge Limited in the United States of America with revenues of US\$61.3 billion in 2013; Cargill with revenues of US\$136.7 billion in 2013; and Dreyfus Group, a French global conglomerate with revenues of US\$63.6 billion (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 137).

Since 2006, an upsurge in foreign investment has been particularly intense in developing countries, increasing from US\$379 billion in 2005 to US\$500 billion in 2007 (Zoomers, 2011, p. 13). This global increase corresponds to growth in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Sub-Saharan Africa, where FDI has increased from US\$17 billion in 2005 to US\$30 billion in 2007. The main recipients are countries where corporate agriculture has been well documented. These countries include Ghana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia, which historically have received little foreign investment until the early 1990s (UNCTAD, 2008 cited in Cotula et al., 2009, p. 24). The World Bank report of 2010 (p. 43) states that domestic private capital dominates the land deal business. However, the FAO, IFAD and the International Institute of Environmental Development have challenged this conclusion, reporting that, in fact, international capital with state support has been the dominant form of contemporary land deal operations (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 127).

Proponents of corporate agriculture, including the World Bank, claim that smallholder agriculture, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, is inefficient and unproductive. Proponents of agribusiness argue that large-scale investment in agricultural land are necessary to promote economic growth and development in a manner that will ultimately benefit everyone, including small farmers (von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 1). The World Bank states that investment in large-scale farmland is badly needed because of several potential benefits, such as: boosting private and foreign direct investment, improving productivity in agriculture, providing access to markets, improving technological development, and creating job opportunities (World Bank 2010, p. 131). They claim that FDI in agribusiness will increase infrastructural development, improve local livelihoods, create jobs, maintain food security, and increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of host countries (World Bank, 2010, p. 10; Cotula et al., 2009, p. 15; Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 129; Baglioni & Gibbon, 2013, p. 1559).

On the other hand, civil society groups, NGOs, and the media have become critical of land grabbing in recent years. Critics argue that such agribusiness investment can negatively affect smallholder food production for local consumption (Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 83). Several new works report that contemporary large-scale acquisitions, done with little regard to the rights of communities and local people who are usually highly vulnerable, could reduce local food production and deny small farmers and their families access to culturally adequate and nutritious food, land, and other productive resources (Akram-Lodhi, 2012; Cotula et al., 2009, p. 15; Pauw & Thurlow, 2011; Grain, 2012).

This promotion of corporate agriculture and its potentially dramatic intensification of the transition from traditional subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture has brought many ethical, economic, social, cultural, ecological and environmental concerns, around community displacement, destruction of local livelihood activities, intensification of conflict, and the destruction of waterways and flora and fauna. Many governments also questioned the potential benefits for small farmers, claimed by proponents. These concerns are raised particularly for rural communities of Sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of the poor and vulnerable live, and smallholder agriculture required to meeting corresponding increase in population (Borras Jr. & Franco, 2012, p. 36; Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 127).

Considering arguments raised by both critics and proponents of corporate agriculture, national governments and international food and development agencies are working on policies that will integrate small farmers into large-scale production schemes. This could hopefully yield a “win-win” situation for small farmers, who unequivocally bear the brunt of many policy prescriptions. Along the line of developing policies for a fair engagement in corporate agriculture, the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (PRAI) or ‘RAI principles’ were introduced by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank at the Seoul Summit in November 2010 (UNCTAD, n.d.).

The RAI principles intend to promote a level playing field using guidelines that direct and control operations of investment in agriculture. Compliance of foreign and private investment companies is enforced through monitoring. The guidelines cover



issues such as respecting local land and resource rights; ensuring and strengthening food security through employment and community food programs; ensuring transparency, good governance and an enabling environment for investment; consulting those involved and enforcing agreements; respecting the law, following best practice and ensuring communities are economically viable; ensuring social sustainability; and minimising and mitigating negative environmental impacts (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 129, World Bank, 2010, p. xxvii; von Braun&Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 3; Matondi, Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 21; Cotula et al., 2009; De Schutter, 2009). Critics believe, however, the RAI principles ultimately continue to promote corporate agriculture and investment with only minimal government intervention. This corresponds to the policies of the neoliberal food regime (Borras Jr. & Franco, 2012, p. 35).

## **1.2 The Political Economy of Agricultural Development in Post-War Sierra Leone**

To explore this debate and the impacts of land grabbing on smallholder farmers, this thesis will focus on the Sub-Saharan African country of Sierra Leone. Since the end of Sierra Leone's brutal civil war in 2002, agriculture development and food security has been a top priority of ruling governments. The question, however, is whether national and political policies, which are mostly backed by external development agendas, could generate the desired political outcome of providing food self-sufficiency and creating employment, or exacerbate food insecurity, dispossession, displacement, hunger and poverty. A brief discussion of the Sierra Leone political economy of agricultural development and governance from the period the war ended will shed light on how

power, politics and policies are exercised in a country where agricultural transformation is shifting towards large scale commercialization.

Democracy in its theoretical term has prevailed since the war ended. The democratically elected president, Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, in his second inauguration in 2002 pledged that, by the end of his second term of office, "...no Sierra Leonean should go to bed hungry." This political pledge came during a period of national recovery from the war. As a result, national recovery programs and external agendas were directed towards the pledge. Some of the recovery programs include the Medium Term Strategy Agricultural Plan and the Poverty Reduction Strategy paper and sectoral policies in the fisheries, forestry, health, education, water, and nutrition and sanitation sectors. This strategic political pledge resulted in an increase in rice production and in 2006 doubled the production levels before the war (Alieu, 2005, p. 2; UNCTAD, 2010, p.6).

The 2007 presidential elections brought a change of government, bringing the opposition party to power. The new, second democratically elected president after the war, Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, in 2008 declared that agricultural development is one of his government's top priorities, after tremendous strides in the energy sector. This political declaration is part of the government's "Agenda for Change", which is part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2 (PRSP2). With a dual mandate from both the external and national political objectives, the "Agenda for Change" prioritized energy, agriculture and infrastructure as the main government activities in building economic, social and infrastructural development. These macroeconomic strides intend to "...[m]ake

agriculture the “engine” of socio-economic growth and development through commercial agriculture” (NSADP, 2009, p. 7; Curtis, 2013, p. 108).

Both Presidents’ declarations underscore the importance of agriculture in bringing long-term sustained macroeconomic growth and development. In this case, however, agricultural commercialization was placed at the center of agricultural development activities. According to the National Sustainable Agriculture Development Plan (NSADP), which is the blueprint for putting the government agriculture, forestry and fisheries objectives into action, agricultural commercialization “...has the potential to create more wealth, employment and trigger industrialization and services leading to, among others, a significant increase in food security and poverty reduction” (NSADP, 2009, p. 8).

With funding requirements estimated at US\$403 million for a 5-year period, most of the allocation was intended to come from donor agencies, including the UK Department of International Development (DFID), the European Commission (EC) and the World Bank. The program was intended to cater for 82,500 farming households out of the estimated 400,000 smallholder families in the country. In 2010, government budget allocation to domestic capital to support various agriculture projects was Le7.8 billion (US\$1.8 billion) compared to Le3.4 billion (US\$802 million) in 2009. This increase is evidence of the government’s priority on agricultural development, but macroeconomic decisions and implementation policies have had a top-down approach, giving less power to the rural people and local authorities to decide their production systems (Curtis, 2013, p. 111; NSADP, 2009, p. 38; Khan & Sei, 2015).

Large scale investment on agricultural land for the production of food and biofuel crops for export also became part of the political campaign to create jobs and develop the agricultural sector. Guidelines on investment in agricultural land were revised, which made the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and food Security (MAFFS) and the Ministry of Energy (MoE) as the lead ministries for agriculture and bioenergy related investments. These ministries are jointly referred to as “Bioenergy and Food Security” (BEFS); however, Sierra Leone Investment and Export promotion Agency (SLIEPA), a newly formed agency, regulates the affairs of all investments, including the bioenergy and food security investment (FAO & BEFS, 2013).

The macroeconomic sector governance in Sierra Leone has mostly been hierarchical with a top-down decision making and management approach. This approach has mostly focused on the economic potentials of sectors of the government, with little attention to the social, cultural and political aspects of governance, placing absolute power on the decision makers (national, political and international) to make national and rural policy decisions without the involvement of non-state actors and local authorities. For example the 1963 Fisheries Act, which was reformed in 2003, placed greater emphasis on the state in the governance of the country’s natural resources, neglecting local actors and authorities, a top-down approach to resource governance (Khan & Sei, 2015, p.567). The state with international influence has, therefore, exercised more power in strategic decision planning over post-war agricultural development programs. This has led to programs that focus on political and national objectives, while integrating the rural and local smallholder based sector to achieve the former desired goals and objectives.

### 1.3 Agricultural Investment in Sierra Leone

Since 2008, Sierra Leone has seen an influx of foreign corporations investing in fertile agricultural land, despite the many criticisms raised against corporate agriculture. The government, beginning in 2010, has granted land leases of over 500,000 hectares of cultivable agricultural land to foreign investors; several of these leases were still under negotiation as of late 2010 (Oakland Institute, 2011, p. 1). About twenty foreign investment companies in large-scale agribusiness have been documented as being actively engaged in land lease transactions in Sierra Leone. These include Addax Bioenergy Group, Quifel Agribusiness (SL) Limited, Scofin, Sierra Leone Agriculture (Caparo Renewable Agricultural Development Limited), and Sepahan Afrique Limited (Oakland Institute, 2011, p. 22) (see Table 1). FDI inflows between 2000 and 2005 averaged \$18 million annually. In 2007 alone, FDI inflow in Sierra Leone was estimated at \$81 million. Between 2008 and 2013, FDI increased tenfold, from \$58 million to \$579 million respectively (Oakland Institute, 2011, p. 15; Fielding, et al., 2015, p. 9).

**Table 1: Major Agricultural Foreign Investors in Sierra Leone**

<b>Foreign Corporation</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Province</b>	<b>Land leased (ha)</b>	<b>Estimated investment</b>	<b>Product / company focus</b>
Addax Bioenergy Sierra Leone Ltd.	Switzerland	North	20,000	300 million Euros (phase 1: 2010-13); 300 million Euros (phase 2: 2013-15)	Sugarcane/ Ethanol (export)

Quifel Agribusiness (S.L.) Limited	Portugal	North	126,000		Rice, pineapple, cassava, vegetables
Sepahan Afrique Ltd	Iran	North	10,117		Palm oil, castor, jatropha,
Sierra Leone Agriculture (SLA)	United Kingdom	North	43,000		Palm oil for comestible oil for local market. Palm oil (agrofuels, soap)
SocFin	Belgium/ Luxembourg	South	6,475	100 million USD	Palm oil and rubber

Source: Oakland Institute: <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/land-deals-africa-sierra-leone>.

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 177 of 187 countries in the 2013 Human Development Index (HDI). The country had one of the most violent civil conflicts in the twentieth century (1991-2002), which devastated its economic, social and political systems and displaced thousands of people from their villages and towns (MacKenzie, 2009, p. 205). With a population of about 6.125 million people, in 2010 the country was categorised by the FAO as one of five African countries with critical problems of food insecurity (Oakland Institute, 2011, p. 8).

Recent statistics show an estimated 2.5 million Sierra Leoneans are food insecure, representing about 45 percent of the country's population. About 7.4 percent of rural

households are also estimated to be severely malnourished (WFP, 2013, p. 5; CFSVA, 2011, p. 11). The number of hungry people in the country increased from 1.7 million in 1990-92 to 1.9 million in 2010 and fell slightly to 1.8 million in 2011-13 (FAO, WFP & IFAD, 2013, p. 43; CFSVA, 2011, p. 11). Smallholder agriculture is the main livelihood activity for about 65-70 percent of the population, and about 53.4 per cent of the population are living below \$1.25 per day, while 34.1percent of children aged 6 to 59 months are estimated to be stunted and 18.7 percent are found to be under weight (NSADP, 2009, p. 11; CFSVA, 2011, p. 12; UNDP, 2012).

About 400,000 smallholder families in Sierra Leone are estimated to be involved primarily in subsistence agriculture with individual land holdings averaging 1.5 hectares of cultivable land (FAO, 2012). Rice is the main staple food produced by the majority of smallholders. Other crops grown by smallholders include cassava, potatoes, maize, yams, groundnuts, pulses, oils, vegetables, and fruits. Cash crops like coffee, cocoa, and piassava are also grown in limited quantity in some parts of the country (FAO, 2012; WFP, 2013, p. 11). Sierra Leone has a dual land use policy approach. In the municipality of Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone, land is the property of the state, while in other parts of the country land is under customary tenure, governed by traditional rulers (HRW, 2014, p.19; NSADP, 2009, p. 12).

Since 2008, Sierra Leone has been reviewing and making changes to its investment policies, a strategy aimed at attracting foreign investment with the goal of creating employment opportunities and bringing economic and human development to the country. The new investment policy framework put in place by SLIEPA allows long-term

leases of fertile agricultural land for \$5 to \$20 per hectare per year, compared to \$100 in Brazil, and even higher in other countries (Fielding, et al., 2015, p. 9). The policy also includes a ten-year corporate tax holiday on investment in agriculture and zero import duties on agricultural inputs by foreign investors, according to Oakland Institute, an independent policy think tank that aims to promote fair debate on critical social economic and environmental issues. The country's investment policies allow 100 percent foreign ownership of all investments and full repatriation of profits, dividends and royalties, which may not be the same in many other Sub-Saharan countries (Oakland Institute, 2011, p.13).

This new policy framework has been developed on the assumption that private sector development of commercial agriculture will drive the value chain, bringing smallholders to the market and supporting commercial farms, through adding value to local produce, providing training, and integrating smallholders into large-scale production and commercial activities, a strategy referred to as "agriculture for development" (World Bank, 2008, p. 18). Responding to the improved investment climate, Sierra Leone has become an attractive place for foreign investors for commercial production of agricultural products (Oakland Institute, 2011). The recent boom in large-scale land acquisitions in Sierra Leone has made it the focus of much debate around the positive and negative impacts that such acquisitions bring, and an ideal case study for further examination of this urgent development issue. Production of commercial crops, including sugarcane and oil-palm to produce bioethanol and biodiesel respectively, has already commenced in the northern region of the country (Oakland Institute, 2011, p.11).



## **1.4 Research Question and Hypothesis**

In Sub-Saharan Africa, large-scale land acquisition has been seen as part of a transition from traditional small-scale subsistence farming to commercial agriculture, which promotes the production of export crops. Consequently, smallholders' food production capacity has often reduced, and communities' rights to access and control over land and other productive resources, such as water and forest has been denied. Land grabbing has presented a considerable challenge for smallholder agriculture and food production systems. Hunger, poverty, and malnutrition have increased in many rural communities. Communities have been dispossessed of their land and many smallholder farmers are facing new challenges searching for other livelihood opportunities (Havnevik, 2011, p. 21; Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 127).

The complicated impact of the present spate of farmland acquisition has created the need to examine whether or not large-scale farmland acquisitions for corporate agriculture is a viable approach for promoting food security, human development, and overall improvement in smallholder livelihoods. This thesis aims to explore the impact of large-scale farmland acquisition in Sierra Leone on the basis of a "food sovereignty" approach, and argues that, in the face of global corporate agriculture and pro-corporate approaches to agrarian development, little opportunity exists for smallholder farmers to be able to fully utilise their potential to produce their own food and take control of their food production systems. I have arrived at this conclusion through a study focused around one central research question: How has a large-scale farmland acquisition for corporate agriculture affected smallholder production and access to culturally adequate and

nutritious food that meet the dietary needs of farming families and communities in Sierra Leone?

Food sovereignty arises from the concept of economic and social human rights (Rosset, 2002, p. 305). It is the right of each nation and its people to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods, respecting cultural and productive diversity (La Via Campesina 1996; Patel, 2009, p. 665). It signifies the right of peoples and nations to define their agricultural and food policies without excessive outside interference (Akram-Lodhi, 2013, p. 4; Grain, 2012, p. 2). Land availability and food sovereignty are inextricably linked and the availability of fertile agricultural land is critical to accessing culturally appropriate and nutritious food in poor communities. Smallholder access to land is a fundamental food sovereignty principle that is critical to food production (Grain, 2012, p. 2).

Principles of food sovereignty relating to food needs are dominated by smallholder-based approaches. The approaches allow access to land and control over productive resources by those people who tend to be the poorest and hungriest. As a result, build the capacity of these people to solve local food shortages. Food sovereignty principles have focused on shifting food decision-making power to small farmers, indigenous poor, and landless people. It's about "...rights to have rights over food" (Patel, 2009, p. 691). Food sovereignty approaches to food needs have been seen to significantly increase local food production and reduce hunger and poverty globally. In Honduras, for instance, training of smallholder farmers in food production techniques and providing access to land have contributed to improved farm management skills, which in

turn has increased the yield of local food (Boyer, 2010, p. 328). Similarly, in Cuba, evidence has shown that the implementation of smallholder-based approaches and access to land have contributed to an increase in local food production (Ergas, 2013).

Food sovereignty, as an integral part of peasant rights, and an agrarian approach to food needs and food production system provides the lens to which this study is directed. This is particularly important because the study communities are small agrarian-based communities that depend on land for food and livelihood. Food sovereignty not only speaks to the aggregate amount of food that is available for consumption at all times, which the food security model particularly emphasized, but it also emphasizes that the rights and power relations of the food production system should be in the hands of those who are the local food producers. Its principles are engrained within peasant rights to access productive resources, and power to control or decide the production, marketing, distribution, sale and consumption of their agricultural produce (La Via Campesina, n.d.).

These rights include; the right to be free from any form of discrimination in exercising their social, economic and cultural rights, including the right to not be evicted from land; the rights to land and territory, including the right to own land; the right to freely access and utilize land and water resources to generate income for the basic needs of families; the rights to decide the type and quantity of food produced, the price of the crop produced, and the orientation of food consumed; the rights to have credit for agricultural production; the right to water for crop irrigation and production; the right to access and control livelihood activities, including animal grazing, hunting, fishing and gathering; and the recognition of women farmers rights, who play a major role in food

production (La Via Campesina, n.d.; Rosset, 2011, p. 22; Boyer, 2010, p. 319). Using a food security approach could have limited my assessment of a smallholder based agriculture community to only looking at food availability, while other unique features such as rights, access and power relation which characterised a smallholder production system, could be better assessed through an agrarian based approach, which is the food sovereignty approach.

However, food security programs in developing countries have also contributed to an increase in food availability higher than the average dietary energy requirement over the past two decades (FAO, WFP&IFAD, 2013, p. 28). Critics, however, are concerned that food security programs have been developed and driven by an unspoken preference for food needs being met through the international market, increases in the scale of production, and increases in the capital stock to land. These are offered through a highly competitive environment that will ultimately be dominated by large corporations with extensive resources (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 126). According to Raj Patel (2009), food security programs have been mostly implemented with unquestioned hegemony from external actors, who are reluctant to discuss the rights and power of small farmers to decide and control their food production (p. 666).

Critics argued that food security approaches to food needs are embedded in mainstream technocratic, neoliberal development discourses. Emphasizing access through supply and demand chains aligned with transnational agribusiness, which is governed at the national and international level. The power relation of food systems in food security regimes are placed at the national and international level, while the local level appears to

be detached from decisions of food production at the international and national levels (Jarosz, 2014, p 169). On the other hand, food sovereignty discourses have placed emphasis on equitable access to local resources and power relations, including local autonomy and democratic control of land, water, environmental and agro-ecological sustainable food systems.

While food security emphasises economics of scale as a relational analysis justifying international and national dominance, its approach appeared to be inadequate in addressing social relations to power and control of land and food production systems. Food sovereignty emphasises the lack of equal power relations among the international, national and local levels, of the global food system, which is described as “...unjust, oppressive, and discriminatory,” according to critics.” This lack of power by smallholders in agrarian communities could interfere with conditions necessary for both food security and food sovereignty (Jarosz, 2014, p 173).

This skepticism raised questions about rights, and the power relation that characterise decisions about how food security could be attained in a smallholder based economy. Therefore, in order to better understand how access to land is critical to smallholder food production, a food sovereignty approach is used. As such, my findings, results, and analysis are based on a food sovereignty perspective.

The field study provides useful information on the impact of farmland acquisition on smallholder food production systems and the findings will be a valuable resource for the country, peasant farmers, civil society organizations, and research institutions generating knowledge on the issue of land grabbing. The lessons learned will provide a

useful comparative case study that can be applied to research in other settings where this is also a major issue. As a Sierra Leonean with personal, academic, and work history of dealing with issues related to agriculture, this issue is personally and professionally important to me. Exploring this issue will contribute to my own knowledge of my communities and my country in general, while allowing me to share with them lessons I have learned.

### **1.5 Research Methodology**

Much of the research on large-scale land acquisition in Sierra Leone has focused on the inefficiencies associated with land deal transactions (Anane & Abiwu, 2011; Mittal & Sosnoff, 2012; Oakland Institute, 2011; Oakland Institute, 2014), while very little is known about its impact on traditional subsistence smallholders or its impact on food sovereignty. This study aims to fill the gaps.

Field study was carried out in four communities in the Bombali District of Sierra Leone between July 5 and August 10, 2013: two communities affected by land grabbing and two non-affected communities. The affected case study communities, Worreh Yeama and Lungi Acre, are communities where farm land was originally owned by inhabitants of the villages but a significant portion of that land has now been leased for a period of fifty years, with the possibility of extension, to a foreign corporation for cultivating sugarcane, a feedstock for biofuel production.<sup>2</sup> These communities were selected also because they are considered to be among the most productive farming communities in terms of the quantity of food produced, and among the most affected by land acquisitions. The non-

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<sup>2</sup> See for example SILNORF & Bread For All, 2012, p. 12; Oakland Institute, 2014.

affected communities, Makaiba and Lungi Lol, are communities where farm-land is owned by the inhabitants of the villages and land has not been expropriated by foreign corporations. These communities have resisted attempts at large-scale land leasing with support from their local leaders and civil society groups.<sup>3</sup> According to staff of the Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food (SILNORF), these communities are known to be among the most productive in terms of the amount of food produced per hectare per year. They are a good choice for a comparative case study because they are able to maintain their land and productivity.

This study is qualitative, using a comparative case study research approach. This approach has allowed me to assess the severity of the problem of land grabbing from a holistic perspective that is not only looking at the impact of the problem on access to food, land and other productive resources, but also its social implications on communities. The approach also allowed me to comparatively analyse the impact of land grabbing on smallholder farmers, their families and communities. The case study approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the problem in a specific location and, when triangulated with other data, enables one to make sound generalization on the basis of the research findings (Yin, 2009, p. 18; Verschuren, 2003. p. 132). The comparative approach is particularly useful for a better understanding of the opportunities that exist for smallholder farmers in affected and non-affected case study communities. This approach compensates for various shortfalls, such as variability associated with a single case, and also enhances the analytic power, pervasiveness and generalizability of findings

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<sup>3</sup> Source is based on interviews conducted with local leaders in non-affected communities.

(Verschuren, 2003. p. 123). The research met the appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and was given ethics approval from Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board and was in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2).

Data were collected using three sets of structured interview questions: questions for individual smallholder participants, questions for a focus group discussion, and questions for individual stakeholder participants. Focus groups were conducted with selected members who are either directly or indirectly affected and residing in one of the affected communities. Focus group questions were intended to collect detailed information on personal perspectives of affected persons and communities on the overall process of large-scale land acquisition and its impact on local food production. This was not required for non-affected communities. All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the interview participants. Field notes were also taken on the responses of participants and my own observations and experiences, which helped to inform my analysis and conclusion.

The research was conducted with 32 participants including 7 women and 25 men (14 participants each from both affected and non-affected communities, and 4 stakeholders including chiefs and NGO workers). Although women do most of the farm activities in these communities, only 7 willingly accepted to take part in the research. Due to gendered roles and responsibilities, many women prefer men take the leading role in issues relating to advocating and representing their communities. This preserves family harmony and prevents conflict in the home. Participants were selected with the assistance



of field staff from a partner organization, Sierra Leone Network on the Right to Food (SILNORF). Participants of both affected and non-affected communities are from the Temne tribe, the dominant ethnic group in the region. The selection criteria for the research includes: (a) apart from chiefs and NGO workers, participants must be farmers; (b) they must have lived in the community for at least three years before land grabbing; (c) they must be presently residing in the same communities after land grabbing; and (d) they must be aged 18 and over.

Individual interviews were conducted anonymously with the assistance of SILNORF field staff in places within the community chosen by participants. Being a citizen of Sierra Leone and a native of the north, I am fluent in the local language, Temne, which was the language of communication. This made it easier for me to translate questions from English to the local language understood by the participants. Oral script and consent materials were orally translated into Temne in order to obtain oral consent from all participants. Research instruments were designed in Canada, based on an extensive review of literature on problems and issues related to land grabbing globally.<sup>4</sup> Twenty-six questions were designed: 16 for individual participants, 5 for the focus group discussion and 5 for individual stakeholders. Affected and non-affected individual participants' interview questions were based on the orientation of food production, the levels of food production, type of crops being produced, the quantity of food produced, the source of food consumed, other sources of livelihood, and the amount of land available and accessible for crop production. The focus group discussion and the

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Akram- Lodhi, 2013. Akram- Lodhi, 2012. Borras et.al. (2010). McIntyre, et al., 2009. Cotula et al., 2009.

stakeholder interview questions were focused on social issues around large-scale land acquisition and its impact on local food production.

My research partner, SILNORF, was founded in 2008 as a national coalition of civil society organizations promoting the right to food, and has been one of the most effective local non-governmental organizations advocating against land grabbing and for the rights of smallholder farmers in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone. SILNORF also monitors the operations of foreign companies and national agriculture and food security programs and policies. The organization undertakes research on land and food issues, and was very active in raising awareness of the FAO guidelines on agricultural investment in Sierra Leone in 2013.<sup>5</sup> Collecting essential information in small communities on sensitive issues affecting them can be a challenge, especially for strangers, possibly because these communities have developed a lack of trust for many people, including government officials, researchers, foreigners, and NGOs. To address this problem and to ensure protection against fear of participation, SILNORF was officially selected as a partner organisation.

## **1.6 Outline of Chapters**

This study consists of five chapters. Following the introductory chapter, the second chapter is an exploration of the main theories and research on large-scale land acquisition. The chapter reviews literature from media organizations, official development institutions, academics and NGOs and provides an overview of the emerging land grab discourse and a review of the impact of large-scale land acquisition

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.Silnorf.org](http://www.Silnorf.org) for detail description of project activities in the Bombali District, Sierra Leone.

on smallholder subsistence agriculture in developing countries. The chapter discusses the contemporary drivers, players, and actors in large-scale land acquisitions, policies governing land use in Africa, the concept of marginal and underutilised land, and foreign direct investment in agriculture. The chapter also discusses the approaches of food security and food sovereignty, concluding with a discussion of smallholder and commercial agriculture.

Chapter 3 is a review of Sierra Leone agriculture and agricultural policies from the period 1808 to the present era dominated by neoliberal development policies around market-led, export-orientation and agricultural commercialization. The chapter shows the impact of specific agricultural development approaches on smallholders in different eras of the country's history. It charts four distinct historical phases of the country's agricultural development: the period of the colonial administration to independence in 1808-1961, the post-independence era to the period before the civil conflict in 1961 to 1990, the period of civil conflict in 1991-2002, and finally the period of post-conflict reconstruction and development in 2002 to 2012. This chapter demonstrates that agricultural development programs in the different eras were mostly driven by the desire to promote export crops production, which adversely affect smallholder access to land and control over local food production in the different periods of the country's agricultural development.

Chapter 4 provides a description of the case study communities and a discussion of the field work and analysis of data. The chapter includes a discussion of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, access to culturally adequate and nutritious

food, access to land and water resources and other livelihood opportunities, and concludes with a brief discussion of gender-related issues.

Chapter 5 offers a conclusion and summary of the key issues that stem from the analysis of findings. I argue that, in the final analysis, the rhetoric does not match the reality on the ground. In the face of large- scale land acquisition for corporate agriculture, little opportunities exist for smallholder farmers to be able to fully utilise their productive potential to produce their own food and take control of their food production systems.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Discussions and Literature Review**

This chapter opens with a review and analysis of the meaning of land grabbing followed by an overview of global land grabbing and its impact on food production and smallholder agriculture in countries of the south. The chapter also provides a conceptual discussion of the idea of idle land as it relates to issues of foreign direct investment in agricultural development in Africa. Furthermore, the chapter discusses food security and food sovereignty, analysing the contentious debate surrounding traditional smallholder subsistence agriculture and commercial corporate export agriculture. It includes an examination of the gender implications of lack of access to land on rural women in the Global South.

### **2.1 Defining Land Grabbing**

One of the most outstanding lingering effects of the 2007-2008 financial crisis, which saw prices of food and oil skyrocket globally (Headey, Malaiyandi & Fan, 2009, p. 1), is the intensified proliferation of private, foreign investors in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. These investors are seeking to acquire large tracts of land for purposes serving the interest of countries of the North and emerging countries in the South, in particular China and the Gulf States (Baglioni & Gibbon, 2013, p. 1559; von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 1, World Bank, 2010, p. 10). Media organizations, academics, and NGOs have referred to these acquisitions as “land grabbing” (Borras & Franco, 2012; Cotula et al., 2009; Grains, 2012; Pauw & Thurlow 2011; Matondi,

Havenevik & Beyene 2011, p. 1; Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 135; Martin Keulertz, 2012; Oakland Institute, 2011).

“Land grabbing”, synonymously used with “large-scale land acquisition”, has been described and defined in different ways depending on the context. For the purpose of this study, the term is applied to the large-scale acquisition of arable land in the Global South by foreign or private investors for the production of agricultural products for export. Looking at the wider literature on land grabbing, Akram-Lodhi (2012) defines the concept based on agrarian political economy, highlighting the logic behind the capital expansion of agricultural industries and the promotion of a global food regime that has the potential to dispose and displace vulnerable classes of poor rural farmers in order to maximize profits (p. 135). John G. Galaty (2014) refers to the term as denoting increased corporate investment in land in the agrarian regions of developing countries (p. 80), while Karl Pauw and James Thurlow (2011) note that land grabbing has emerged as “...one of the inevitable consequences of globalization, deregulation, free trade.”

Kjell Havenevik, Prosper B. Matondi and Atakilte Beyene (2011, p. 2) are particularly concerned with the often-undemocratic procedures for granting large-scale land leases, such as lack of transparency and community participation. Martin Keulertz (2012) defines land grabbing as a new form of colonialism as it represents a new form of enclosure that dispossess rural farmers to then exploit them as a pool of cheap labour. Similarly, Philip McMichael (2013) refers to land grabbing as a new “territorialisation” by the North, whose political and economic elites seek to acquire land for repatriating agricultural resources to investing countries (p. 50). At the centre of the various

definitions of land grabbing given is the emphasis on the negative impact of land acquisitions on small farmers and rural communities. This includes the impact on access, power and control over food production systems, which is the main subject of this study.

## **2.2 Expansion of Large-scale Land Acquisitions**

Large-scale land acquisition is not a new practice, as it dates back to colonial times. Historical struggles around land control have evolved, with powerful nations exercising political power and economic dominance over weaker ones to exploit the latter's natural resources. Examples of historical struggles associated with land grabbing include the colonial creation of estate agriculture in the Caribbean, South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, and the colonial dispossession of indigenous people in North America, South America, and South Africa. (Mutch, 2011; McMichael, 2013 p. 48; Gregory, 2011, p. 90; Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 126).

What is new in contemporary land grabbing or contemporary large-scale land acquisition, states Mutch, (2011, p. 58) is the "... scale, breadth, and ease with which land can now be acquired around the world." This takes place within a global corporate food regime, which is an agriculture and food system structured through a geo-political dimension of global capital accumulation (McMichael, 2009, p. 140). Within the contemporary global corporate food regime, traditional land users and producers are incorporated as landless workers in small enterprises, or as rural labourers on corporate farms, or as small-scale farmer-growers contracted to sell their produce to the company. In some cases, former farmers are expelled entirely from their land when their labour is

not needed, often without any other viable livelihood options in rural or urban areas (Borras & Franco, 2013, p. 1735; McMichael, 2013, p. 48).

Both earlier and current research has given diverse estimates of the magnitude of contemporary large-scale land acquisitions (Matondi, Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 20). However, there is a consensus among researchers that the practice has gained momentum since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Borras et al., 2013, p. 162). According to An Ansoms (2013) a year after the 2008 global financial crisis, both local and foreign investors acquired over 40 million hectares of land in developing countries for corporate agriculture (p. 2). Similarly, in 2010, the World Bank report estimated 45 million hectares to have been leased in developing countries (Borras Jr. & Franco, 2012, p. 37). Furthermore, between 2000 and 2011, about 203.4 million hectares of land was leased or under negotiation for lease globally. Fifty percent of these land deals were found in Sub-Saharan Africa (Borras Jr. & Franco, 2012, p. 37; Cotula et al., 2009, p. 15; Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 127). Oxfam International, a confederation of organizations working to find solutions to poverty, estimates that 230 million hectares of land in developing countries have been acquired by foreign investors since the beginning of 2001 (McMichael, 2013, p. 50). In the last decade, an estimated 500 million hectares of land acquired globally is reported to have come mostly from international finance capital. This represents an area ten times the size of Britain (Oakland Institute, 2014, p. 4).

### **2.3 Drivers of Contemporary Large-scale Land Acquisition**

Contemporary large-scale land acquisition has emerged as a global concern in many social, political, economic and environmental forums globally. These forums have



in diverse perspectives discussed the various factors that drive large-scale land acquisitions especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Matondi, Havnevik and Beyene (2011), there are four main factors behind the recent surge in large-scale land acquisition: unprecedented economic growth in transition countries including India, China and Brazil, which increases the demand for energy consumption as people seek a higher standard of living; food security needs arising from introducing biofuel production, which has contributed to the increase in the absolute number of hungry in developing countries; global peak oil and the search for alternative fuel energy that can bring down the price of oil globally (which since June 2015 has been quite low); and climate and environmental concerns that have promoted biofuel production to reduce carbon emissions, which has also been contested and disputed by research (p. 9). These precipitating factors appear to arise from the needs and concerns of transitioned and developed countries that have championed the search for investment in fertile agricultural land in other countries.

Borras Jr. and Franco (2012) identified four directions of the “many faces of changing land use today.” The four directions are: food to food, which diverts food production for consumption and domestic exchange to food production for export; food to biofuel, which diverts food production for consumption and domestic exchange to production of biofuel for export; non-food to food, which diverts forest, idle and marginal land to the production of food for export; and non-food to biofuel, which diverts forest, idle and marginal to production of biofuel for export. Their main concern of the changing land use in Sub-Saharan Africa was the shifts in production that divert land to the

production of food and biofuel for export (p. 39). The diversion from non-food to food for export, which requires the use of forest, idle and marginal land was also identified. This could pose a potential threat to farmers, losing land that has been left to fallow for a period of five years and over.

In the center of the aftermath of the 2008 crisis is the desire to ensure food availability in emerging countries of the South, seeking to acquire land in countries assumed to have abundant land, water supply, and low production costs (von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 1). For instance, in Southeast Asia, about 83 percent of the fertile agricultural land acquired is put towards the production of export crops, such as oilseeds, corn, wheat and feed grains. This shift has diverted the production of locally produced staple food crops to market-led export crops, which may have contributed to the surge in farmland acquisitions in Sub-Saharan Africa (McMichael, 2013, p. 54).

The desire of rich countries like the United States and United Kingdom to acquire land for biofuel production in developing countries has contributed to the surge in land acquisitions, leaving small local farmers exposed to hunger, food insecurity and landlessness (Mutch, 2011, p. 58; Ansoms, 2013, p.3; Cotula et al., 2009, p. 52; von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009; Andrew & Vlaenderen, 2013, p. 1). For instance, sugarcane production in Brazil and Tanzania, soya in Argentina, and oil palm in Malaysia and Indonesia have been reported to increase the scale of land acquisition in those countries, with smallholder farmers bearing the brunt through land appropriation and lack of access and control over food and livelihood opportunities (Zoomers, 2011, p. 14).

Expectations around the future increases in global market prices for food as demand exceeds supply is also seen as a potential factor that has driven the rush for land grabbing in Sub-Saharan Africa, with local elites possibly securing large swaths of land for lease to foreign investors at a higher price (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 52). Likewise, large tracts of land are either leased or sold to private and foreign investors cheaply by states seeking to attract investment in arable land, usually based on the argument that this brings employment opportunity and promotes agricultural development in host countries (Matondi, Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 4; Ansoms, 2013, p.3).

Similarly, large-scale land acquisition has been triggered by a carbon market that is generated by climate change mitigation challenges and emission reduction targets, with expectations of long-term increase in land value for afforestation projects. This includes longer term Reduce Emission from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) scheme, which formed part of the Kyoto Protocol for reducing climate change. As 20 percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions largely comes from deforestation and forest degradation through agricultural expansion, REDD is created in developing countries with financial incentives for carbon stored in forests, which is part of an effort to reduce greenhouse emissions. Although REDD is still at its early stage, long term investors continue acquiring land, which compromise traditional farming systems of small farmers including crop rotation, shifting cultivation and fallow periods (Zoomers, 2011, p. 14; Cotula et al., 2009, p. 58).

The production of non-food agricultural commodities including rubber, cotton, sugar, coffee, cocoa and tea has also been broadly associated with large land acquisition.

Some countries depend on the importation of these commodities for their home industries as part of the global production and consumption system. In 2003, China became the biggest consumer of natural rubber in the world, importing 23 percent of the world rubber supply and overtaking the US. This has resulted in acquisition of land in countries neighbouring China, for example Laos and Myanmar (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 56).

## **2.4 Main Actors of Contemporary Large-Scale Land Acquisitions**

As there are many drivers behind large-scale land acquisitions, there are also many actors that are pushing large-scale land acquisition as a “viable development approach”. Chief among them are international financial institutions, especially the World Bank (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 135; Oakland Institute, 2014). Other financial institutions associated with promoting large-scale land acquisition include the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), with particular focus on Sub-Saharan Africa (McMichael, 2013, p. 57).

Beyond the promoters of large-scale land acquisitions, rich and transition countries are the main countries actively involved in seeking farmland for growing food and energy crops. In the EU, Germany and Italy in addition to the UK are identified as the most active EU biofuel investors with total farmland acquisitions of 3,267,029 hectares, and 88.9 percent of these farmlands are for biofuel production (Schoneveld, 2011, p. 8). In the South, India, Libya and Saudi Arabia, for example, are reported to account for 1,167,612 hectares of land acquisitions in Sub-Saharan African countries including Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan, Zambia and Ethiopia. Among these countries, Ethiopia is shown to carry the highest number of foreign investors working on

21 projects, producing food crops on about 990,798 hectares of acquired farmland (Schoneveld, 2011, p. 12). Although the acquired farmland is slated for food crop production, which perhaps will increase the level of food production nationally, the question is how well the food produced benefits local inhabitants, and does it compromise access and control over land, which infringes on smallholder food sovereignty rights.

Billionaires, including Bill Gates, Richard Branson, Paul Allen, the Saudi Arabian government and the Sultan of Dubai have recently put in bids to buy up tracts of land in African countries, including Tanzania, Sudan, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Mutch, 2011, p. 59). Local elites and entrepreneurs in African countries are also involved in the rush to gain control of land (Ansoms, 2013, p.18). The dominant social classes, including landlords, capitalists, traditional village chiefs and state bureaucrats, have played various intermediary roles in enabling foreign investors to access farmland, either because of government pressure to facilitate easy access to farmlands or for personal gains, as seen in many affected countries (Borras Jr. & Franco, 2012, p. 49).

## **2.5 Land Use Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa**

As much attention behind the contemporary growth in farmland in Sub-Saharan Africa has mostly been on the main drivers and actors, “cross-cutting” factors including land holding and land use policies in host countries have also emerged as contributing factor to the ease at which land is acquired. Although Sub-Saharan Africa is seen as a place of unexploited land and other productive resources, the question emerges: what are the land use policies that make it the most conducive place for investment in farmland?

Understanding some of these policies will contribute to dissecting the issues emerging from the contemporary large-scale land acquisitions.

The importance of land to small farmers who live in poor rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa can never be overestimated because land has economic benefits, but is also an important cultural and political asset that provides for the social, psychological, and emotional well-being of smallholder farmers. The denial of land to food producers, states Ansoms (2013, p. 4), "...does not only present a loss in terms of economic opportunities; it also translates into a loss of social ties, identity, physical security and social and emotional belonging". Many rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa are against the sale or lease of community or family land as this constitutes a violation of the values and traditions of the community. Land is seen as an asset that has traditionally been passed on from generation to generation. In many places, leasing such a valuable asset can compromise the livelihood opportunities for generations to come (Julia & White, 2012, p. 1002).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, governments typically play a greater role than local elites in land allocated leases (Cotula, et. al., 2009, p. 76). Although land may appear to be customarily held by local tribes and clans, it is in most cases formally under the jurisdiction of the state (Behrman, et. al., 2011). A review of land use and land investment policies in Sub-Saharan Africa shows different policy frameworks. Tanzania's land use policy, for example, allows non-nationals to acquire land only for investment purposes, while in Mali there is no marked different legal treatment between nationals and non-nationals. Mozambique allows both nationals and non-nationals a right of 50-year

renewable land leases (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 76). In many Sub-Saharan African countries, although communally occupied by a tribal group or community and often under the formal custody of a chief, land is officially the property of the state. This means that people who occupy community land do not legally own it; the land is the property of the state and can be appropriated (Thondhlana, 2014, p. 4). This is a major factor making Sub-Saharan Africa so ideally suited, in the view of the World Bank and private capital, for large-scale land investment, because investors are largely favoured over local smallholders in terms of land allocations.

Host countries in Sub-Saharan Africa often offer attractive investment incentives and a favourable policy climate to investing countries. For instance, the Ethiopian government offers a five-year tax holiday and low price tag to foreign investors in farmland (McMichael, 2013, p. 56). Some host countries have also established special central investment promotion agencies to handle foreign direct investment. In some cases, other government institutions and ministries act on behalf of the central government. In Tanzania, although the Tanzania Investment Centre (TIC) plays a major role in facilitating land access, formal approval for investment in land is required by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Lands and Housing Development, and the Ministry of Environment (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 65). Considering the significant social and economic role land plays in rural communities, the claims of agribusiness promoters as to the type of land they acquire, sparks the debate over the concept of “idle”, “marginal” and “underutilized” land.

## **2.6 Concept of “Idle”, “Marginal” and “Underutilized” Land**

Akin to during the colonial era, contemporary large-scale land acquisition has been justified and shrouded around the use of unexplored, underutilized, uninhabited marginal land (Galaty, 2014, p. 80; Matondi, Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 4; McMichael, 2013, p. 57). The definition of what constitutes marginal, idle or underutilized land, which is generally referred to as “land that is arable yet degraded and difficult to farm as determined by a combination of biophysical factors including soil profile, temperature, rainfall and topography”, remain contested (ibid, n.d., p. 409, cited in Thondhlana, 2014, p. 3). Bringing controversy, over what is considered unutilized or underutilized land, especially for African countries with huge tracts of fallow land and long fallow periods (Matondi, Havnevik and Beyene, 2011, p. 25). Critics argue that land availability in certain regions does not necessarily mean the land is not being used or users are willing to part with it, meaning that some of the unutilized land is probably fallow land (Galaty, 2014, p. 85).

In Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Mozambique for instance, land allocated for investment was found to be previously under a shifting cultivation rotation system, an ecological sustainable system that poor smallholder farmers use to restore soil nutrients (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 62). Fallow land is an important source of wood for cooking meals, and the bark, leaves and roots of plants and trees are used as a source for traditional medicine. However, long fallow periods, which are also used for animal grazing practices are often neglected in official assessments. (Matondi, Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 25; von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 2). In general, it appears that



these traditional rural livelihood activities are neglected when decisions and policies about large-scale land acquisitions are made, without substantive justification on the concept of idle, underutilized or marginal land (Mutch, 2011, p. 59).

## **2.7 Food Security and Food Sovereignty**

Of great significance to assessing the developmental impact of large-scale land acquisitions is the discussion over food security and food sovereignty. This centers on a debate over peasants' rights to access culturally adequate and nutritious food and control local agricultural production system versus a version of food accessibility and agricultural development rooted in global market integration in a world system dominated by rich states and powerful corporations.

Food security principles have evolved since the term was first defined in 1974. In the early 1980s, the principles of food security extended not only to food production, but also to accessibility, nutritional adequacy, and cultural acceptability (Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 34). It is defined by the FAO as "...when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2003, p. 28; Patel, 2009, p. 664). When food security conditions are not achieved, a situation of food insecurity is created, with people being deprived of their basic rights to food (FAO, 2003, p. 28).

Although the more recent definition of food security has shifted the discussion from production alone to issues of broader social concerns, critics have argued that it still avoids discussing issues of social control of the food system, which speaks to a more

smallholder-based approach, while accepting, even if not directly acknowledged, neoliberal market-led agrarian reform (Patel, 2009, p. 665). Promoting food security has been the dominant operational approach and policy agenda for many African governments, international non-governmental organisations and international financial institutions (Havnevik, 2011, p. 34). In its contribution to concerns raised by critics of food security policies, the 2009 Global Report of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), an international body that evaluates the relevance, quality, and effectiveness of agricultural knowledge, science and technology, emphasizes the challenges local food systems have faced over the last decade because of a globalized food system that caters to urban demands, while preventing access to local food systems and livelihood opportunities for the rural poor (McIntyre et al., 2009, p. 119).

For instance, the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), a food security program, is seen by critics as "...a campaign designed to mobilize resources for the expansion of capitalist agriculture." This program, according to Holt-Gimenez (2009), has driven farmers' differentiation and marginalization, while dispossessing many through enclosures and displacement (p.154). Previous food policy programs such as "the right to food", "freedom from hunger", and "food security" have also, according to Guntra (2012, p. 2), remained firmly embedded in the food regimes that deny smallholder access and control over productive resources, and has been viewed as an approach that neglects the welfare, wellbeing and livelihood security of small farmers and the rural poor who depend on land for livelihood security (Torrez, 2011, p. 51).

Critics of food security have pointed out that for food security to be realised, there should be food sovereignty because “[f]ood sovereignty is a logical precondition to genuine food security” (Patel, 2009, p. 665). Others have also stated that, in order to promote livelihood resilience and food and nutrition security, there is a need to promote food sovereignty over food security (Akram-Lodhi, 2013, p. 4). Food sovereignty arises from the concept of economic and social human rights (Rosset, 2006, p. 305). It was first defined in 1996 by Via Campesina, an agrarian global social movement, as “...the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the right to defend their own food and agricultural systems” (La Via Campesina, 1996). The concept was introduced as an alternative to the market-led neoliberal food security policies and industrial model of production that in effect, could protect small farmers from competing with big investors in terms of what to produce, how to produce and price and quantity of goods they produce (Grain, 2012, p. 2).

GRAIN, a small international non-profit organization that works to support small farmers and social movements, in 2012 listed some of the principles of food sovereignty. These are:

- ❖ “prioritising local agricultural production in order to feed the people, access of peasants and landless people to land, water, seeds, and credit;
- ❖ the right of [peasant] farmers...to produce food and the right of consumers to be able to decide what they consume, and how and by whom it is produced;

- ❖ agricultural prices linked to production costs: they can be achieved if the countries or unions of states are entitled to impose taxes on excessively cheap imports, if they commit themselves in favour of a sustainable farm production, and if they control production on the inner market so as to avoid structural surpluses;
- ❖ the populations taking part in the agricultural policy choices;
- ❖ the recognition of women farmers' rights, who play a major role in agricultural production and in food (La Via Campesina, Porto-Alegre, 2003. Cited in Grain, 2012, p. 2).

The values of food sovereignty are supported not only by NGOs, activists, and scholars, but also by the UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, who reiterates the importance of food sovereignty for emphasizing the “corollary right to land and, even, the right to produce for rural peoples” (Rosset, 2006, p. 305).

Many scholars have begun recognizing the significance of the principles of food sovereignty raised by GRAIN in countries where subsistence agriculture is the main source for food and livelihood for the majority of the people. According to Raj Patel (2009), food sovereignty is about putting smallholder farmers first in solving the farming crisis, and supporting rights-based approaches to food that shifts decision-making power to small farmers, indigenous poor and landless, to freely access and control productive resources (p.691). They believe that food sovereignty promotes the rights of people, rather than agribusiness corporations, to decide their food production system and ensures guaranteed access to food and control over the chain of production from production to processing, distribution, marketing and consumption (Holt-Gimenez, 2009, p. 146).

Others believe that food sovereignty is important because it respects cultural and productive diversity, and places smallholder farmers at the core of agricultural programs that are “...pro-poor, pro-nature, pro-livelihood, and pro-women” (La Via Campesina, 1996; Raj, 2009, p. 665; Guntra, 2012, p. 2; Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 82).

Several studies of food sovereignty around the world have revealed evidence of successful smallholder rights-based approaches in both urban and rural communities. Evidence of Cuba’s agricultural transformation from industrialized large-scale mono-crop production of export crops to smallholder agro-ecological and sustainable production of local food crops has been seen as in pursuit of food sovereignty benefits. Smallholder urban agriculture in Cuba, a food sovereignty approach to social, economic and environmental recovery from periods of food scarcity, has been commended globally for largely transforming food production towards a more sustainable path using local farmers and material (Ergas, 2013). The implementation of smallholder urban agriculture in the city of Havana, for instance, produces 60 to 70 percent of the food consumed in the city. Cubans also increased their calorie intake from 1,863 calories a day in 1990 to 3,356 calories a day in 2005. This increase is said to be the result of an increase in urban agriculture output by a thousand fold between 1994 and 2006 (Ergas, 2013).

Similarly, a case study conducted in Rwanda on the Kibuye Sugar Works Company concluded that sugarcane productivity would have been higher and farmers would have earned a wage three times higher than the wage paid if production was left in the hands of smallholder farmers (Ansoms, 2013, p. 10). Also, evidence is seen in Asian countries, including China, India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Vietnam, where

smallholders are producing about 80 percent of the food consumed in the Global South and feeding one-third of the global population (Viswanathan et.al., 2012, p. 44).

Food sovereignty promotes a direct producer to consumer market, making the chain of production shorter (Borras Jr. et al., 2015, p. 602). Cuba's agricultural transformation, built within a direct producer to consumer chain of local food production framework, is referred to as the shortest in the world. As a result, Cuba is known as one of the few examples of a country that locally produces most of its food (Ergas, 2013). Cases such as this have contributed to bolstering the significance and desirability of food sovereignty approaches (Akram-Lodhi, 2013, p. 4). However, recent publications have raised questions about what constitutes sovereign rights to food and land as competing sovereignties involving state and non-state actors have emerged around how much resources they can claim as having authority over (Borras Jr. et al., 2015, p. 602), interwoven with the debate over smallholder production and commercial agriculture.

## **2.8 Smallholder and Commercial Agriculture**

Smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa are generally dependent on low input, limited technology smallholder farming for their food and livelihood. Many of these farmers live in remote areas where fertile land can be easily accessed and traditional agriculture is mostly practiced (Rosset, 2006, p. 304). In traditional agrarian communities, land is not only seen strictly as a livelihood resource base, it also serves as a cushion against food shortages and high food prices. Land also provides access to other natural resources, including water resources such as fish in rivers, lakes and ponds, which

increases livelihood opportunities for rural communities and smallholder farmers (Borras & Franco, 2013, p. 1726; Unruh & Turray, 2006).

Two main schools of thoughts have emerged on the issue of global land grabbing and development discourse. On the one hand, there are views upheld by proponents of commercial agriculture. For example, although the FAO, has been critical of the impact of commercial agriculture on small farmers, its Secretary General, Jacques Diouf, in 2008 argued that opportunities exist for investment in agriculture and admonished governments for not making sufficient use of the opportunities available by providing a favourable environment for private and foreign investment in agriculture (McMichael, 2013, p. 56).

This development model, it is argued, will bring rapid agricultural modernization, create employment, and provide the conditions necessary for food security (Baglioni & Gibbon, 2013, p. 1559; Zoomers, 2011, p. 13; Pauw & Thurlow, 2011). In Indonesia, for example, the World Bank (2010) claims that oil palm expansion in rural communities has contributed to reducing poverty and increased employment, although social issues including land rights, deforestation, greenhouse gas emission and transparent agreements remain major issues to be addressed (p. 20).

While the previous argument is aimed primarily at increasing productivity and improvement in local incomes as the key reason for supporting large-scale land investments, arguments in support of smallholder agriculture are based on a human rights-based approach that ensures smallholder farmers have access to and control of their productive resources and development activities, which essentially is the food sovereignty approach (Ansoms, 2013, p. 18). Critics believe that land investment that shifts land

rights from communities to investors should be the last resort if no other options for investment on land are available (De Schutter 2011, p. 250 cited in Akram-Lidhi, 2012, p. 136). In Rwanda for example, two case studies involving both foreign and local entrepreneurs showed a shift of local productive resources, a shift in the division of labour, and a shift in the decision-making power from smallholders to owners of the investment companies, denying smallholders the right to decide on their food production system (Ansoms 2013, p.18).

Critics of corporate agriculture lay out evidence that the policy framework of corporate agriculture, has led to serious economic, social and environmental consequences to small farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa (Akram-Lodhi, 2012, p. 130). In Rwanda, for example, farmers who lost their land to the Kebuye Sugar Works (KSW) Company ended up as rural proletariat, working on temporary low-wage jobs provided by the company (Ansoms, 2013, p. 16). Another case is in Zimbabwe where land acquisition for biofuel production not only displaced communities, but also deprived them of land-related livelihood opportunities, including mixed cropping, bush hunting, and cutting wood for cooking and building materials. This exacerbated food shortages and led to a decline in the standard of living of displaced communities (Thondhlana, 2014, p. 14).

Similarly in India, agrarian regions have faced a decline in the share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), possibly due to the neglect of smallholder agriculture (Viswanathan et.al., 2012, p. 44). In another development, Franco et al's (2010) study on ethanol production in the Global South reveals that loss of access to land causes smallholders and communities to depend on foreign investment companies for livelihood



and employment while triggering the migration of people to other places (p. 682). As a result, investment companies often take advantage of the precarious situation of the dispossessed to exploit the new pool of unemployed labourers offering them low wages, difficult working conditions, and tenuous employment (Li, 2011, p. 281). Also, agricultural expansion in Brazil has shifted the production of crops from smallholders to mechanized farming, creating intense price competition and turning smallholders into a pool of landless laborers for exploitation from companies engaged in the production of sugarcane (Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 84).

Social unrest and conflicts associated with large-scale land acquisition for corporate agriculture are reported in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Peter Dauvergne and Kate Neville (2010), in examining “Forest, Food and Fuel in the Tropics”, particularly stress peasant differentiation, class exploitation, dispossession and marginalisation in India, Ethiopia, Botswana and South Africa as triggers of land conflicts and social unrest (p. 649). Social unrest and conflicts are reported in Madagascar, where government negotiations with Daewoo Logistics Corporation to lease 1.3 million hectares for maize and oil palm reportedly played a role in the political conflicts that led to the overthrow of the government in 2009 (Cotula et al., 2009, p. 70).

Environmental and ecological sustainability of land and water resources are also among key issues raised by critics of corporate agriculture. In this case, agricultural mechanization, irrigation, and the use of agrochemicals are practices that create concerns about their environmental effect on land and water resources and biodiversity including flora and fauna, vital to smallholder productivity and livelihood security (von Braun &

Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 3; Ansoms, 2013, p. 15). Although the use of machinery and irrigation of large-scale farms can increase efficiency, concerns such as water and aquatic food shortage have emerged as very significant issues to smallholders and communities (Matus, Acs & Paloma, 2012, p.6).

Gender issues arising from transitioning smallholders into rural labourers play an important role in understanding the impact of commercial agriculture. Because men and women have different social roles, rights, and opportunities, their role in farming and social reproduction will be affected differently, taking into consideration the already vulnerable position of women in rural communities (Chu, 2011 p. 36; Behrman, et. al., 2011). Gender is socially and culturally constructed, and gender practices in rural communities have the potential of marginalising certain groups of people, including women or even the male poor, exacerbating gender disparity that existed prior to land acquisition (Behrman, et. al., 2012, p. 52; Asthana, 2012, p. 97). In Indonesia, for instance, although women play a very important role in providing livelihood for their families, they experienced systematic discrimination and exclusion from negotiations over land use transactions due to male domination in the different stages of biofuel production (Julia & White, 2012, p. 997).

Between the two schools of thought discussed above, the question that arises is what model of agricultural production will yield the best outcome for small farmers, who bear the brunt of the negative outcomes associated with the actions of investing companies. Seeking to address this, the World Bank (2010) advanced a model for integrating small farms and large investors through contract farming and out-grower

schemes (p. 20). However, it is important to bear in mind that in order to achieve a “win-win” situation, such options require strong collective action by institutions backed by strong civil society movements to be fully implemented. This collaborative support will generate the clout necessary for smallholders to effectively negotiate the terms of agreement with investors and tap the benefits of foreign investment (von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 3). Akram-Lodhi (2012), although critical of the World Bank’s view of a “win-win” situation, stressed the need for establishment of sound property rights in land and water, with efficient regulatory frameworks that “...provide the access to information needed by farmers to effectively locate themselves within global agro-commodity chains” (p. 130).

Another consideration for a fairer playground is the implementation of codes of conduct embedded within the principles of Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) (Matondi, Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 21). The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the International Institute of Environmental Development (IIED) in collaboration with the FAO, IFAD, UNCTAD, the World Bank, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food have set guidelines on land lease deals (Chu, 2011, p. 36). The guidelines are expected to cover shortfalls that emanate from investment policies (World Bank, 2010, p. xxvii; von Braun&Meinzen-Dick, 2009, p. 3; Matondi, Havnevik & Beyene, 2011, p. 21).

In summary, although commercial agriculture is seen as an opportunity for countries of the Global South to increase investment in agriculture and improve their economies, its implementation has been regulated with preference for a food security approach, where productivity is in the main purview of investment companies. As a

result, smallholders are unable to exercise their rights to decide what to produce, how to produce, and the orientation of the food they consume. Although smallholder agriculture is considered by some to be unproductive and inefficient, it is seen by others to speak to the needs, provisions, and rights of the rural poor, who constitute the majority of smallholder farmers.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the debates in agrarian development, revealing arguments between two contrasting views of agricultural development: the smallholder food sovereignty approach, which promotes smallholder access to land and the ability of the rural poor to produce their own food, and the large-scale export oriented agriculture dominated by foreign investors and agribusiness corporations. The discussions reveals that, as corporate agriculture emerges as the dominant food production system in developing countries, the rights of small farmers to access culturally adequate and nutritious food and control over their food production systems are compromised, potentially resulting in land dispossession and loss of vital sources of livelihood in rural communities. Proponents of large-scale commercial production cite low level of productivity of small farmers as the justification for preferring commercial agriculture, neglecting food sovereignty approaches that speak to upholding the values of small farmers, despite their proven ability to increase productivity locally under the right conditions. Using food sovereignty as a lens provides an alternative perspective on the impact of corporate agriculture on small farmers and rural communities in the Global South in general, and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. The remaining chapters explore

these themes with a specific focus on the history and current context of agriculture and development in Sierra Leone.

## **Chapter 3: Sierra Leone Agriculture**

This chapter will provide additional context about Sierra Leone in order to situate this project. A brief background of the agricultural sector and land tenure and land investment policies of Sierra Leone will be provided. Then the history and evolution of agriculture and agricultural development programs from the 1900s to the present era of neoliberal market-led export-oriented policies will be described using four distinct periods of Sierra Leone's history: during the colonial administrative period to independence (1900-1961); post-independence to the period of civil conflict (1961-1990); the period of civil conflict (1991-2002); and the period of the post-conflict reconstruction (2002 to 2012). Although investors and donor agencies claim to contribute to increasing smallholder production, generating employment and increasing income level of farmers, agricultural policies of successive governments have mostly favoured production for export crops, thereby displacing small farmers, limiting access to local food, and denying complete control over land and other productive resources.

### **3.1 Background**

Agriculture is one of the most significant sectors in the economy of Sierra Leone, contributing about 45 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing about 65-70 percent of the population (NSADP, 2009, p. 11). As seen in Table 2, crop production is the largest subsector of agriculture, followed by the much smaller subsectors of livestock production, forestry, and fisheries. Although comprising small percentages of the agricultural sector, it is noteworthy that forestry provides about 80 percent of the domestic energy consumption requirement for cooking and heating, while

fishery provides about 75 percent of the total protein consumed in the country (Liepzig, 1996, p. 11).

**Table 2: Contributions of Major Agricultural Sub-sector to Agricultural GDP (percent)**

Sub-sector								
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Crops	25	29	28	30	32	32	31	32
Livestock	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Forestry	6	5	5	4	4	4	4	3
Fishery	7	7	8	9	9	8	8	8
Agriculture's contribution to GDP	40	44	44	46	48	47	46	46

Source: NSADP 2010-2030

Predominantly an agrarian economy, the country has a total land area of 7.2 million hectares, of which 5.36 million hectares is categorised as prime land suitable for crop production (NSADP, 2009, p. 12). The climate is favourable for crop growth, with relatively predictable rainy and dry seasons, vegetation of upland ecology of high forest and high bush use by rural communities for crop production, animal grazing and hunting; and lowland ecology of 630,000 hectares of inland valley swamps, 120,000 hectares of seasonal swamps locally referred to as “Bolilands”, 110,000 hectares of riverine grassland and 200,000 hectares of mangrove swamps (FAO, 2012; NSADP, 2009, p. 12; Unruh & Turray, 2006; Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Cultivable uplands account for about 4.2 million hectares, representing about 78.4 percent of the total cultivable land area, while

lowlands account for about 1.16 million hectares of land suitable for agriculture (Leipzig, 1996, p. 11).

Crop production is traditionally characterized by food-producing subsistence smallholder farmers, with about 400,000 farmers cultivating about 600,000 hectares of the land suitable for agriculture (Leipzig, 1996, p. 11). These smallholder farmers, produce a variety of local food and cash crops in a shifting cultivation or “slash and burn” rotation system on less than 2 hectares of land (Matus, Acs & Paloma, 2012, p.2). The farming system is predominantly three to four years of a continuous farming cycle on a piece of land and a fallow period of two to ten years (Unruh & Turray, 2006).

Traditionally, food is synonymous to rice, as rice is the main food produced in the country. A variety of other food crops are grown as well, including cassava, maize, yams, groundnuts, sorghum, millet, okra, garden egg, pepper, and a variety of green vegetables. The annual per capita consumption of rice in Sierra Leone, estimated at 104 kg, is amongst the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country requires about 530,000 MT of milled rice to meet the consumption needs of its population annually (WFP, 2013, p. 13). Coffee, cocoa and piassava were the main cash crops historically produced for export, now produced in very limited quantity (FAO, 2012; Leipzig, 1996, p.10).

A 2010 survey on the state of food insecurity in Sierra Leone estimates 45 percent of the population of the country to be food insecure (CFSVA, 2011, p. 9). The report also indicates 46 percent of households cultivate upland rice and 35 percent cultivate lowland rice. Half of households grow cassava, 38 percent grow leafy vegetables and 34 grow maize. Beans and groundnuts are also important household staples (CFSVA, 2011). These



statistics show the significant contribution of small farmers to food production, even while a significant proportion remain food insecure.

### **3.2 Evolution of Sierra Leone Agricultural Development Policies and Programs**

The following history and evolution of Sierra Leone's agricultural development provides an understanding of how specific agricultural development interventions and policy prescriptions of the country have benefited or harmed small farmers. This provides lessons that can be useful in addressing issues of food sovereignty. During this historic period, different ruling governments have collaborated with research institutions, foreign countries, and agricultural organizations to implement approaches and programs that address food insecurity and agricultural development issues. Unique interventions have been devised during specific periods of the country's agricultural development, from the colonial period to the current era of market-led, large-scale land acquisitions.

#### ***3.2.1 The Colonial Era***

The establishment of formal institutions and policy formulation started when Sierra Leone was made a British crown colony in 1808. The country was first colonized in 1787 by freed slaves from England, joined by other freed slaves and Blacks from Nova Scotia in 1792 (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Although rudimentary agricultural livelihood activities are known to have existed through narratives since the pre-historic period, for the purpose of this research, only major agricultural activities and policy prescriptions dated since the early 1900s are discussed because of the absence of reliable evidence of agricultural activities that go beyond the period under review (FAO, n.d., p. 17).

Before independence in 1961, Sierra Leone was governed under two political subdivisions: As a British colony in the Western Area since 1808; and as an inland protectorate of the rest of the country, over which Britain was able to gain jurisdiction of in 1896. In the Western Area, English property laws established by former British rulers who governed the use of land, allowed private ownership and sale of land through land fee, conveyances, mortgages and leases (HRW, 2014, p.19). Unoccupied and uncultivated land in the Western Area remained state land (NSADP, 2009, p. 12). In the north, south, and east of the country where vast tracts of agricultural land were found, communal land ownership was practiced, and still is today (Unruh and Turray, 2006, p. 2). Traditionally, land was held by landowning families (lineages) who were able to trace their ancestry to early pre-colonial arrivals. Technically, lineages are attached to a chieftaincy structure that plays a significant land administrative and custodian role.

This duality in the land tenure system in Sierra Leone is acknowledged in the current land legislation today. The National Lands Policy has existed since the colonial era. According to the 1927 Provinces Act, Paramount Chiefs were the custodians of all land in the protectorate. The Act prohibits the sale of land, particularly to foreigners (HRW, 2014, p.19; NSADP, 2009, p. 12). According to this structure, there is no rural land in the country that does not reside within chiefdoms, with the exception of the small Western Area where Freetown is located. Also, while there are chiefs at different administrative levels, the Paramount Chief is particularly important in land issues and no significant land matters in chiefdoms are final unless the Paramount Chief approves (Unruh, 2008; Bruce, 1998, p. 122).

Sierra Leone has officially placed agricultural development and food self-sufficiency at the center of food and agricultural development policies since the period of British administrative rule. Official agricultural investment programs and formal agricultural institutions, however, started in the early twentieth century. During this period, until independence in 1961, the country's agricultural policies were mainly developed by British rulers to promote land and forest conservation, food self-sufficiency, and the expansion of agricultural exports (Alie, 1990, p. 192). This involved the expansion of forest production in the upland and rice production in the swampland; a strategy aimed at reserving fertile upland soils for the production of export crops (FAO, n.d., p. 15).

In 1911, a Department of Agriculture was established in the southeast of Sierra Leone to oversee the production and export of agricultural products, which before the 1930s accounted for 75 percent of the total government revenue (Alie, 1990, p. 192; FAO, n.d., p. 15). In 1919, a school was established at N'jala, in the South of Sierra Leone, to assist in training of agricultural extension workers and to carry out research to improve cultural farming practices. To further enhance research in crop production, in 1934, the Rokupr Rice Research Station was established to conduct research on cultural practices and crop improvement on indigenous and introduced rice varieties suitable for swamp cultivation (FAO, n.d., p. 18). These institutions were meant to provide training to smallholders in new farming techniques using mechanical equipment, and distribution of improved swamp rice and other crop varieties to farmers in the form of credit, aimed at providing food self-sufficiency (FAO, n.d., p. 18; Alie, 1990, p. 194).

In 1932, swampland development programs were established in the country designed to divert smallholder farmers from upland rice cultivation to the lowlands, so that uplands would be specifically allocated to forest extraction and cash crops production for export (FAO, n.d., p. 15; Alieu, E., 2005, p. 7). The implementation of these programs lacked the participation of local smallholder farmers because it was reported to be highly mechanized. And according to the FAO, "... traditional farming methods [which small farmers prefer] generally seemed to have highly favoured smallholder upland rice production by then, instead of swamp rice", requiring technical and mechanical skills which small farmers lacked (FAO, n.d., p. 18).

Another venture that appeared smallholder-based was the establishment of a cooperative ordinance act, which allowed for the creation of cooperatives in 1939 to prevent the exploitation of small farmers by both private and foreign firms seeking to buy agricultural produce. The formation of cooperatives as a bargaining unit enabled smallholders to improve product value, access better market prices, and create channels of credit facilities. In terms of economic benefits and social cohesion, cooperatives played an effective role in bringing farmers together to pool resources and knowledge and increase the income level of farmers. However, the formation of cooperatives was primarily geared towards making smallholders into efficient producers for export crops. Cooperatives were inefficient to tackle the policy initiative of the colonial government, which was primarily to promote and increase production of export crops, leading to tensions that resulted in their collapse (FAO, n.d., p. 19).

After the collapse of cooperatives, in 1949, the Sierra Leone Producing Marketing Board (SLPMB) was established by the colonial government. According to Alieu (2005), SLPMB was in fact an amalgamation of dismantled cooperative societies, bearing similar functions and operations (p. 7). With a mandate and monopoly right to buy local produce from farmers, the SLPMB was designed to guarantee a stable price for agricultural produce regardless of fluctuations in the world market price of agricultural produce. Although farmers received higher prices for their produce, SLPMB failed to reinvest in agriculture the surplus capital accrued during periods of high world market prices in the 1950s and early 1960s (Alie, 1990, p. 192). Instead of focusing on providing smallholders with technological and marketing support, SLPMB was reported to be engulfed in corruption and mismanagement of resources, leading to ineffective coordination between small farmers and management offices. Support for smallholders started shifting towards the creation of large farms for increased export production (FAO, n.d., p. 19).

While making significant contributions to agricultural export and generating revenue for the country, the colonial agricultural policies ignored fundamental principles that promote smallholder control of the food production system. Instead, much emphasis was placed on agricultural programs and market-led policies of export crop promotion, which limit smallholder access to production and consumption of local food (FAO, n.d., p. 21).

### ***3.2.2 Post-Independence Period***

After independence in 1961, Sierra Leone was able to produce sufficient food to feed itself, and agricultural development policies appeared to focus on achieving rice self-sufficiency programs centered on smallholder production. The increase in rice production was achieved primarily through the expansion of the land area under cultivation, mostly by smallholders (NRDS, 2009, p. 8). Notwithstanding this expansion, the underlying principles of post-independence agricultural development strategies were marked by the colonial legacy of industrial expansion of agro-based industries, with similar claims of promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and improving the living standards of people. In this way, agriculture in the early post-independence years was primarily considered a pool from which resources for industrialisation could be generated (Alieu, 2005, p. 7; FAO, n.d., p. 15). This policy prescription of industrial expansion of agro-based industry saw small farmers facing numerous challenges, including integrating into production and commercialization chains, and constraints to investing in agriculture (Matus, Acs & Paloma, 2012, p.6).

Between independence and 1980, the country implemented numerous agricultural development programs aimed at promoting smallholder production. However, some of the programs were promoting smallholders to increase production of export crops, and opening a market for dumping foreign food products domestically, instead of providing smallholder access to resources for local food production (FAO, n.d., p. 24). For example, a Ten-Year Plan (1962-1971) was a state support program of Economic and Social Development which aimed to diversify agriculture in order to address the issue of low

productivity and instability of export markets. The National Development Plan (1978-1978), aimed to increase food production and improve standards of living of rural communities (FAO, n.d., p. 24).

In the late 1970s to early 1980s, the Integrated Agricultural Development Project (IADP) was established with support from the FAO, the World Bank and USAID. The IADP policy prescriptions were focused on developing smallholder agriculture to increase agricultural productivity through providing agricultural education and extension services, including provision of planting materials and subsidies to small farmers (Alieu, 2005, p. 8). In an effort to achieve its policy objectives, IADP implemented smallholder-centered programs including agricultural education, the supply of agricultural inputs and access to credit, feeder roads construction and agricultural infrastructural development. However, its scope of operations was limited due to limited donor funding; as a result, the impact of its operations was not widespread. In the middle of the 1980s, IADP closed down due to the implementation of a national Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) (FAO, n.d., p. 23).

In 1983, the Agricultural Sector Support Project (ASSP) was introduced with support from World Bank and IMF. With its neoliberal directed policies, ASSP was aimed at re-structuring the agriculture policies of Sierra Leone so they could align with SAP policies. Its strategies were aimed at removing agricultural subsidies and state-provided incentives for small farmers, promoting agricultural exports, privatizing agricultural mechanization and reducing the number of unskilled labourers employed by the Ministry of Agriculture. The removal of smallholder subsidies and privatization of tractor hire services, impacted smallholders that could not afford the cost of these

services, making local food production a less attractive venture to the eyes of small farmers (ASSP, 2000, p. 8).

In 1985, the Green Revolution Program (GRP) was introduced with policy prescriptions aimed at revitalizing the agricultural sector and increasing agricultural productivity through funds from foreign sources (Alieu, 2005, p. 8; FAO, n.d., p. 26). About 92 percent of GRP funds were expected to come from foreign donors, and activities were mainly directed to the production of export crops directed through the SLPMB (FAO, n.d., p. 24). In the late 1980s, Public Law 480 (PL 480), a US food aid project that sold rice on long-term credit below the market price, was introduced in Sierra Leone. Cheap surplus American agricultural produce including rice was dumped in the country under the rationale of enhancing food security while the primary aim was to promote US foreign policies through expanding markets for US agricultural products (GAO, 1994, p. 1).

In the years 1987 and 1988, Sierra Leone was declared ineligible for borrowing from the IMF and World Bank as the country was unable to meet its financial commitments, leading to a serious economic crisis. As a result, the government adopted an Economic Emergency Program (EEP) with IMF conditionality, involving SAPs, to address the prevailing economic crisis. In 1990, the government adopted SAPs to enable the government to gain access to international donor funds and loans. The SAPs of the EEP led to a revaluation of the national currency and various policies to liberalize trade and agricultural exports, along with cuts in government subsidies and incentives for smallholder farmers (Sillinger, 2003; FAO, n.d., p. 26). The EEP, though not directly



related to agricultural development, was also aimed at providing the necessary platform for agricultural development, which was directed towards commercial production of export crops. As the agricultural export trade was liberalized, private companies such as James International (JI) and Pan African Commodity Corporation (PACC) embarked on the production and export of agricultural produce, which displaced smallholder production of basic food stuffs (FAO, n.d., p. 28).

### ***3.2.3 The Period of Civil Conflict***

The eleven years (1991-2002) civil war in Sierra Leone displaced 30 percent of the country's 400,000 farm families, which adversely affected the level of food production of farming communities (WFP, 2013, p. 7). The displacement of farmers from farming communities left fertile agricultural land uncultivated in many conflict areas, thus making it impossible for smallholders to grow crops (FAO, n.d., p. 29). The inability of smallholders to produce food during the conflict negatively impacted agriculture and contributed to bringing the country's economic, social and agricultural structures to a total breakdown (MacKenzie, 2009, p. 205). The end of the war in 2002 brought some glimmer of hope as the agricultural sector started to regain its growth, which has steadily increased since. Total local rice production and rice import, mainly from Asia, was reported to increase from 57.4 percent in 2002 to 59.3 percent in 2003, and 61 percent in 2004 to 69 percent and 71 percent in 2005 and 2007, respectively. There has also been a record increase in the production of cassava and sweet potatoes, which serves as a substitute to rice. This increase in the production capacity of these crops was due primarily to an increase in land area put under smallholder agriculture (CAADP n.d., p.2).

### ***3.2.4 Post-war Agricultural Policies and Programs***

Domestic food production started to recover after 2002, with smallholder farmers playing a major role in the production, distribution and marketing of the country's staples. Despite this increase in domestic food production, the country remained in food deficit and has been heavily dependent on food imports (WFP, 2013, p. 7). In 2004, a new investment act, the "Sierra Leone Investment Promotion Act" was established as an amendment to the Non-Citizens Trade and Business Investment Act of 1969. The new investment and promotion policy intends to provide an environment conducive for both domestic and foreign investment in agriculture, including investment in agricultural land, which promotes production for export and ensures international market integration (NSADP, 2009, p. 19).

The 2004 Land Investment Act, which allowed leasing of land, also required land lease agreements to spell out all conditions governing the use of land, including: the amount of rent agreed by all parties; the number of land lease years; the purpose for which the land will be used; the rights and responsibilities of all parties; terms of expiration or termination for a lease; and a period of lease agreement review of seven years (Andrew & Vlaenderen, 2013, p. 3). Under this act, the state has the power to expropriate land in the "interest" of the country's development, regardless of the type of land ownership that is in operation (Andrew & Vlaenderen, 2013, p. 3).

Post-war Sierra Leone adopted a number of economic recovery and human development programs including the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP), National Recovery Strategy (NRS), Vision 2025, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy

Paper (PRSP) (FAO, n.d., p. 33), all of which were significant to revitalizing the agricultural sector. The IPRSP is an assessment of the country's poverty situation highlighting the poverty gaps and designing the path through which poverty gaps are addressed through the production of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IMF, 2001). Although the IPRSP is not specifically directed to improving smallholder agriculture, the completion of the IPRSP served as a precondition to meet preliminary requirements set by international donors such as the World Bank and IMF for the country to benefit from international economic recovery programs, and may have contributed to accelerating the resettlement and rehabilitation process to rejuvenate the agriculture sector (ADF, 2005, p. 3).

These programs included the World Bank 2001 Economic Rehabilitation and Recovery Credit (ERRC), which aimed at improving "economic governance" through providing financial resources to enable the government to build strong management structures to stimulate good local governance and economic growth (ADF, 2005, p. 3); the 2002 Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which provided debt relief for the country, estimated at US\$1,032,928,000 in 2002 and US\$1,281,403,000 in 2004 (FAO, n.d., p. 36; Index Mundi, n.d.); and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), aimed at supporting programs related to poverty reduction in the country (ADF, 2005, p. 1).

Like the IPRSP, the NRS was also not specific to agriculture, but rather an emergency program aimed at consolidation and promoting human rights through the restoration of local and economic livelihoods in rural communities. To achieve its

objectives, a national social action program was created - the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), to implement NRS policy and strategy specifically directed toward resuscitating rural economic and social livelihood structures such as processing and storage facilities, required to revive smallholder food production and the overall agriculture sector (FAO, n.d., p. 33).

The PRSP is the strategic framework that provided a complete policy prescription of the country's macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs for the period 2005 to 2007. Unlike the IPRSP and NRS, specific identifiable objectives for agricultural development in Sierra Leone were subsumed in the PRSP. However, pro-poor sustainable agricultural development policies under the PRSP were based on promoting food security through global market integration, corresponding to the need to achieve development outcomes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing poverty by half by the year 2015 (FAO, n.d., p. 36).

Along similar lines in providing the platform for recovery, the 2003 "Vision 2025" development agenda for Sierra Leone, a framework that describes the country's long-term development goals until the year 2025, was established. Its objectives cut across many development issues, including promoting private sector development, strengthening institutional capacity through local participation, improving living standards of people, providing investment in education, creating acceptable democratic principles by the government, improving science and technology, and ensuring sustainable exploitation and effective utilisation of the country's natural resources while maintaining a healthy environment (FAO, n.d., p. 35). To realise this vision, effective

policy implementation and agricultural support is required, such as that which saw early post-war agricultural extension activities in rural communities. In 2009, agricultural extension activities were broadened to include the training of farmers in new farming practices and technologies. This collaborative effort by the government and NGOs resulted in the development of Farmers Field Schools (FFS), serving as village-level informal institutions aimed at improving smallholders' capacity in improved agricultural techniques (NSADP, 2009, p. 17).

Following the implementation of post-war recovery programs that provided the platform to commence agricultural activities, a number of food security programs linked to external development agendas, such as the MDGs and the PRSP pro poor sustainability growth for food security were introduced. As a result, food security activities for Sierra Leone were subsumed into these programs, highly supported by international donors including the World Bank and IMF (FAO, n.d., p. 40). These financial institutions strongly favoured large-scale land acquisitions for corporate agriculture, meaning that the implementation strategies of food security would have minimal activities aimed at bolstering smallholder production (Aliou, E., 2005, p. 10).

A number of food security programs were introduced and subsumed under the government National Sustainable Agricultural Development Plan (NSADP), a pathway for agricultural development designed by the government of Sierra Leone in collaboration with donor agencies in 2009. The activities of NSADP were aimed at integrating all agricultural-related programs into its strategic framework, in order to increase agricultural productivity through commercialization and private sector participation in the production

and export of agricultural products (NSADP, 2009, p.29). This, according to NSADP, would provide an enabling environment to promote small and medium farm holders as well as agribusiness and large-scale farms, and facilitate access to market for smallholder farmers. Financing the implementation of NSADP was a “dual approach venture” involving finances from national and private sector investment, and external funds from international borrowing and international grants. Because the government relies mostly on external funds to finance NSADP, emphasis was placed on promoting production for export instead of smallholder local food production (NSADP, 2009, p. 37).

Following the integration of both national and international agricultural policies into NSADP’s agricultural development strategies, two main agricultural projects were created: (a) commodity commercialization, which supports small, medium and large-scale agricultural commercialization; and (b) agricultural infrastructural development, which supports the rehabilitation of feeder roads and construction of storage, processing, packaging and irrigation facilities for both small and large-scale farming (NSADP, 2009, p. 37; CAADP, 2010, p. 7). Other sectors of NSADP include promoting private sector development through market liberalization and the coordination and management unit of the sub sectors (NSADP, 2009, p. 37). The financial requirement of these programs is estimated within a series of five-year periods that run until the end of 2050. The 2010 to 2015 period required a total of USD 333.5 million (NSADP, 2009, p. 30).

Responding to the policy requirements of NSADP, the UN subsumes their programs into the smallholder commercialization scheme through a UN joint vision to complement the “*Sierra Leone Agenda for Change*,” also known as the Poverty

Reduction Strategy Paper 2 (PRSP2) in 2008 (NSADP, 2009, p. 36). The PRSP2 places emphasis on agriculture as an engine of economic growth and development. Its objectives were designed to increase agricultural productivity; promote commercial agriculture; expand on agricultural research and extension; promote efficient and effective sector resource management systems; manage and exploit the country's fisheries, forestry and marine resources; and mainstream cross-cutting issues in agriculture (NSADP, 2009, p. 21). However, commercialization, high technology and export agriculture will invariably favour large farms over small ones, as the former have the resources and land to compete in that environment.

Thus, post war agricultural development programs were highly dependent on the support of international funding and donor agencies including the World Bank and IMF, and were integrated into external development agendas such as the MDGs (NSADP, 2009, p. 37). As a result, programs of agricultural development have been implemented with policy prescriptions that promote market-led food security policies that encourage production of export crops and the dumping of food in the country. Also, despite claims that agricultural commercialization programs would improve food availability and increase the income level of smallholders, its implementation has favoured large farms, while small farmers struggle to organise themselves into such schemes (NSADP, 2009, p. 37).

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Different periods of agricultural development interventions in Sierra Leone have revealed specific policy prescriptions, ostensibly smallholder directed, but have

invariably favoured production of export crops. During the colonial administrative period, agricultural development policies were based on promoting the production and export of cash crops and timber. Although land used for export crop production at the time was not leased and smallholders were supported to focus on swamp cultivation, the policy approach appeared to dispossess small farmers because of their diversion from upland local food production to swampland conservation.

Like the colonial era, government policies in agricultural development in post-independence Sierra Leone appear to integrate smallholder farmers into many agricultural development projects. This regulatory policy framework has however, been mostly centered on promoting commercial agriculture. This is aimed at transitioning farming from traditional environmentally-sustainable shifting cultivation practice of crop production to large-scale production of export crops. Consequently, smallholder farmers faced numerous challenges, including integrating into production and commercialization programs of production and constraints to investing in agriculture, which was not only due to subsidies and credit shortages but also to the regulatory policies of donor driven agricultural programs (FAO, n.d., p. 24; Matus, Acs & Paloma, 2012, p.6).

Sierra Leone has mostly relied on foreign aid for agricultural development programs since the end of the war. As a result, post-war policies have been further directed towards donor driven objectives. Consequently, the country was unable to implement locally-based pro-poor agricultural policies that would enhance the production of local food crops using local farming system and activities. Also, agricultural policy strategies after the war were directed towards achieving external agendas instead of focusing on local programs specific to improving smallholder food production. As a



result, smallholder local programs have only translated into increasing production of export crops, negatively impacting smallholder rights to access and control land and other productive resources, and their food production system.

## **Chapter 4: Case Study Findings**

This chapter presents a discussion of the case study findings of the impact of large-scale land acquisitions on small farmers in affected communities. The evidence from the communities suggests that, in the face of global corporate agriculture and pro-corporate approaches to agrarian development, little opportunity exists for smallholder farmers to be able to fully utilise their potential to produce their own food and take control of their food production systems.

### **4.1 Case Study Location and Participants Description**

As described in previous chapters, Sierra Leone has, since a few years after the end of the war in 2002, experienced an influx of foreign investors in large-scale land acquisition for investment in commercial agriculture (Oakland Institute, 2011, p.11). With emphasis on promoting large-scale land acquisition for agricultural development, since 2008, the Sierra Leone Investment and Promotion Agency (SLIEPA)<sup>6</sup> has managed the country's investment policies of government departments, including but not limited to agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The new investment promotion policies for agriculture include a ten-year corporate tax holiday on investment in agriculture and zero import duties on agricultural imports by foreign investors. The country also allows 100 percent foreign ownership of all investments and full repatriation of profits, dividends, and royalties (Oakland Institute, 2011, p.13). From a food sovereignty perspective, this policy change appeared to compromise the rights of communities to control their food

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<sup>6</sup> SLIEPA is an independent agency under the Sierra Leone Ministry of Trade and Industry, Created by an Act of Parliament in 2007 to replace the Sierra Leone Export and Development Corporation, to facilitate and promote business in the country.

production system. According to proponents, however, the investment policy change was done on the assumption that private sector development of commercial agriculture would integrate smallholder farmers into global supply chains and provide the support for them to be self-sufficient, as well as supporting commercial farms, a strategy referred to as “agriculture for development” (World Bank, 2008, p. 18).

The field study was conducted in two affected and two non-affected communities of large-scale land acquisition in the Bombali District, Northern Sierra Leone, which is geographically the second largest district in Sierra Leone. Subsistence farming is the predominant livelihood activity in the district and about 75 percent of the population is engaged in smallholder agriculture. This district has attracted more foreign investors in corporate agriculture than any other district because of the abundance of arable land (Anane & Abiwu, 2012).

#### ***4.1.1 The Communities Studied***

The two affected communities are Lungi Acre and Worreh Yeama. They are very small communities sharing a common boundary in the Makari Gbanti chiefdom of the Bombali District. These two communities are about 37 and 41 kilometers southwest of Makeni, which is the provincial city of the North; they are about 112 kilometers from Freetown, the capital city. Lungi Acre was one of the most productive farming communities in the Bombali District in terms of rice production before the arrival of foreign investors in the community. The name “Acre” was an extension to its original name “Lungi,” derived from the hundreds of acres of rice MAFFS was producing from its fertile bolilands and uplands (Interview 10, 28 July 2015). The name of the other affected

community, “Worreh” refers to “cattle ranch” from the local language Temne, named so historically because a nomadic cattle herder decided to settle and rear his cattle in the village. This community is known for its mixed farming activities, including the rearing of animals and rice production activities, conducted widely before their land was expropriated and used for growing sugarcane (Interview 8, 25 July 2013). This indicates that land in these communities was not only used only for crop production but also for other livelihood activities including animal grazing, hunting, fishing and gathering. These villages have village heads, also called “section chiefs”, who report all activities of the communities to the Paramount Chief of the chiefdom.

The two non-affected communities are Makaiba and Makeni Lol. They are located in the Paki Masabong Chiefdom of the Bombali District, approximately 11 and 24 kilometres southeast of Makeni. Similar to affected communities, the non-affected communities also have large swaths of very fertile uplands and bolilands that serve as the main breadbasket and livelihood opportunity for smallholders and their families. Foreign investors have not expropriated land in these two unaffected communities, largely because they have successfully resisted large-scale land leasing. According to respondents the communities were successful in resisting large-scale land leases through support from local leaders, local NGOs, and civil society groups operating in the communities, and as a result of experiences and lessons learned from affected communities (Interview 28, 1 August 2013; Stakeholder 1, 5 August 2013). Many youth and young men found in these communities were, at the time of the study, engaged in farming activities using community and family labour. Also, signboards of agricultural

commercialization programs funded by FAO in collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone were found in these communities.

#### ***4.1.2 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents***

The number of respondents interviewed was 32. Among the number of respondents interviewed, 78 percent (n=25) were male and 22 percent (n=7) were female. Male overrepresentation is a common feature in surveys and meetings in these rural communities because of their strong ties to gender cultural roles and responsibilities, according to one NGO respondent, a field staff assigned to the affected communities: “Men see this as a pride and respect to represent the family in any meeting or activity, and many women, especially the elderly, tend to be shy to speak publicly and also prefer to respect their husbands’ role, as a means to avoid conflict within the family” (Stakeholder 4, 5 August 2013).

Of the 28 respondents interviewed in both affected and non-affected communities, all were household heads with an average household size of 9 people, and 89 percent (n=25) of them have spouses. The average age of the respondents in both affected and non-affected communities is 42 years and over half of them (63 percent, n=15) were age 45 and above. Over half of the respondents (64 percent, n=18) in both affected and non-affected communities were born and raised in the communities and 36 percent (n=10) have lived in the communities for a period of twenty-five years or more.

With the exception of other stakeholders, all participants interviewed were farmers. Of this number, 33.7 percent (n=14) were smallholder farmers from affected

communities; 33.7 percent (n=14) were smallholder farmers from non-affected communities; and 12.5 percent (n=4) were other stakeholders. In assessing participants' formal education level, apart from stakeholder respondents (12 percent, n=4) who attained tertiary level education, over half of the respondents (78 percent, n= 25) did not have any formal level of education, 6 percent (n=2) attended secondary school but did not complete, and 3 percent (n=1) attended primary school education. Apart from subsistence farming which is the main livelihood activity in all case study communities, only 29 percent (n=8) of respondents in both affected and non-affected communities have other skills (blacksmith, carpentry, hunters), which are acquired informally. These skills are a source of extra income for these community people, according to participants (Interview 3, 25 July 2013).

#### ***4.1.3 Foreign Investment in Bombali District***

A foreign investment company, Addax Bioenergy, is a subsidiary of the diversified energy group of companies, the Addax and Oryx Group (AOG) of the Malta-based Swiss company<sup>7</sup>. Addax has leased from the government of Sierra Leone about 57,000 hectares of arable land in the Bombali District for a period of 50 years to grow sugarcane for biofuel production. Addax sugarcane plantation covers about 10,000 hectares, plus an additional 2,000 hectares that Addax intends to use to assist communities in growing rice through an Addax initiative called the Farmer's Development Program (FDP) (Fielding, et al., 2015, p. 16).

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<sup>7</sup> [www.addaxbioenergy.com/en/about-us.php](http://www.addaxbioenergy.com/en/about-us.php)

Addax processing capacity in the Bombali and Tonkilili districts is estimated at 950,000 tons of sugarcane per year, producing about 350,000 litres of bio-ethanol per day. Excess electrical power produced by Addax is to be sold to the national grid (15MW or 100,000MWh/year). About 2,000 labourers are expected ultimately to be employed, the majority of them as seasonal workers with one to three month contracts (Andrew&Vlaenderen, 2013, p. 9; Fielding, et al., 2015, p. 10). About 24,000 people in 2,424 households in the Addax operational area are affected either directly or indirectly through loss of fertile agricultural land and about 92 percent of inhabitants in Addax affected communities were estimated to be food insecure (Anane & Abiwu, 2011, p. 7; Andrew&Vlaenderen, 2013, p. 9).

## **4.2 Assessing the Impact of Farmland Acquisitions on Food Sovereignty**

### **4.2.1 *Access to Culturally Adequate and Nutritious Food***

At the centre of the debate on food security versus food sovereignty is the issue of the rights of people and communities to have access to culturally adequate and nutritious food. Using food sovereignty to guide the assessment of how access to culturally adequate and nutritious food is impacting case study communities, three peasant rights were taken into consideration: the right to produce sufficient quantity of food; the right to decide and control what to produce and consume; and the right to decide and control the orientation of food consumed.

Primary evidence from the study revealed that in the affected communities, all of the respondents (100 percent, n=14) were no longer able to produce sufficient food for home consumption. The inability of the affected communities to produce sufficient food

appears to be partly exacerbated by the inability of smallholders in the communities to exercise their rights to access fertile land, which has been expropriated by the government and leased to the foreign investing company, Addax. Responding to the quantity of food produced, a participant in the affected communities stated:

“My family and I used to cultivate about 15 bushels of rice and would harvest up to about 150 bushels. We saved 15 bushels for seed crop, sold about 60 bushels and the rest was used for home consumption. This year, because of the lack of access to land, I was only able to cultivate about 3 bushels, from which I harvested 20 bushels. This harvest only serves my family for a few weeks. For the most part of the year we depend on buying imported rice, which has replaced our locally produced rice since our land was expropriated by the government”

(Interview 1, 23 July 2013).

Another respondent also remarked:

“When land was accessible, my family and I used to cultivate about 10 bushels of rice and would harvest about 100 bushels. Out of this harvest, we used to reserve 10 bushels as seed crop for next planting season, 30 bushels for home consumption, and the rest of the harvest we sell. The proceeds from the sale we reserve for clothing, health and education of our children. Presently we only cultivated 3 bushels on a small piece of swampland and harvested 25 bushels”

(Interview 2, 23 July 2013).

Analysis of the above statements of Interview 1 and 2 revealed a significant fall of 86.6 percent and 75 percent in local rice production respectively. Imported rice was reported to be available in the communities, which is paramount in the view of food security;



however, unavailability of sufficient locally produced food was clearly evident in affected communities. A study conducted in the Addax operational areas in Sierra Leone also revealed indications of food insecurity due to fall in the levels of local food production (Fielding, et al. 2015, p. 26).

The only means of food production by inhabitants of the communities is through backyard gardening, producing mostly leafy vegetables and spices, and a few tuber crops such as potatoes and cassava for home consumption, according to all respondents in affected communities. Backyard gardening on tiny plots around houses was visible on entering these communities, and communities have maintained these tiny plots to control some of the food they want to produce and consume, according to participants of the focus group discussion (Focus Group 1, 25 July, 2013).

Considering that smallholder farming is the main livelihood activity in the communities, the high number of participants who cannot produce sufficient food is very significant. This can result in the inability of smallholders and their families to have access, including through purchases, to adequate and nutritious food, which is evident in affected communities. Responding to interview questions, one participant stated, "...my family and I used to produce most of the food we eat; rice, cassava and a variety of vegetables on 2.8 hectares of land, now we rely on backyard gardening on less than 0.5 hectares of land, worked mostly by my wife" (Interview 11, 29 July 2013). These remarks are examples of the many similar stories told by other respondents on the difference in the quantity of food produced before and after the expropriation of their land.

On the issue of the type of food produced and consumed, a large portion of the arable land in the affected communities is either used as nursery sites for sugarcane

seedlings or occupied with sugarcane fields, according to participants of the focus group (Focus Group 2, 28 July 2013). All of the respondents in affected communities reported that sugarcane, specifically grown for producing biofuel for export, has replaced the locally produced staple crop rice in the fields, causing food insecurity. During the period the research was conducted, there were plantations of sugarcane on the fields of land on each side of the unpaved, muddy and water flooded roads leading to the two affected communities. The implication here is that the food production system in the affected case study communities, controlled and regulated by the investing company, has denied communities the rights and power to make their own choices on what crop to produce, what method of production to use, and how to market their produce.

Many smallholder families in the affected communities have serious concerns about the implications of the regulatory food production system that has contributed to the lack of access to control, produce and consume locally produced traditional food. A participant of the focus group discussion reported, "...our access to consume and produce our local food has been affected, and we are concerned and worried. Our worries are not only limited to us as adults, but we are also concerned about the future implications for our children and grandchildren, who will have to take over from us when we pass away" (Focus Group, 25 July 2013). Many similar concerns were expressed by individual participants in the affected communities.

Regarding the orientation of food, all respondents in affected communities reported consuming mostly imported rice for the past year. This appears to be a concern for smallholders as they have to strive for other avenues of income to be able to purchase imported rice from the closest town or city. This is unlikely because smallholders in the

case study communities lack the required education, technical or vocational skills to be able to fit into other job opportunities in the cities or elsewhere. The high number of respondents with no formal education increases their risk and level of vulnerability to livelihood insecurity, and will not enable them to easily secure jobs when land, which serves as an insurance against uncertainties, is expropriated. Fielding et al.'s (2015) assessment on the biofuel project in Sierra Leone reported that literacy and job skills have adversely limited employment opportunities for unskilled and illiterate communities, whose land has been expropriated (p. 28).

For a few respondents in the affected communities (28 percent, n=4), the only available means of livelihood is relying on their children or extended families living in the cities. While the rest (72 percent, n=10) who do not have similar opportunities of support appear to lack adequate food. According to one respondent, "...the quantity of food we now consume has been reduced and less nutritious. With my family of 10, we used to cook about 10 cups of rice per day but now we are reduced to five cups because we cannot afford a large quantity of imported rice. Sometimes, we eat cassava and potatoes as supplements" (Interview 9, 29 July 2013). Even the 28 percent of respondents who relied on extended families and children for support reported consuming inadequate food because other food requirements like protein and vegetables is most often absent from their diet. Other findings revealed that affected communities in Addax operational areas cope with food insecurity by spending more money to buy food through borrowing from other community members, or eating less than the quantity they used to eat (Fielding, et al. 2015, p. 26).

Regarding consuming nutritious food, 93 percent (n=13) of respondents in affected communities appear to be consuming less nutritious food than in the past. Fish, which was the main source of protein from surrounding streams, and bush animals caught from land that was left fallow, have been difficult to access because of restrictions placed on entering protected land and fields of sugarcane leased by the foreign company. Participants were asked to list the type of food their families consumed for the past five days, and what quantity of the food they listed that was bought or produced. All of the participants stated they bought all of the food categories they and their families consumed except for green leafy vegetables which they continue to grow in small plots around their houses.

A participant, speaking on the issue of consuming nutritious food gave this remark: “For the past five days my family and I ate rice, cassava, fish, green leaves, pepper, and peanuts. We used to grow all the items for home consumption. But, now I have to buy each and every item, except the green leaves which I grow at my backyard” (Interview 3, 25 July 2013). The fundamental issue raised here relates to the aspect of rights, power and control, which appeared to be denied in affected communities. As a result, evidence from the study shows that smallholders and their families in the affected communities have lacked access to culturally adequate and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs. Before their land was leased, all of the respondents reported consuming most of the food they produced including rice, cassava, potatoes, fish from streams and many green vegetables. According to one respondent, “...it will be difficult for poor families like us to consume adequate and nutritious food if we cannot control our food we

produce and consume, and subsistence farming has been our only reliable access to local food” (Interview 13, 29 July 2013).

In order to ensure food availability in communities, Addax has, according to participants of the focus group discussion in communities, initiated and supported communities’ production of rice through a program called “Farmer Development Program” (FDP) (Fielding, et al., 2015, p. 10; Focus Group 1, 25 July 2013; Focus group 2, 28 July 2013). This rice program is part of the Addax Social and Environmental Management Program responsibility in operational communities spelt out in the land lease agreement between Addax and the government of Sierra Leone. The program is expected to support about 13,617 people in 60 Addax operational, providing about 100 kilograms of rice per person (1,362 tons of rice for all affected people) in affected communities (Andrew&Vlaenderen, 2013, p.13; Anane&Abiwu, 2011, p. 7). Developed with support from the FAO, the program was designed to boost rice production well beyond the communities’ traditional production levels (Anane&Abiwu, 2011, p.16). According to the program details, Addax will support affected communities by cultivating a total of 2,000 hectares of land for rice production, provide planting materials, including seed crop and fertilizer, and assist in threshing and milling of harvested rice. The cultivated fields of rice are then divided into 60 affected communities and shared among the landholding household families in the affected communities (Andrew &Vlaenderen, 2013, p. 13).

According to participants of the focus group, a large portion of land was ploughed and planted with seed rice. The cultivated rice field was divided among

smallholder farmers in affected communities at 20 by 20 metres per person per household. Beneficiaries of the rice program are expected to pay Addax back for the costs of production within the three-year period. At the end of the each year, beneficiaries must pay back two-thirds of the cost of production with rice harvest, which is estimated at 16 kilograms of rice per person multiplied by the number of persons per household (Focus Group 1, 25 July 2013). It is expected that by the end of the third year, farmers would be able to produce their own food on those pieces of land with proceeds accumulated during the three-year period. Although FDP was aimed at ensuring food availability in affected communities, outputs were reported by participants to be very low due to the lack of effective community participation that resulted in delays in the time of planting, and late interventions in farming practices like weeding and fertilizer application (Focus Group 2, 28 July 2013).

Similarly, Fielding et al. (2015) in their assessment of the biofuel project in Sierra Leone reported that, timing of planting and harvest contributed to the low FDP output (p. 26). According to one respondent, the lack of participation of communities towards FDP was a deliberate attempt to express dissatisfaction of the occupation of their land by a foreign investment company (Interview 7, 25 July 2013). The company's control of FDP, which is designed as a community food program, is evidence of smallholder lack of power and control of the food system in affected communities, which is a principal aspect of food sovereignty.

Most of the participants interviewed (93 percent, n=13) in affected communities appear to have also lost access to economic fruit trees including mango and orange trees,

and oil palm trees from which they get their main source of oil for cooking. These perennial tree crops have, according to participants, served as another source of livelihood income for many smallholder families in the communities. As one respondent stated: “Addax promised to compensate us for the loss of our economic trees but nothing they provide could be measured to the value of the trees we lost” (Interview 10, 29 July 2013). Income received from the sale of produce from tree crops was used to buy food supplements, pay school fees and buy school materials for their children, housing, clothing and health (Focus Group 2, 28 July 2013). Fielding et al. (2015) also mentioned in their report that it is a common practice for small communities and households in Sierra Leone to maintain fruit trees (p. 26). The replacement of these important food crops with sugarcane plantations has undermined both smallholder access to adequate and nutritious food, and access to other source of livelihood income, which are fundamental food sovereignty principles.

Respondents in non-affected communities seem to enjoy better control, and access to culturally adequate and sufficient locally produced food. Smallholders in these communities were actively engaged in producing their own foodstuffs including rice, cassava, potatoes, and a variety of vegetables on their farms, by making use of their arable uplands and bolilands. Also, non-affected communities also have access to fruit trees, which according to a respondent, “have not only served as a source of fruits but also as an avenue for family income” (Interview 15, 31 July 2013). Although the quantity of rice smallholders in these communities produced does not serve their families till the next farming season, all of the respondents grow most of the food their families consume.

During the peak farming season, cassava and potatoes, which are grown throughout the year, are used as supplements, although some respondents also buy imported rice in order to save local seed variety for the next growing season (Interview 20 and 24, 31 July 2013; Interview 28, 1 August 2013).

The average acreage of a family farm is two hectares, however a few respondents (28 percent, n=4) are capable of renting a tractor to plough areas of up to 5 hectares. The availability and accessibility of tractors and the ability to hire the service increases the quantity of food produced in the communities. According to one respondent, "...many smallholder farmers in the communities are looking forward to expanding their productive capacity through hiring the service of a tractor to plough more of the arable land" (Interview 28, 1 August 2013). All of the respondents in the non-affected communities have maintained the production of the local food crops by saving some amount of seed crop from every harvest for the next planting season. The main source of protein is fish caught locally from streams and ponds, and sometimes meat from small wild animals caught from the bushes surrounding their communities, according respondents (Interview 20, 29 July 2013; Interview 27, 1 August 2013).

#### ***4.2.2 Access to Land, Water Resources and other livelihood opportunity***

The promotion of agricultural products for export has dispossessed people off their land and denied them the rights to access and control land and water resources, and other livelihood opportunities, according to critics (Franco et al., 2010, p. 682; Ansoms, 2013, p. 16; Thondhlana, 2014, p. 14). This has recently been in the small rural communities in Sierra Leone where the study was conducted. Many households in both



affected and non-affected communities rely on land for food and livelihood activities including hunting, gathering of wild fruits, livestock farming, bee-keeping, charcoal production, fishing, cutting wood for cooking their meals and building materials, and using leaves, roots and bark of trees as traditional medicine. In affected communities studied, many of these livelihood activities have been lost due to lack of control, and access to protected land (Stakeholder 4, 5 August 2013). A study conducted in Zimbabwe also revealed that land acquisition for biofuel production not only displaced communities, but also deprived them of land-related livelihood opportunities, including mixed cropping, bush hunting, and cutting wood for cooking and building materials (Thondhlana, 2014, p. 14).

Evidence from the study suggests that affected communities appeared to have lost access to these livelihood activities, which is caused primarily by the lack of access to land. Small farmers did not have control over the leased and protected areas the company is occupying; as a result their right to access resources from protected fields is prohibited. All of the respondents in the affected communities reported the loss of access and control over land. This has not only impacted food production, but has also resulted in mass migration of young men from affected communities to towns and cities in search of decent jobs, which for most is unlikely because they lack technical or educational skills, according to participants (Stakeholder 1, 5 August 2013). A case study in Rwanda also reported that farmers who lost their land to an investing company ended migrating to the cities as rural proletariat, and investment company often take advantage of the precarious situation to exploit the new pool of unemployed labourers offering them low wages,

difficult working conditions, and tenuous employment (Ansoms, 2013, p. 16; Li, 2011, p. 281).

Land expropriation in the affected communities appears to also affect access to water as all respondents in affected communities reported the lack of access to the main sources of water in the communities. The lack of access to the main sources of water has affected communities' access to safe drinking water, and loss of livelihood activities including fishing. Regarding this issue, one respondent stated: "Our streams are drying up, as Addax has constructed channels that divert water from streams to irrigate their sugarcane plantation plots. As a result, swamps are getting dry and crops are not doing well" (Interview11, 29 July 2013). Water access issues were also reported in a study conducted in affected communities in Addax operational areas in Sierra Leone. The report states that more than 70 percent of households in the affected communities they covered faced competition in obtaining water for household use (Fielding, et al., 2015, p. 26).

Travelling into the communities, there was what appeared to be a major sprinkler irrigation system on the fields of sugarcane leading to the affected communities. According to participants in affected communities, water channels constructed by the foreign company diverted water from the streams directly to fields planted with sugarcane (Focus group 1, July 25 2013). According to Andrew and Vlaenderen (2013), a central pivot irrigation system irrigates the plots of sugarcane plantations in affected communities (p. 13). The diversion of water to the protected fields of sugarcane plantation could well be a factor facilitating water shortages in the community,

exacerbating insecurity. According to Fielding et al. (2015), 80 percent of water sources in three affected districts in Sierra Leone could not deliver safe water for household use (p. 26).

Before land expropriation, affected communities relied on natural perennial sources of clean drinking water. In the community of Worreh Yeama, a most crucial water source has been destroyed by the foreign investing company operation in the community. This water source was replaced with a dug well, which the community found unsuitable for drinking. Participants of the focus group discussion expressed their dissatisfaction with the destruction of their natural perennial source of water, as one of the respondent stated: “Our perennial water source, which was a natural source of clean drinking water, has been destroyed and replaced with a water well. Whenever the pump on the well is broken, we walk long distances for many hours scouting for clean drinking water, and during the dry season the water gets muddy and not suitable for drinking” (Focus Group 1, 25 July 2013). Participants also reported that water from the constructed well has a taste that the natural perennial water source does not, and some people in the community have reported diarrhoea, which they believe was related to drinking water from the constructed well. One participant reported witnessing one of the foreign investors’ personnel drinking water from the natural source of water they used to have, but have never seen any of them drink from the community well they constructed (Interview 7, 25 July 2013).

In the light of land dispossession that already resulted in loss of access and control over land and water resources, other livelihood opportunities have also been affected. In a

focus group discussion participants reported the loss of agricultural assistance given to communities that are actively engaged in local farming activities. The agricultural assistance includes the supply of planting materials, agricultural education and extension services from local and international NGOs working on food issues, and MAFFS and the Local District Council. The operations of these organizations and institutions, had allowed communities to maintain access to land and production of local food crops (Focus Group 2, 28 July 2013). Responding to this issue, a participant stated: “Our freedom to access and control land has put my family in a miserable situation, where we cannot feed ourselves. This is unthinkable and unbelievable. Many NGOs like Seed Multiplication, Plan International, and Action Aid, used to support farmers with local tools and planting materials” (Interview 10, 28 July 2013). This assistance and support from organizations and institutions was seen by participants as a livelihood opportunity still enjoyed by smallholders in the non-affected communities. The denial of affected communities right to access agricultural assistance, from land dispossession, have put them in a more precarious and vulnerable situation.

Traditionally, communities have over time developed a way of access to credit from friends, and local money lenders they called “business partners”, according to participants (Focus Group 1, 25 July 2013). Access to such credit was no longer available in affected communities. According to focus group discussion, participants reported that their lack of access and control over land has exacerbated the lack of access to credit facilities from “business partners” they have relied on for getting loans during periods of uncertainty. “When we had access to our land and grew our local food crops, local

business partners from the cities saw land as a collateral to loan any amount of money we wanted”, said one participant in the focus group discussion. Another respondent remarked: “Our community used to produce abundant food both for home consumption and for sale to retailers who come from nearby towns and city to do business with us. These retailers have not only served as local partners, but have since served as a source for borrowing money, which we have lost” (Focus Group 1, 25 July 2013; Focus Group 2, 28 July 2013).

Some participants have over the years informally learnt trades, which have served as other source livelihood income for their families. However, in affected communities, participants who have acquired those skills found opportunities to use them were no longer available because of the changes within farming communities. For instance, a smallholder farmer who was also a blacksmith, making and repairing farming tools and implements for farmers in affected communities reported: “I used to make tools like hoes and cutlasses for farmers in the communities but I no longer do because farmers are out of their jobs” (Interview 7, 25 July 2013). Looking at this scenario, it appeared that the absence of local farming activities has resulted to a fall in the demand for farming tools. The respondent was expecting that the foreign company operating in the community would contract him to make cutlasses and hoes for the company. Instead, such tools were either imported by the company, or bought through the service of a hired contractor. The inability to use these trades due to the introduction of corporate agriculture in the affected communities has adversely limited income generated from these skills in these communities, according to participants (Interview 5, 25 July 2013).

Many youth and young men and women in the affected communities had hopes of fulltime employment with Addax. However, employment opportunities provided by the foreign company only caters to a few labourers from the communities, and in the form of short-term contracts. According to responses from focus group discussions, during farming seasons, short-term, low-wage contracts of one to three months are offered to youth and strong men and women in the communities to work as labourers in the sugarcane plantations. Explaining how they felt regarding this issue of employment, one respondent remarked: “I feel terrible, and life has been so difficult without a job to sustain my family. Addax promised that they will provide jobs, but the jobs were on short-term contracts. I was employed in their first year of operation, served for three months and was laid off. I have been out of a job for the past two years.” Many youth and strong men and women have, over the years, seen this short term employment opportunity as an entry point to getting fulltime employment, which for most has not been the case.

Instead, at the end of the farming season, the contracts are terminated with numerous layoffs, encouraging them to reapply in the next farming season. Because plantation agriculture requires the use of machines for a major portion of field operations, it appears that a few short-term labourers are required to perform some farm activities that require the use of simple tools. Also, because plantations are market-led with profit maximization as the main goal, short-term low wage contracts appear to be preferred in order to lower the cost of production. A participant who used to work with Addax but was laid off remarked: “Salaries paid to labourers are deplorable. The money I used to earn could not feed my family for a week because we have to buy all the food we eat. I have

accumulated more debt since Addax took over our land. Before, I used to pay my debt after every harvest” (Interview 10, 28 July 2013).

According to a one month contract document issued by Addax to a former short-term employee of the foreign company operating in the communities, the basic pay for a labourer in 2011 was Le 6, 313 (approximately US\$1.75) and the daily rate of pay including housing, transport and medical allowances was Le 15, 347 (approximately US\$3.75). The employee is required to work forty hours a week from 07:00 hours to 16:00 hours Monday to Friday. Work on holidays, Saturdays and Sundays is paid at a double time<sup>8</sup>. According to the Statutory Instrument No. 6 of 2014, which was created out of the 1997 minimum wage act, at a minimum of 40 hours a week, any government or private worker should not be paid less than Le 500,000 (US\$113.889) a month. At this monthly minimum wage, the hourly nominal wage is calculated at Le 2,941.461(US\$0.67) (Sierra Express Media, 2014; Wikipedia, n.d.). According to the government minimum wage standard, for a day of eight hours minimum wage work, a worker should earn Le 23,882 (US\$5.44), which is 30 percent more than what employee reported earning at Addax.

In the non-affected communities, all of the respondents have access and control over their land, water resources, and other livelihood opportunities, which appear to be absent in affected communities. Apart from direct sales of produce, which is their main source of income, smallholders in these communities also have access to credit facilities from business partners, who usually come to the communities during harvest seasons

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<sup>8</sup> Source of this information is from documents shown to me during an Interview conducted with respondent No. 10. The information was not verified with Addax Bioenergy

(Interview 20, 31 July 2013). According to participants in non-affected communities, local moneylenders often loan money to farmers during the non-farming seasons and farmers are expected to pay with produce in the following harvest season (Interview 28, 1 August 2013). This type of credit facility, although seemingly exploitative, was seen by smallholders as a secure avenue to borrow money for family health and education. The ability to access such credit probably emanates from their access to land, which local business partners possibly saw as a security for paying back in kind or in cash.

The practice of bringing local business partners to the communities has opened opportunities to smallholders to market their product with little or no transport cost incurred and has also facilitated women being actively involved in marketing produce (Interview 22, 31 July 2013). Going into villages of non-affected communities, there was evidence of farming activities as youth and young men in the communities were holding locally made hoes and appeared to be going to their farms. This unique feature of the power to control their production systems and freely access productive resources, was not exhibited in non-affected communities.

#### ***4.2.3 Land Related Issues***

Land lease transactions were also a concern raised by smallholders in affected communities. SLIEPA, the government main investment and promotion agency has made it easier for foreign investors to acquire land at the detriment of affected communities (Oakland Institute, 2011, p.13). In focus group discussions, participants reported having no signatory to the land lease agreement of their communities. In addition, land lease rules were not always clear. According to land laws in Sierra Leone, provincial land is



under the custody of the chiefdom and communities, however, only chiefdom administrators can bear signatories to land lease agreements (Fielding, et al., 2015, p.14). Community members were originally told by representatives of the central government, local government, and the investing company that the land under agreement would not include bolilands, which unfortunately was not the case.

In Worreh Yeama, there was an ongoing disagreement over the use of their bolilands (fertile lowland suitable for rice production), which, according to participants of the focus group discussion, was not part of the land lease agreement (Focus Group 1, 25 July 2013). When I was visiting the community, the government, in collaboration with Addax, was in the process of negotiation with the community to determine whether the community was ready to surrender their boliland to be used for sugarcane production. According to Fielding et al. (2015), by late 2014 Addax has relinquished unused land to the communities, reducing the company estate to about 24, 000 hectares (p. 13).

According to a participant of the focus group: “The process of land lease agreement was not transparent and annual income from compensations for land leased to the foreign company was far below the annual income we got when we had access to our land” (Focus group 1, 25 July 2013). The Chiefdom Councils Act, Section 28 (d) of the Local Government Act 1994 and the Provinces Lands Act (Cap 122) require a company wanting to lease land to pay surface rent to local authorities. The rent from the land lease is shared among the government, the Paramount Chief, his Native Administration, the District Council, and the community where land is located, in proportions stated in the signed agreement. The lease agreement must also indicate the amount of rent agreed by

all parties for the lease of land, the number of land lease years, the purpose for which the land will be used, whether the interest is assignable, whether buildings or permanent structures are to be erected, and what the rights of the parties on the expiration/determination of the lease are. It also stipulates that the rent is subject to review every seven years by the District Officer/Chief Administration office (Andrew & Vlaenderen, 2013, p. 3).

According to the land lease agreement signed by Addax Bioenergy, Local Council, Chiefdom Administrators and the national government, an agreed rent of £5.57 (US\$8.83) per hectare and £58,488 (US\$89,242) per annum is to be paid by Addax to the government and distributed as required by land laws; 20 percent to the District Council (£11,698 or US\$17,849); 20 percent to the Chiefdom Administrator; 10 percent to National Government (£5,849) or (US\$8,924); and 50 percent to the community (£29,244 or US\$44,622). In addition, Addax will pay an additional £2.17 per (US\$3.31) hectare per annum directly to communities. The actual rent from land that the communities will receive has been calculated at £4.94 (US\$7.54) per hectare per annum, which is very low when compared to Brazil and other countries, where rent for land was estimated at US\$100 plus annually (Andrew & Vlaenderen, 2013, p. 14; Fielding, et al., 2015, p. 10 &14). According to Fielding et al. (2015), there was no clear and transparent process to the distribution of rent in affected communities, creating uncertainties as to whether communities are actually receiving their share of rent. This report also found that Addax designed a system that encourages land owners who signed an “acknowledgement

agreement” are directly paid US\$1.40 per hectare in addition to the previous rent already paid (p. 14).

#### ***4.2.4 Gender Related Issues***

Both women and men play a vital role in providing food and maintaining family livelihood in both affected and non-affected case study communities. The loss of land impacted both men and women, but the impact on women increased their level of vulnerability to gender discrimination. In affected communities, women interviewed reported that before land expropriation, they used to contribute equally to providing food and livelihoods for their families through access to and control over land, from which they produced vegetables for home consumption and sale. Women in affected communities were, before land expropriation, also generating income through gathering fuel wood, wild fruits, and fishing in shallow streams for fish, and selling these items to provide additional income for the family.

A female respondent in the affected communities gave these remarks: “Now our families are going to bed hungry because we women, the primary food producers, no longer have access to land, and no other opportunities are available for us to be able to maintain our role and responsibilities” (Interview 2, 23 July 2013). Another female participant remarked, “We women have faced many constraints resulting from the expropriation of our land. As part of our contribution to household welfare, we are primarily responsible for providing food for our families. This role has become difficult to perform. Our sources of food access have been limited, as leased land is protected by the security of the company” (Interview 9, 29 July 2013).

The lack of access to land appears to make women in affected communities more vulnerable to gender inequality. As a result of the scarcity of fertile land, men try to claim title to any available land in the communities. Women also appear to be the most affected in terms of access to water as they perform most of the domestic chores that require the use of water. In the focus group discussions, women complained about the distance they cover to look for adequate sources of drinking water after the destruction of their perennial source of water, which has served the communities for many years. All women interviewed in the affected communities also reported not being properly informed and excluded from land deal transactions. Fielding et al. (2015) noted that gender difference is significant particularly in agricultural production (p. 30).

In non-affected communities, the women interviewed reported that their role in producing vegetables and providing food for their family has not changed because of their access and control over land. One of them reported: “I provide most of the food we eat in my household, while my husband is responsible for cultivating the main staple food, rice, and excess produce I sell to nearby markets” (Interview 18, 31 July 2013). Women in these communities were carrying baskets, which appeared to be full of freshly harvested produce to nearby markets. According to a respondent in the non-affected communities, during harvest periods, the communities are flooded with traders coming to buy produce at the farm gate (Interview 24, 31 July 2013). These activities seem to have opened opportunities for women to actively participate in marketing produce and making and taking decisions in food production issues. Access to reliable natural sources of clean drinking water in non-affected communities appears to reduce the constraint of

scrambling for water for women during periods of scarcity. In contrast to women in affected communities, who, in addition to providing food for the family, also face the issue of scrambling for clean drinking water. A study conducted in the West Kalimantan region of Indonesia also revealed that women were prevented from fishing, gathering and accessing other resources on protected oil-palm plantation areas (Julia & White, 2012, p. 1001).

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Evidence from the study revealed that large-scale land acquisitions for corporate agriculture in affected communities has limited smallholders' access to culturally adequate and nutritious food, which could be the result of smallholders' lack of access and control over arable land and other productive resources. The quantity of local food produced in affected communities has been tremendously reduced, which appears to change the orientation of food, especially rice, consumed to mostly an imported variety, if they have the means to purchase such food. The power to decide and control food production systems in the affected communities has shifted from the traditional land users to the foreign company operating in the communities, resulting in loss of access to produce, consume, and control local food production. In contrast to affected communities, evidence from the study shows that smallholders access to adequate and nutritious food in non-affected communities is directly related to access to land and other productive resources, which facilitated local food production.

Although the high level of illiteracy in the communities increases the risks and level of vulnerability of smallholders to livelihood insecurity, some smallholders have

informal training in technical skills including carpentry and blacksmithing that were previously of great use in carrying out local farming activities. The use of these informal technical skills was thwarted by the absence of local farming activities in affected communities, but appears to be an added livelihood opportunity for smallholders in non-affected affected communities. The impact of lack of access to sufficient food in affected communities exacerbates the reliance on families and friends living in towns and cities, as an alternative to access food.

Akin to the lack of access to locally produced food is the loss of vital livelihood income opportunities including fishing, hunting, wood gathering, and beekeeping. Smallholders in affected communities have lost vital perennial tree crops including mango, orange trees, and oil-palm trees, which continue to serve as an additional source of livelihood income for smallholder families in non-affected communities. Although there is evidence that employment for local inhabitants was provided by the foreign company, it appears to cater to a few labourers from the communities with short-term contracts, creating a pool of low wage labourers.

There is evidence that crucial sources of clean drinking water were negatively impacted, exacerbating the lack of access to safe drinking water, which left affected communities scouting miles away to fetch water during periods of scarcity. Women in affected communities have lost major economic activities, which affected their gender responsibilities. In the end, affected communities appear to have developed a lack of trust and confidence in the government and leaders in the country, due to unfulfilled promises of making their lives better than they were before.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

To respond to the research question, “How has contemporary large-scale land acquisition for corporate agriculture affected smallholder production and access to arable land and culturally adequate and nutritious food that meets the dietary needs of farming families and communities in Sierra Leone?”, it was necessary to: a) conduct a field study in two affected communities and two non-affected communities in Sierra Leone; b) examine the agricultural investment programs and policies, land policies, and their influence over large-scale land acquisitions in Sierra Leone; c) examine foreign investment in large-scale land acquisitions and the opportunities that exist for smallholder farmers in countries of the South; d) examine the approaches to food security and food sovereignty, to determine which approach offers a more viable tool for assessing and defending the rights of smallholder farmers to be able to have access and control over their food production systems.

Based on this examination, I conclude that in the context of Sierra Leone, large-scale land acquisitions, particularly over the past eight years, have evolved in a manner that has been harmful to smaller farmers. It appeared that the practice has emerged as a profitable business for foreign investors and private business individuals, while displacing smallholders, exacerbating hunger and poverty, and limiting their access and power to control over adequate and nutritious food, land and water resources in affected communities. The government of Sierra Leone has promoted foreign investment in agricultural land to increase production of agricultural produce and foster development and livelihood opportunities for affected communities. There is evidence however, that

the current agricultural investment policies that promote large-scale land acquisitions for production and export of non-food crops have thwarted current opportunities, and could further limit future opportunities for smallholders in affected communities. Evidence suggests that smallholders in affected communities have lost the power to control over local production systems, including local food production programs, and the main export crop grown, which is exclusively regulated and controlled by the foreign company.

The basic rationale for the promotion of foreign investment in agricultural land in Sierra Leone is based on the assumption that such investment would increase local food production and livelihood opportunities, create jobs, and improve infrastructure and social services, which could potentially improve the standard of living of people and access to locally produced food. However, evidence from this study suggests that this has not been the case. Instead, smallholders in affected communities have lost vital food sources and livelihood income opportunities, including fishing, hunting, wood gathering, beekeeping, and vital perennial tree crops including mango, orange trees, and oil-palm trees, which have served rural communities as sources of income.

Similarly, technical skills, which are acquired informally and have served as alternative sources of livelihood income are no longer effectively utilized within affected farming communities. This further indicates the loss of livelihood opportunities and the devastation on communities caused by large-scale farm land acquisition. Access to local credit has been a key revenue source for many farmers during periods of necessity, and local business partners in towns and cities have often served as an important source of financial credit. Evidence from this study suggests that these credit opportunities are no



longer available to farmers in affected communities, limiting their access to food in times of need.

Comparatively, evidence from this study suggests that, in non-affected communities, smallholders have increased local food production, which in addition to access and control over land, has also been associated with access to local credit opportunities. Access to credit has increased access to services like hiring a tractor, which has increased the land that is put to local food production and maintained production of the local food crops. Invariably, controlling the orientation of food consumed, a food sovereignty value, which unlike affected communities, is evident in non-affected communities.

Access to agricultural programs and training services, including agricultural education and extension and supply of basic farming inputs, delivered by local and international NGOs and government institutions working on food issues that support small farmers have been undermined in affected communities. Evidence from this study suggests that these services and programs have contributed to bolstering local food production in non-affected communities, which continue to benefit from these services and programs. These trainings have the potential to improve farming skills and maintain food production capacity in the affected communities as well. Programs initiated to ensure food availability in affected communities, including the FDP have failed to deliver the promised result. In effect, there is a lack of coherent smallholder rights-based approaches to food, which could have shifted decision-making power of access and control of the food system from the foreign company to small farmers.

The ability to access and control water sources for household use emerged as a significant issue for participants in affected communities. Evidence suggests that many crucial sources of water have been destroyed in affected communities. The expansion of sugarcane fields that require construction of water channels and erecting sprinkler irrigation systems, have left communities scouting miles away to fetch water during periods of scarcity. The destruction of drinking water sources has increased the burden, in particular on women and children who are mostly responsible for fetching drinking water. Evidence from the study also suggests that employment opportunities offered by the foreign company have only catered to a few labourers from the affected communities, with mostly short-term contracts. As a result, small farmers are rendered jobless, creating a pool of unemployed labourers that are exposed to exploitation. Those offered short-term contracts, work with very little pay, while they could have made more financial returns if land and water resources were accessible and at their disposal.

Women have traditionally played a significant role in providing food for the family in both affected and non-affected communities. This role has assured women access to and control over the use of land and water resources in their communities without fear, as they perform their functions, including domestic chores, food preparation, fetching water, fishing, gathering, and vegetable production. In affected communities, there is evidence that women's land use activities that would ensure access and control over land and water resources are lacking. This lack of women's access and control to such vital economic opportunities has relegated women to the sidelines, potentially exposing them to greater gender discrimination, especially around land ownership. Thus,

making it more difficult for women to exercise their rights and perform their roles and responsibilities, which has traditionally included local food production.

Sierra Leone's agriculture appeared to be influenced by policies that lack attention to the fundamentals of food sovereignty. Past and present agricultural policies have promoted agricultural productivity through an often unspoken preference of food security, aimed at expanding the production of mostly export crops. Although some of the agricultural policy prescriptions appear on paper to integrate smallholders into various agricultural schemes, their participation in such activities is regulated to meet the desired goals of donor agencies or foreign investing companies. As a result, smallholder agriculture becomes shuttled aside as a less attractive livelihood option.

Policies governing the use of land could be a deterrent to land acquisition, especially for large-scale investment. However, the powers vested in the government to expropriate land in the interest of the country's development regardless of the type of land ownership operation, has made rural communities more vulnerable to large-scale land acquisitions, and even more vulnerable to food and livelihood insecurity. Potentially empowering foreign companies to control and regulate the food production system in rural communities. As a result, communities have developed a lack of trust and confidence in the government to protect them from exploitation from private and foreign investors.

Despite agriculture being one of the most significant sectors in the economy of Sierra Leone, the agricultural policy prescriptions of the country for the past seven decades have not sufficiently translated into the expected outcomes of providing food

self-sufficiency and increasing income for smallholder farmers. Evidence suggests that in the colonial era, policies were aimed at promoting smallholders to increase the production of export crops. The agricultural policy prescriptions in Sierra Leone, particularly since post-independence, were mostly donor-driven and directed towards meeting external development goals. As a result, smallholder agriculture has lacked the required support to be able to make efficient use of their productive resources.

The current revised agricultural investment policies in Sierra Leone, as of 2008, appear to place an increased emphasis on foreign and private investment for agricultural development. Various incentives to attract investors have been introduced. This includes the provision of cheap arable land and exemptions such as tax holidays and import and export duties on agricultural products. These new policies however, are implemented regardless of their potential implications for smallholders' loss of access and power to control their food systems and livelihood opportunities.

On a final note, the lessons learned from this research can be directed to various players. To encourage organization of small-scale producers to advocate on their own behalf, local, national and international civil society organizations should be working with small-scale producers to provide them with information on alternative models and the means to pressure both formal government and local traditional leaders, such as Paramount Chiefs. An international solidarity campaign strategy similar to that which took place with rural communities in Latin America in the 1980s could have some impact in this regard. Paramount Chiefs, who have the strongest influence on the rural population, should be offered examples of successful resistance to land grabbing by

visiting other areas within the country, in Africa, or further afield. Education and lobbying of government representatives and members of the civil service on the impact of and alternatives to land grabbing would be beneficial.

Macroeconomic governance of sector activities, with top-down system of governance, should allow equitable access to local resources and power relations as seen for example in Cuba. This should include local autonomy and democratic control of land, water, environmental and agro-ecological sustainable food systems. National and democratic governance, which are mostly influenced by political and international policies and objectives, should make room for non-state actors and local government authorities. This would allow the local engage in strategic decision planning over local agricultural development programs. Decentralizing power could give local authorities and non-state actors, the leverage to effect the required social change that will generate fair distribution and utilization of productive resources particularly in rural agrarian communities.

Successful stories from other countries, including Ghana, Brazil, India and China, where governments have successfully employed smallholder rights-based approaches to maintain sustained food production provide valuable lessons for the Sierra Leone government and others, interested in agriculture investment. These success stories emphasize good governance, access and control, research and development, extension services and strong government interventions as key to sustained local food production.

Finally, further study and research on alternatives and resistance to land grabbing is needed. On a personal note, as a Sierra Leonean from an agricultural background,

conclusions from this research provide me with both increased concern about the impact of land grabbing on my community and country and hope that change is possible.

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