Factors of vulnerability: How large-scale land acquisitions take advantage of local and national weaknesses in Sierra Leone

Genesis Tambang Yengoh, Karin Steen, Frederick Ato Armah, Barry Ness

Abstract

Enticing economic benefits for host nations and the notion of large areas of land considered available are often put forward as the main reasons for large-scale land acquisition in many areas of sub-Saharan Africa. However, country-level datasets of land acquisitions seem to indicate a clear divide between a majority of countries engaged in land acquisitions as investors and those involved as targets. We posit that there are socio-economic and governance factors that make the engagement between targets of land acquisitions and investors both unequal and attractive to large-scale investments. We then ask the question: what are the factors that make communities vulnerable to an unequal engagement with large-scale land-investing interests in Sierra Leone? We explore this question using local-level socio-economic data of households and communities in two settings where land acquisitions have occurred in Sierra Leone. We find that socio-economic characteristics of local populations, such as levels of education, the powerful role of traditional chiefs and corruption, make these areas easier targets for such land investments. Investors also exploit the poor economic situation of local areas by making alluring promises of development opportunities. The vulnerability of local people to land investors is further undermined by poor governance at the national level and external politico-financial interest in favor of such investments. Local populations are vulnerable to organized campaigns of land acquisitions by multi-national companies. Proper legal and institutional frameworks are required to protect local interests in these land deals.

1. Introduction

In its broadest terms, large-scale land acquisitions (LSLA) refer to the acquisition or leasing of large areas of land by foreign investors for a variety of purposes (Cotula and Vermeulen, 2009; Robertson and Pincus-Andersen, 2010; Rulli et al., 2013). This phenomenon manifests differently in terms of the main drivers, its scale and the outcomes across diverse regions where it occurs (Borras et al., 2012). This makes it difficult to ascribe a universal definition of the phenomenon. In most countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the purposes for which these lands are acquired or leased is for the cultivation of food, biofuel or fiber crops for export (Songwe and Deininger, 2009). LSLA is a phenomenon that has accelerated since the 2007–2008 global food price crises (De Schutter, 2009; Robertson and Pincus-Andersen, 2010; Songwe and Deininger, 2009). The key drivers of large-scale land investments (LSLIs) in sub-Saharan Africa may not necessarily be the same or at least not in the same magnitude as in other parts of the world. In a study of LSLA in Latin America and the Caribbean, Borras et al. (2012) identified four main initiatives that drive LSLA in this part of the world, which are food security initiatives, fuel security, climate change mitigation strategies and contemporary needs for new areas of investment of global capital. It is important to note that these initiatives do overlap with those identified in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (Kugelman and Leventstein, 2009; Robertson and Pincus-Andersen, 2010). Borras et al. (2012) conclude that the likely outcome of these initiatives would be increased concentration of land and capital in the hands of a few a move away from the redistributive policies that have characterized recent land de-concentration reforms in this part of the world. Although the main drivers of LSLA may vary in different parts of the world, the processes involved in land acquisition tend to be remarkably similar. A study of such processes in Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia identified a striking similarity of procedures across national borders, notwithstanding the wide differences in legal and insti-
tutional frameworks (German et al., 2011). A key feature of the outcome of LSLA processes is the marginalization of the rights of local land owners and users in rural regions of LSLI host countries (ActionAid, 2013; Vermeulen and Cotula, 2010) as well as their limited participation in the processes that will eventually determine the future directions of their lives and livelihoods (Robertson and Pstrup-Andersen, 2010; Vermeulen and Cotula, 2010).

Although LSLA is a global phenomenon, a majority of the land deals that have been made over the last decade have been in sub-Saharan Africa (Anseuew et al., 2012; Kugelman and Levenstein, 2009; Moore, 2011). The proliferation of LSLA in sub-Saharan Africa has been seen as a worrying phenomenon for many observers (Kugelman and Levenstein, 2009). The key reason for this concern is the understanding that sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where food insecurity remains persistent as a result of low productivity. Agriculture in this part of the world is predominately small-scale, characterized by low inputs and employing a majority of the population (especially in rural areas). Food production in many rural communities is supported by a farming system that depends substantially on fallowing to replenish soil fertility. Food and livelihood security for a vast majority of the population therefore depends on the abundance of land to support the fallow systems, characterized by low external input farming, LSLA, on the other hand, takes over prime rural agricultural lands, which are usually of good food-production quality, close to water sources (De Schutter, 2009), and heavily depend on by populations with few other alternative livelihoods.

Although sub-Saharan Africa has been described as a region with the greatest land potential for the expansion of agriculture, robust studies bringing together key variables of land use characteristics in the region to compute the amount of land available based on the farming patterns are scarce. Information, for example, on how much land is available, given the average farm size required to meet food security needs for individual countries, the lengths of fallow, demographic dynamics, or considering yield trends for major food and industrial crops of national importance or a host of other considerations, is scarcely available for any country in the region. Therefore, it is important not to take the concept of “available”, “unused”, “underused” land at face value. Resource-poor, small-holder farmers without formal land titles currently occupy much of the land sold in these transactions (Robertson and Pstrup-Andersen, 2010). This threatens, among other things, local access to land-based resources, internal food security, rural livelihoods, local individual and political rights and the socio-political stability of states that host LSLIs (Oakland Institute, 2012b; Robertson and Pstrup-Andersen, 2010; Vermeulen and Cotula, 2010). We posit that these non-agroecology correlates are not coincident countries with particular characteristics (such as poor governance, higher levels of corruption and lower levels of education for the general population) tend to be more attractive for large-scale land investors than those with better levels of development among these and similar indicators (see Fig. 1).

Although research attention on the scale of LSLA as well as its implications on local communities and on the national governments that host them has been steadily gaining ground over the past several years, little attention has been directed toward understanding why some regions make for better targets for LSLA than others. In this paper, we ask the question: what are the factors that make communities vulnerable to an unequal engagement with large-scale land-investing interests in Sierra Leone? To explore this question, we begin by eliminating factors of agro-ecological suitability for biofuel crops. There are a number of reasons for this elimination. One reason is that for a majority of the developed countries where most of the LSLI companies originate, there is an agro-ecological potential (by way of arable land) for the production of biofuel crops (FAOStat, 2014). This is the case for six of the

top ten investor countries the United States of America, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, India, Brazil and China. According to the Land Matrix Database, in 2015, Canada and the Russian Federation were among the list of top ten foreign large-scale land investors (The Land Matrix Global Observatory, 2015). These are also countries with ample potential to produce crops and biofuel feedstock within their national borders.

A closer examination of the UNDP (2014b) dataset (http://hdr.undp.org/en/data) also reveals that a majority of countries that host LSLIs tend to be countries where the levels of education for the general population are low and a host of other human development indicators, such as the Human Development Index (HDI) and levels of school attainment, are also low (see Fig. 1). In the same vein, when the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for countries that are sources of LSLIs is compared with those of target countries, the differences are significant (see Fig. 1). The top ten investor countries compared are the United States of America, Malaysia, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, India, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and China. The top ten target countries, on the other hand, are Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, the Republic of Congo, Brazil, Ukraine, Liberia and Sierra Leone (The Land Matrix Global Observatory, 2013). Although South Sudan is the third-largest target country for LSLIs, little data exists on the country’s welfare indicators in the UNDP database (UNDP, 2014a).

Sierra Leone is one of six countries in sub-Saharan Africa involved in the project whose overall goal is to understand the outcomes of LSLA. Given the brutality and destruction suffered by Sierra Leone in its civil war, it can be expected that investments carried out by land-investing companies can be beneficial for the social and economic development of the country. Because of these factors, Sierra Leone was chosen as a case that can shed light on the importance of such investments for countries that have undergone severe socio-economic shock. ADDAX Bioenergy and SOCFIN Agricultural Company are some of the major large-scale investors in bioenergy feedstock in the country. These two companies are also interesting as cases because their operations are already more advanced than those of many other players in the sector hence, their impacts in communities (both positive and negative) are already being felt.

### 1.1. Socio-economic background

Sierra Leone is a relatively small country in West Africa. It is located between 6° 55′N and 10° 00′N (Fig. 2) and has a population of approximately six million inhabitants. It covers a total land area of approximately 72,325 km², and approximately 56% of the land is less than 150 m above sea level. The country has a diverse array of ecological regions, including forests on higher ground, savannah woodlands and grasslands in lowlands and inland valley swamps, riverine grasslands called ‘bollards’, as well as mangrove swamps.
Fig. 1. Comparing countries that are the main sources of LSLA investments in the main target countries of such investments, using the HDI (2012), CPI (2013) and secondary school attainment levels (2010). The country lists are derived from the Land Matrix database (The Land Matrix Global Observatory, 2013), data for HDI and secondary school attainment is derived from UNDP (2014a) and the CPI is derived from the website of Transparency International.

Fig. 2. Districts of Sierra Leone and the location of the Chiefdoms in which the study was conducted. Addax Bioenergy operates in the Chiefdoms of Makari Gbanti, Bombali Shebora and Malal Mara in the north, whereas SOCFIN operates in the Malen Chiefdom in the south.

(Yengoh and Armah, 2014). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that approximately 56% of the land area of Sierra Leone comprises of agricultural land meaning the sum of areas under temporary agricultural crops, temporary meadows for mowing or pasture, land under market as well as kitchen gardens, and land temporarily fallow for less than five
years (FAO, 2014b). In addition to being rich in land-based natural resources, Sierra Leone can be safely described as a country that is rich in marine resources. It has a coastline on the Atlantic Ocean that is approximately 560 km long, and the shelf covers (to 200 m depth) an estimated area of 30,000 km². The country's Exclusive Economic Zone covers approximately 155,700 km².

Sierra Leone's development was inhibited by a brutal civil war, which lasted just over a decade and ended in 2001. The country has since enjoyed a fragile stability, a growing economy and some development in the provision of social services. Nonetheless, Sierra Leone continues to rank very low on a range of human development and poverty indicators (UNDP, 2014a). These include indicators of healthcare, access to water, access to education, corruption, and a range of other socio-economic indicators of progress toward sustainable long-term development and peace (Transparency International, 2014; UNDP, 2014a). For instance, less than one-third of the rural population in Sierra Leone has access to a reliable supply of safe drinking water from a protected source. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sierra Leone had one of the worst child survival indicators in world in 2012 standing at 182 per 1000. This situation was made worse by the outbreak of another disaster and human tragedy in May 2014 the Ebola epidemic.

A number of factors constitute challenges to efforts to improve the quality of life of Sierra Leoneans. One of the most important factors is high level of poverty, even though the country is endowed with a vast range and quantity of natural resources. In 2010, the UNDP concluded that approximately 73% of Sierra Leoneans were multi-dimensionally poor. The Multidimensional Poverty Index identifies multiple simultaneous deprivations in the same households in areas of education, health and living standards (UNDP, 2014b). In 2012, approximately 52% of the population was living below the poverty line. Rates of literacy are low (UNDP, 2014b), with an acute lack of professionals in some of the key skills that form pillars for sustainable economic growth and development in many developing countries. The rights of women and their ability to participate fully in the socio-economic development of the country is being usurped by archaic cultural norms and lip-serviced political will to change the status quo (Millar, 2015; Yengoh et al., 2015). The protection of human rights has been described by many observers as grossly inadequate. This has especially been cited on matters relating to LSLA (ActionAid, 2011; CEDAW, 2014; Oakland Institute, 2011, 2012a). Living conditions for common Sierra Leoneans remain relatively basic. In 2008, a study by the World Food Program found that national average household size was approximately 10 persons. This figure was even higher in areas of the Northern Province, where some of the land acquisitions are taking place, reaching 11.4 persons per household in some cases (WFP, 2008). Approximately 95% of rural households depended on agriculture (especially the cultivation of the staple food crop rice) to meet a vast majority of their food needs. According to the World Food Program report, many households were living in poverty and were therefore vulnerable to shocks in the food production system. Against this backdrop, it has been observed that the exploitation of the country's vast reserves of natural resources has not been effectively managed for the benefit of the country, its people and long-term sustainable development.

Since the end of the war, the country has had to rebuild many of its socio-economic and political infrastructures from scratch. This effort comes with great demands for financial resources, jobs, infrastructure and the revamping of different poles of development. This lack of resources poses a major challenge to development and makes the country vulnerable to many national and international pressures.

With urging from a range of international financial and business interests, the government of Sierra Leone perceives or acquiesces to the notion that LSLA is an important source for achieving these development goals. The desire to promote large-scale land investments in the country is partly clarified by one of the government’s development strategy documents, The Agenda for Prosperity Road to Middle Income Status, developed in 2013. This agenda builds on an earlier initiative, the Agenda for Change, 2008–12, which was considered by the political leadership to have been a socio-economic and political success. In The Agenda for Prosperity Road to Middle Income Status, Sierra Leone’s vision of growth up to 2035 is that of a country driven by a “stable, export-led economy” built on “private sector-led growth” (GoSL, 2014).

1.2. Methods of data acquisition and analysis

This study is one dimension of a larger project that sought to investigate the outcomes of LSLA at the local level in Sierra Leone. Other aspects of LSLA that were investigated include the gender-differentiated outcomes of land acquisitions (Yengoh et al., 2015), access to natural and landed resources (Yengoh and Armah, 2014), and LSLA’s impact on food security. We adopted a purposive sam-
pling strategy. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the units or subjects that are investigated are based on the judgment of the researcher (Tongco, 2007). This judgment is usually drawn from specialist knowledge of the research area, uniqueness of the case under study, or the capacity and willingness of a particular set of subjects to participate in the research (Given, 2008; Tongco, 2007). In purposive sampling, the outcome of the sampling decision becomes a series of strategic choices regarding where, when and how the study can be conducted (Given, 2008).

Two of the criteria for the selection of samples developed by Curtis et al. (2000) were used to guide the selection of both Sierra Leone as a country and the different large-scale land investors within the country as the cases. One of the criteria is that the sampling strategy should be relevant to the questions addressed by the research (Curtis et al., 2000). In this study, the research is interested in outcomes of large-scale land investments hence, areas in which LSLA is occurring are of interest. Another criterion is that the sample should have the potential to generate rich information on the type of phenomena that need to be studied (Curtis et al., 2000). This guided our decision of choosing specific companies that were already operating in local communities as well as studying the outcomes of LSLA at such local levels instead of at national levels wherein finer details of the phenomena may not be adequately captured.

1.3. Sampling and survey in two settings of LSLA in Sierra Leone

One of the advantages of purposive sampling is that it offers a range of research designs. Our choice of purposive sampling offered the possibility of using several techniques for data collection, chiefly surveys and focus groups. It has been observed that the results of purposive samples tend to be more representative than the results of probability-based methods of sampling. This is because through the application of expert knowledge, the choice of the sample selected tends to represent a cross section of the population of interest (Battaglia, 2008). One of the most commonly cited drawbacks of the purposive sampling method is that the method rests on the subjectivity of the researcher’s decision making, which can compromise the validity of the research conclusions (Oliver, 2006; Tongco, 2007). We minimize this threat by ensuring that there is an internal consistency between the aims and epistemological basis of the research (Oliver, 2006). We also ensure that criteria used for selecting the sample are adequately stated.

We draw on data from a cross-sectional survey conducted from October 2013 to November 2013 and from January 2014 to February 2014 in communities of Northern and Southern Sierra Leone. We use a case study (Sierra Leone) and two settings (the investment of Addax Bioenergy in Northern Sierra Leone and the investment of SOCFIN Agricultural Company in Southern Sierra Leone) to critically examine the features that have contributed to making these locations attractive for LSLA. In these communities, LSLA for the cultivation of biofuel feedstock (sugarcane and oil palm) and potential crops for other industrial purposes (rubber) is already in progress. A total of seven communities were chosen in Northern Sierra Leone: Lungi Acre, Maronko, Woreh Yeama and Yainkissa from the Makari Gbanti Chieftdom, Bombali District; and Mabilafu, Mara and Massaethle from the Malal Mara Chieftdom, Tonkolili District. The large-scale land investor operating in the communities where this study was undertaken in Northern Sierra Leone is Addax Bioenergy Sierra Leone Ltd., a subsidiary of Addax & Oryx (a Swiss-based energy corporation). It acquired lease rights in 2010 for 50 years (with the possibility of a 21-year extension) to over 15,000 ha of land in Bombali District, Northern Province, Sierra Leone (see Fig. 2). Its primary goal is to grow sugarcane for the production of bioethanol for export to European markets. Its current lease area has grown to 57,000 ha (ActionAid 2013).

In Southern Sierra Leone, the communities of Jumbo, Sinjo, Kortumahun, Bassale, Bannale, Sahin-Malen of the Malen Chieftdom (Fig. 2) and Pujehun District were studied. In this part of the country, SOCFIN Agricultural Company Sierra Leone Ltd. (a member of the French Bolloré group) operates in the Pujehun District, where it obtained lease rights for 50 years for 6500 ha of prime fertile land in Malen Chieftdom in 2011 (Oakland Institute, 2012a). It is currently growing oil palms with the intention of using part of the land for the cultivation of rubber in the future.

The survey had four main components: the administration of questionnaires to households in the study communities; focus groups on four themes in all of the communities where questionnaires were administered; interviews with key informants and stakeholders on matters of LSLA; and the observation of LSLA-related outcomes. In addition to these data on local factors regarding what has made these communities favorable for large-scale land investments, we also explore national-scale factors such as the background to some of the key messages that the government of Sierra Leone uses to advertise the country as a lucrative destination for large-scale land investments.

1.4. Structured questionnaires

Questionnaires were administered by enumerators who were trained in a workshop and contributed to pre-testing and refining the questionnaires. The enumerators were all natives of the study area, drawn from the local community, spoke the local language (Temne in Northern Sierra Leone and Mende in the Southern part) and had all lived in the local community for more than five years. The questionnaires gathered information on households’ characteristics (such as size, age and gender distribution of family members, level of formal education), sources of household income, changes in the amount and quality of land assets over the last five years (that is, since before LSLA companies arrived), outcomes of LSLA on household welfare, such as employment opportunities, access to land and associated resources, as well as the opinion of respondents on the activities and continuous operation of the companies in their local communities.

To examine the characteristics of respondents in the study, descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. Measures of central tendency (mean) and measures of spread (standard deviation) were used to describe respondents when respondent characteristics were continuous. For categorical attributes of respondents, frequencies and percentages were used to describe them. Multivariate regression models were fitted to four variables to predict the outcomes of the following: being aware or unaware of LSLA transaction, being happy or unhappy with the operations of the company, and being for or against the continued operations of the company in the local area. The response variables are all binary. Depending on the distribution of the binary responses (yes or no), the variables were fitted to either complementary log–log models (skewed distribution of responses) or logit models (even or fairly even distribution of responses). To make predictions or draw inferences about the population in the study area from observations and analyses of the respondents in this study, non-parametric chi square tests were conducted. The threshold for statistical significance was set to \( \alpha < 0.05 \).

1.5. Focus groups

In every community where questionnaires were administered, focus groups were organized afterwards. There were at least three focus groups held in each community. The focus groups dealt with specific themes, and the participants were chosen accordingly: one group dealt with women’s issues (gender implications of LSLA); another dealt with issues of youth and employment; and the last
group dealt with issues related to access to land and other environmental resources. The purpose of the focus groups was to put together detailed accounts and experiences of local people and communities regarding their relationships with large-scale land-investing companies. Such information supplemented data that could not be derived from structured questionnaires. The focus groups sessions were conducted either in the local language or in Krio (a lingua franca of Sierra Leone understood by the researchers) and facilitated by animators drawn from the local community. The deliberations were recorded through either video or audio, depending on what the participants felt comfortable with. These recordings were later transcribed into English and analyzed using constant comparison analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

2. Results

To answer our question, "What are the factors that make communities vulnerable to an unequal engagement with large-scale land investments in Sierra Leone?", the results section is divided into the influence of the level of education, the role of traditional chiefs, awareness and participation, and happiness with the company. Within and among these factors, issues of free, prior, and informed consent, traditional norms, as well as socio-political factors such as corruption interact.

2.1. Levels of education and factors of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)

A disproportionately large number of respondents were undereducated (approximately 86%), whereas less than 7% had attained secondary education or higher (Fig. 3). This finding is very important because most of the LSLA contract agreement documents are written in English and most of the people are illiterate; thus, one may question the extent to which they fully understood the terms and implications of the contracts. One possible solution to this problem would be to translate and read aloud the context of the agreement in the local language. Although questions may be raised about the accuracy of translation, it can be argued that by providing the chance for landholders and land users to understand the terms of the contracts in their local languages and giving them sufficient time to reflect on the implications that such terms may have on their lives, the potential for attaining prior and informed consent can be enhanced. The need for a full understanding of terms of contracts and operations is an important requirement in the concept of free, prior and informed consent to large-scale land transactions (FAO, 2014a; Mahanty and McDermott, 2013).

2.2. The role of traditional chiefs in land leases

Fig. 4 summarizes responses regarding who made the decision before the land use and access rights of respondents were transferred to the companies. The reported role played by the local chiefs is comparable to that played by the land owner (Fig. 4). Aside from the local chiefs (one of the local arm of state administrative power), the importance of the role (perceived or real) played by the state administrative bodies (such as "The State" or "The District Council") relative to the role played by land owners and users has some important implications worth noting. First, it is indicative of the lack of knowledge on the part of local residents and land users regarding who is responsible for or implicated in the process of lease transfers in their local communities. Second, it points to the limited engagement of local land owners and users regarding their roles as well as the importance of their decisions in relation to the process of executing land leases with the companies.

Generally, land users tend to feel that the decision to lease the land to companies was made by the land owners and the local chiefs. Land owners tend to think that the decision was made by the local chief, the State, and one of its local arms the District Council. By not being sure of who made the decision to change their land rights, Fig. 4 also calls into question the existence or application of free, prior and informed consent in the processes of land lease transfers. That some respondents claim to have no knowledge at all regarding who made the decision on the change in their land use right is noteworthy for LSLA projects with such broad and lasting implications on the socio-economic status of households and communities. The issue of who made the decision or was contacted before the land tenure situation changed was further explored by asking whether respondents were aware of the transactions that led to their land rights changing hands (when it occurred).

2.3. Awareness and participation in land lease transactions

Awareness in this case refers to knowledge among respondents on whether the process of LSLA will affect their access to land resources chiefly through the loss of their land to the leases. The need to investigate predictors of awareness is important because anecdotal evidence from focus groups seemed to suggest that many of the arrangements regarding land leases were made by local chiefs and other power brokers, while land owners and users were alienated. Table 1 is the output of the logistic regression showing the estimated coefficients, standard error of the coefficients, z-values and p-values. It also shows the odds ratio and a 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio of the binary logistic regression model investigating the relationship between awareness of the LSLA transaction (the response variable) and some respondent predictors. Table 1 shows that there are three significant predictors of awareness of LSLA transaction, namely: the level of education attainment of the woman (z = 2.15, p = 0.032), the amount of time residing in the area (z = 5.8, p = 0.000), and the number of years the respondent has been practicing agriculture (z = −3.71, p = 0.000). These variables have p-values of less than 0.05, indicating that there is sufficient evidence that the coefficients are not zero using the α-level of 0.05. These variables therefore have a significant influence on outcome variable (awareness of transaction). Hence, more educated female respondents tended to be more aware of LSLA transaction than those who were less educated. Respondents who had resided in their community for a longer period of time were more likely to be aware of the LSLA transaction compared to those who had lived there for shorter period of time. Age, gender, household size, being employed by the company, experience in agriculture and marital status, however, were not significant predictors of awareness of the LSLA transaction. Age, marital status

![Fig. 4. Frequency of responses regarding who made the decision before the respondents` land tenure situation changed. Multiple responses were allowed.](image-url)
and level of educational attainment of male respondents were also not significant predictors of awareness of the LSLA transaction. However, it must be noted that awareness in this case does not necessarily imply participation in the process of land leases. In focus groups (and evident in the data from questionnaires), there is the tendency for some respondents to portray themselves as passive victims of LSLA. For instance, when asked whether the LSLA transaction involved their full consent and agreement, some indicated that they agreed to different terms than were contracted (3%) and others said they were aware, did not want it but could not stop it (27%). Furthermore, more than half of all respondents indicated that they were never contacted about the transaction (53%). All four communities have leaders (chiefs and paramount chiefs) in whom the custody of local land is vested and cannot be bypassed in LSLA transactions. Anecdotal evidence obtained from focus groups suggests that the company usually convinces with the leaders without broader consultation with the community members.

2.4. Happiness with the company operating in the community and agreement on its continued operations

Approximately 29% of respondents said they were not happy with the company operating in their local area (see Fig. 5). An investigation of predictors of happiness with the company operating in their local area reveals that predictors of happiness with the company are gender ($z = 1.97, p = 0.049$), whether a respondent is employed by the company ($z = -2.61, p = 0.009$), the length of time residing in the community ($z = -4.73, p = 0.000$) (Table 2), and the length of time the respondent has been practising agriculture ($z = 4.17, p = 0.000$).

There are no differences in terms of being happy or unhappy with the company based on age, marital status and level of educational attainment of men and of women. The results in Fig. 5 obtained from questionnaires are corroborated by the outcomes of the focus groups.

When asked if respondents would or would not want the company to continue operations in their community, 36% say they would like the company to continue operations (see Fig. 6). Three variables are predictors of agreement or disagreement regarding the company continuing operations in the local area (see Table 3). These are gender ($z = 2.56, p = 0.010$), the number of years spent in the local community ($z = -4.22, p = 0.000$), and the number of years practising agriculture ($z = 3.02, p = 0.003$). As is the case with being happy or unhappy with the company’s operations in the local area, agreement or disagreement with the company’s operations may have gendered characteristics.

This is because women tend to be more adversely affected and have fewer coping options in the face of land loss through LSLA than men (Yengoh et al., 2015). The length of time residing in the community and the length of time practising agriculture may tend to breed resistance to drastic changes in the way of life and means of earning a livelihood. Other variables (age, marital status, level of education of men, level of education of women and whether the respondent is employed in the company) are not good predictors of agreement or disagreement with the company continuing operations in the local area.

It is important to note that the happiness or unhappiness with the company operating in the local community (see Fig. 5) does not exactly match the desire (or not) for the company to continue operations in the community (see Fig. 6). There is a difference of approximately seven percentage points. This difference seems to be explained by responses to the question of what should be the future of land investment companies in the local community (see Fig. 7).

Promises made to local land owners and users prior to land acquisitions seem to be a strong incentive for the respondents’ who express a desire for the company to continue operations in their area. Even among respondents who responded negatively to the question of whether they would want the company to continue operations in their local area, they tend to stress that they would welcome the company if the latter kept the promises made to the community prior to land acquisitions. In focus groups, job creation is said to have been one of the key promises made before land acquisitions happened. The importance of jobs as a response in Fig. 7 points to the dire socio-economic situation of rural communities.

Table 2

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Log-likelihood = -245.392.

Test that all slopes are zero: G = 42.413, DF = 8, p-value = 0.000.

Table 3

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Log-likelihood = -305.732.

Test that all slopes are zero: G = 33.403, DF = 8, p-value = 0.000.

Fig. 5. Frequency of responses on whether respondents were happy or unhappy with the company operating in their community. Multiple responses were not allowed.
3. Discussion

3.1. Exploiting low levels of education attainment of locals

Judging from such low levels of educational attainment (see Fig. 3), it is plausible to agree that local communities and land holders would not be able to sufficiently understand, evaluate and assess the legal implications, rights and repercussions of the land lease agreements. This is part of the grievances that were raised in the focus groups. In these meetings, participants indicated that they were never given the opportunity to properly understand these land lease agreements through any sources independent of the chiefs, local politicians and company agents. In other cases, local residents recount that they were called to meetings to discuss the potential benefits of the company’s existence in their local area. At the end of such meetings, they were asked to make a thumb print at the end of a paper to indicate that they were present in such meetings. These thumbed documents turned out to be agreements whereby they had ceded their lands to the company. These claims were made in both the Bombali and Pujehun Districts.

One very vital issue associated with the inability of rural land owners and users to participate in or determine the future of their association with LSLA is the lack of legal literacy in local areas where LSLIs occur (German et al., 2011). The low levels of educational attainment in communities affected by LSLA in this study (see Fig. 3) and the fact that there was no independent body to properly educate land owners and users on the full implications of LSLA calls into question whether the notion of free, prior and informed consent was respected during land lease negotiations. According to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the underlying principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) can be summarized as follows: (i) information about and consultation on any proposed initiative and its likely impacts, (ii) meaningful participation of indigenous peoples and (iii) representative institutions. In areas covered by this study, not all of these conditions were met.

Local accounts that are backed by empirical data (see Fig. 4) call into question respect for and application of principles of FPIC (as outlined above) by both Addax Bioenergy and SOCFIN Agricultural Company. Evidence from the level of education, level of engagement, and understanding of issues associated with the land leases (see Table 1, Figs. 3 and 4) question the free choice that local people exercised in the land lease agreements and engagements with investing companies. Free choice requires that action is taken or consent is given without coercion, intimidation, or manipulation (FAO, 2014a). Coercion in the form of threats that land owners would lose their land if they did not consent to lease it to the company was widely reported in focus groups. The notion of prior consent was not respected because consent was not sought before important key stages of the project development were implemented. Examples include the absence of clear operational procedures that are known, understood and accepted by local people regarding what to do with damaged water sources in communities affected by LSLA. As a result, many communities have been affected by physical and chemical damage to their water sources. Examples of such communities include Worreh Yeama, Lungi Acre and Maronko in the Makeni District and Masao, Kortumahun and Sinjo in the Pujehun District. It also means that a more comprehensive assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the investment are discussed in a manner understandable to local people. This could generate deliberations in households, among families, and in communities that can lead to informed choices prior to negotiations and operations of large-scale investments. For instance, what would it mean for farmers and households when all of the land is leased to investment companies? How would the loss of land impact women and children? What would be the formula for crop compensation, especially cash crops? What would be the tangible benefits borne by the companies and how would these benefit local people.

Informed choice or action requires that all parties (in this case, all stakeholders in LSLA) share information and have access to such information through channels that are easily accessible and in a form that is understandable to everyone (FSC, 2012). Such information should be sufficient at all administrative levels to enable all stakeholders to make informed decisions on all aspects of their engagement with the project in question (FAO, 2014a; FSC, 2012). Empirical data and the results from the focus groups reveal that local communities were not properly informed about the decisions regarding their land engagements with the companies. That some people were not even aware of who made the decision for

![Fig. 6. Frequency of responses on whether respondents wanted or did not want the company to continue operations in their community. Multiple responses were not allowed.](image)

![Fig. 7. Frequency of responses on what should be the future of land investment companies in the local community. Multiple responses were allowed.](image)
their lands to be acquired (see Fig. 4) is testament to this lack of informed knowledge. Consent in the case of land deals would refer to the choice of local people (land owners and users) to support or reject the acquisition of their lands for the purposes of large-scale land investments or the existence of such large-scale agricultural investments in their local area at all. In the focus groups, it was revealed that the issue of whether local communities were interested in such projects was never raised. It is argued that the national government and local politicians had decided on the presence and location of agricultural investment initiatives in this region. Local communities, therefore, had to negotiate their coexistence with such initiatives, often with no guidance or protection for safeguarding their rights was provided by the national or local government charged with protecting them as citizens. According to ActionAid (2013), approximately 75% of respondents in their study in Sierra Leone never had any contact with the legal entity that represented them in the land lease agreements with Addax Bioenergy. Issues of consent have also been raised in the processes that led to the acquisition of land by SOCFIN Agricultural Company in the Malen Chiefdom (Melsbach and Rahall, 2012).

3.2. Taking advantage of administrative and political corruption (exploiting Sierra Leone’s low capacity for sustainable land administration)

In focus group sessions, local stakeholders called raised questions regarding the sharing procedures of the annual lease rent payment of land leased to LSLI companies. According to this procedure, the District Council receives 20% of the annual lease rent for all land in its jurisdiction, the Chiefdom Council receives 20%, the national government 10%, and the landowners 50%. The maximum lease rent reported in the study area is USD 5 per acre per year, meaning that the real land owners receive USD 2.50 per acre per year. In the focus groups, participants questioned why they would receive only half of what is already considered an insufficient cost of lease rents for their lands, while politicians receive a far more substantial sum (in cumulative terms). The question of moral fairness arises when comparisons are made regarding taxation. At the national level, the property tax on gains from leases or sales is less than 10%. This, however, is not the case with regard to taxing property in rural areas, in which every indicator has shown that the tax levied for land leased by LSLI is 50%.

Such possibilities for self-gain are seen as a strong incentive for corruption and the unscrupulous attitudes observed among local leaders, who they tend to side with companies in cases of disputes with local people. A study published by Bread for the World, which conducted an analysis on this compensation system that favors local administrative officials who gain significantly without suffering any loss or damages, noting that: “This compensation system might have ensured the ‘cooperation’ of every level of national and regional authorities, as the District Council and the Chiefdom Administrators receive annual lease fees without suffering any damage” (Bread for All, 2012). Moreover, oil palm plantations were compensated with a one-off payment of 1 million Leones (approximately USD 230) per acre. Locals report that tracts of land larger than 5 acres receive compensation only up to five acres, even when all of the land is appropriated. No one family or clan knows exactly the area of land they possess, as they cannot access such data anywhere within their local or district administrative services. The obsolete land law, Cap 122, is also exploited, given the latitude provided by its vagueness. The law gives custodianship powers to the chiefdom council over land. The law is abused by misinterpreting the powers of custodianship to mean that the chiefdom councils have the ultimate power to lease land on behalf of the communities.

3.3. Poor governance – a lucrative pull for foreign investors

The governance structures in Sierra Leone are ill-equipped to handle international land deals and associated outcomes of LSLA on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of its citizens. This can be exemplified by a number of features such as the very poorly developed organization, oversight or functioning of land markets in the country. Furthermore, the rent fees for land acquired by companies from local farmers is dismal, does not reflect market prices, and especially, is not deemed remotely fair for the populations from which such land is acquired. Analyses have shown that the compensation for land does not cover the losses in livelihood and income incurred by former land owners and users (ActionAid, 2013). The lease rents are dismal compared to amounts paid in other parts of the world. The Oakland Institute (2012a,b), for example, compares the leases on good agricultural land in Sierra Leone, which range from USD 5 to USD 20 per ha per year, those of other countries, such as USD 100+ in Brazil, USD 450+ in Indonesia and USD 3000+ per ha in Malaysia. The report also notes that fees for the utilization of water resources (an important land resource for rural communities and the country as a whole) is non-existent.

Finally, the land does not seem to be perceived as a limited and non-renewable resource (at least in the short and medium term) by national strategists. This misconception of abundance can be seen when the amount of land that has been leased in Sierra Leone is compared to those of other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. For its comparatively small size, in 2011, Sierra Leone ranked among the ten countries with the largest amount of land leased to large-scale land deals ahead of countries such as Cameroon, Kenya, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (The Land Matrix Global Observatory, 2015). As a result of this misconception of renewability and abundance, little has been done to develop other sectors of the national economy using the proceeds of LSLIs. A clear manifestation of this indifference is in the endless list of qualifications for tax holidays, which the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) rationalizes as incentives for foreign investments in the country. In advertising the country as a destination for investment in oil palm and sugarcane, SLIEPA states regarding corporate taxes: “Tax rates are very attractive, with 0% corporate income tax and 0% duty on imported inputs for qualified investors” (SLIEPA, 2015). In the same vein, SLIEPA advertises the country as an attractive destination for LSLIs by publicizing a recently approved set of special incentives for qualified agribusiness investors. These include, among others (retrieved from www.sliepa.org on 5 May 2014):

- Complete exemption from corporate income tax until 2020, plus 50% exemption from withholding taxes on dividends paid by agribusiness companies.
- Complete exemption from import duty on farm machinery, agro-processing equipment, agrochemicals, and other key inputs; 3-year exemption from import duty on any other plant and equipment; reduced rate of 3% import duty on any other raw materials.
- 100% loss carry forward can be used in any year.
- 125% tax deduction for expenses on R&D, training and export promotion.
- 3-year income tax exemption for skilled expatriate staff, where bilateral treaties permit.

Commitments by investors to build or develop infrastructure, provide diversification of employment sources and improve the country’s foreign exchange can contribute to stimulating economic development in Sierra Leone. This is only possible for Sierra Leone and other LSLI host countries if the governments establish sound, enforceable, and fair local investment legislation as well as meaningful taxation policies (Cotula, 2009). When governments
erode almost all avenues for generating income through taxation, they undermine their ability to support local development and other governmental projects that have the potential of benefiting from growth in national income. Robertson and Pinstrup-Andersen (2010) decry the implications of poor taxation strategies on the employment and food security of LSLA host countries.

3.4. Promises that exploit the situation of limited local socio-economic infrastructure

Poor rural communities with low levels of social and economic infrastructure, few opportunities of non-farm employment, and low prospects of social mobility offer tantalizing targets for large-scale land investors through the use of promises of a brighter socio-economic future. The need for social and economic development is a strong urge in such communities, such that people will more willingly make substantial sacrifices in the hope of achieving such development. In both the focus groups and the structured interviews, participants identified the non-fulfilment of promises made by the company as one of the most contentious and sticking issues between them and the company.

Fig. 7 shows a strong frequency of responses demanding that the companies keep promises made to the local communities when respondents were asked about the future of land investment companies in the study area. The overwhelming demand is for the companies to meet the promises they made to the community. Among some of these promises identified in focus groups and common in all communities studied are: promises to build schools, provide scholarships for children of land owners whose lands have been leased to the company, provide the necessary technical training for children of local land owners that could enable them hold and maintain technical jobs in the company, build hospitals, roads, and other vital infrastructure that would significantly contribute to improving social and economic life in communities that have leased land to the company. With the exception of roads that have been constructed in the local areas to serve the operations of the company (some of which are used by the residents), scarcely any of the other promises of infrastructural developments have been kept.

Participants instead pointed to a host of promises that have been broken. These include, among many others, the forceful take-over of bolliards in communities, such as Lungi Acre, and Worree Yeama. Bolliards are generally flat, lowland depressions of higher than average fertility that are seasonally flooded and constitute prime farmland for most agricultural communities in Sierra Leone. Given their geography, bolis (as they are commonly called) tend to be well watered even in the dry season, permitting local farmers (especially women) to practice off-season cultivation of a variety of vegetables, fruits and pulses. Their loss in many communities has been a direct contributing factor to the deterioration of the food security situation and the gender-differentiated effects of LSLA in many communities hosting these large-scale investments (Yengoh et al., 2015).

Another contentious area of promises made and broken that was captured in both the focus groups and the interviews is in the domain of jobs (see Fig. 7). It is reported that the company promised to prioritize local residents in the allocation of jobs and funding for technical training required to meet the needs of large-scale land investments in their local area. In this promise, the youth saw an opportunity to aspire to a life beyond the farming, which had characterized the lives of their parents. Parents saw an opportunity to contribute to the process of social mobility that would signify improve the chances and opportunities for their children. In the focus groups, many participants argued that such promises and the hope for better opportunities for their children contributed substantially in persuading them to hand over their lands for company activities. The current situation being reported is one in which employees in the higher echelons of the company bring their relatives from other parts of Sierra Leone to occupy jobs that were promised to local residents. ActionAid (2013) found that up to half of all jobs in local companies were occupied by people who did not reside in the local area. In the focus groups, participants reported widespread corruption in the allocation of most jobs. For example, it was reported that a bribe of at least 50,000 SLL (approximately 12 USD) is generally required if one desires to hold one of the seasonal manual jobs in the company, such as farm clearing and planting.

3.5. Taking advantage of traditional systems of local power structures

The traditional system of local power structures in Sierra Leone is heavily dominated by the phenomenon of chieffaincies (Acemoglu et al., 2013). The concept of chieffancy families is a colonial creation that was developed by the British to enable them to better institute their modus operandi of divide and rule in most of their African colonial lands (Acemoglu et al., 2013). It involved providing protection and favors to compliant families, thereby raising them above the political, social and economic status of most other people in the community. In return, these chieffancy families would serve as protectors of British colonial interests as the British sought to develop the hinterlands and colonies into vast areas in the 18th and early 19th centuries (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Reed and Robinson, 2013). This chieffancy institution has endured and today plays an important role in the evolution of socio-economic and political changes in many local areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, chiefs are seen as an extension of the reach of state power into rural and local areas within their jurisdiction by performing tasks such as administering taxation, controlling the judicial system, and allocating land the most important socio-economic resource in rural areas (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Denney, 2013). It has been observed that the concentration of such socio-economic, political and administrative decision-making powers in the hands of chiefs can be harnessed by some forces for nefarious purposes (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Denney, 2013; Reed and Robinson, 2013). This is the case in some rural areas of Sierra Leone where the general system of governance does not provide a robust framework for governance accountability.

In areas affected by LSLA, the role of chiefs in the acquisition of local land is seen as substantial (see Fig. 4). In the focus groups, participants tend to see the interest of local chiefs and those of the political and administrative interests that back such large-scale land investments as being no different from those of the investing companies. In the focus groups, local people accused local chiefs for scheming with companies to “seize” their lands. In the Malen Chiefdom, for example, residents point to a speech made by the Paramount Chief of Malen on the first anniversary of the operations of SOCFIN in the Malen Chiefdom as evidence of the collusion by the chiefs in “seizing” their lands and handing them over to corporate interests. Amid protests by local people regarding issues with the process of land acquisition by SOCFIN, the fairness of compensation for land acquired, the breaking of promises to respect a 500-m buffer around settlements and a host of legal wrangling between affected land owners and the SOCFIN Company, the Paramount Chief declared that: “I am SOCFIN!” The Paramount Chief declared that there was no difference between him and the company whose operations are being decrved by the local population. Such a seemingly close alliance between local rulers and corporate interests would partly explain why many land owners are not exactly sure who made the decision to lease their lands for company activities (see Fig. 4) and why local residents do not see any possibilities for oppose local rulers’ advice to cede the land for lease. Respondents point to such defiance and indifference to
their struggles as a clear sign that the powers that are supposed to protect them and act in their best interest have been co-opted by corporate interests.

3.6. External interests at work

A rich body of research has consistently reported that notwithstanding a country’s endowment of non-agricultural natural resources, there are limited cases in which countries can generate broad-based economic growth without developing and expanding the staple food and livestock sectors (Bezemr and Headey, 2008; Diao et al., 2007; Hazell and Diao, 2005). The dynamism of the Asian Green Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s taught governments that investments in agriculture and food production are an important and viable step in the process toward development (Diao et al., 2010). Investment in the development of the staple food and livestock sectors, therefore, not only is an economic growth strategy but also can be seen as a strategic pro-poor development initiative. Such investments also have the potential to promote the transition to sustainable agriculture that meets the vital demands of food security for many countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Gonzalez, 2014).

In addition to the goal of achieving economic growth, investments in private-sector agricultural projects is increasingly seen by governments of developing countries as an appropriate strategy to achieve socio-economic development and make up for shortfalls in development aid (GoSL, 2014; UNCTAD, 2009). Although several high-level meetings have been organized over the last decade to boost such investments, the overall picture is one of neglecting agriculture by most governments in sub-Saharan Africa (Sasson, 2012). This reduction of investment in agriculture over several years was one of the underlying causes of the 2007–08 food price crisis and associated challenges in dealing with the outcomes of the crisis by affected countries (Robertson and Pinstrop-Andersen, 2010; Sasson, 2012). The outcomes of the crisis included riots (many of which included fatal outcomes) in a host of African countries, such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Morocco and Mozambique (Sasson, 2012).

Responses to the global food crisis were mixed across Africa. In some so called ‘land-rich’ countries, such as Sierra Leone, the World Bank groups saw this as an opportunity to create an enabling environment for such countries to attract large-scale investments in land resources. This was done in the case of Sierra Leone by providing it with financial and technical support for hasty land tenure and land investment reforms through the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the SLIEPA. The IFC is described by the Bank Information Center (a group that partners with civil society in developing countries to influence the World Bank and other international financial institutions to promote social and economic justice and ecological sustainability) as: “the private sector lending arm of the World Bank Group, providing financial services to businesses investing in the developing world. As private enterprises often privilege ‘business confidentiality’ over the public’s right to know, it is frequently difficult for the public to measure or influence the development impacts of the IFC’s activities.”

The “opportunities” of Sierra Leone as a potential hub for land-based investments were underlined in the Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum held in London in November 2009 (Oakland Institute, 2012b; UNDG, 2009). This forum benefited from the blessings of organizations with a strong pro-corporate, neoliberal vision of economic development, such as the African Development Bank Group, the World Bank Group, the Tony Blair African Governance Initiative and the European Commission (Oakland Institute, 2012b; The Tony Blair Governance Initiative, 2010; UNDG, 2009). Among the key outcomes of the forum was the need to “reduce the cost of doing business” in Sierra Leone and to “continue to reform aggressively as a complementary effort to the private sector investments that will help to deliver growth” (UNDG, 2009). In such haste, appropriate safeguards for socio-cultural, economic, legal and environmental oversights have been marginalized. An analysis of the Environmental, Social and Health Impact Assessment of some large-scale land investment companies would bear witness to such marginalization.

The World Bank has been one of the most aggressive organizations in promoting corporate interests relating to LSLA. This neo-liberal, pro-corporate vision of agricultural development of the World Bank, in which large-scale industrial farming and global market integration is aggressively pursued (Oakland Institute, 2014), serves as a vehicle through which LSLA thrives in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa. This is done through a series of metrics designed to place countries on a scale of business suitability. Countries are then expected to live up to these qualifications a process that involves undertaking reforms and changes to the legal, political and economic systems that may not necessarily be good for the long-term sustainability of development. These metrics initiate and sustain a policy agenda driven by a race to the bottom mentality in sectors such as environmental and socio-economic protections in countries that host foreign large-scale land investment initiatives.

Some of the most controversial of the World Bank’s tools identified by the Oakland Institute (2014) report are: the annual Doing Business (DB) ranking of countries, which determines how national regulations operate in favor of the “ease of doing business” and the Benchmarking the Business of Agriculture (BBA indicator), which aims “to inform and to leverage policy reforms which lead to a more modern agriculture sector, built primarily on the basis of commercial viable family farms.” Dixie and Saliola (2013) identify thematic areas to assess the suitability of a country’s enabling environment for business and investments (BBA indicator), which include: a capable and competitive farm base (credit for investment, access to improved inputs, greater skills, mechanization); market insights (market knowledge, strengthened producers organizations); market access infrastructure (roads, distribution, market places); land, water, energy availability (regulations to facilitate a secure and efficient land market, access to irrigation, electricity); agribusiness capability (enabling business environment, access to finance, electricity, water, contractual relationship for raw materials, ease of entry); and international, regional market capability (facilitating trading across borders, harmonized quality standards) (Dixie and Saliola, 2013).

Among the key goals of external interests is the desire to protect corporate interests at the cost of local social and economic development. An example described by the Oakland Institute (2014) is where governments are encouraged to deregulate markets for agricultural inputs such as seed and fertilizer a move likely to significantly benefit the high external input farming initiatives of LSLIs, while at the same time, encouraging investment in infrastructure that favors the circulation of agricultural goods. It is observed, therefore, that government policy (regulation or deregulation) is only good when it favors large–scale agribusiness interests (Oakland Institute, 2014). These are among the aspects of a global institutional and economic order seen by some scholars as coercive on the part of affluent countries, to the detriment of almost ten percent of the world’s population living in poverty (Gonzalez, 2014).

4. Conclusion

This study set out to determine what factors made communities vulnerable to an unequal engagement with large-scale land-investing interests in Sierra Leone. We found that the initial attraction for investors to target a country or local area for
the installation of large-scale farming operations tended to be the claim, and in some cases advertisement, of the availability of larger tracts of land (erroneously or not). This claim is usually made by state interests, sometimes with substantial compassion from external forces. Beyond the heavily publicized notion of land availability being the main reason for investors targeting certain regions of the world, there are other less obvious attractions for investments in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. Such attractions, unfortunately, are not necessarily benign and include opportunities offered by a number of factors in the communities or countries that host such large-scale land investments. Such factors include low levels of education, which limit the unrestricted exercise of free, prior, informed consent; limited effectiveness of governance structures and poor accountability of local and national leaders to their populations; and the marginalization of the rights of local people, which limit participation in processes such as the negotiation of land lease agreements, with significant implications on their livelihoods. The above factors render local peoples and communities vulnerable to the decisions and outcomes of the operations of large-scale land investors. Left to their own devices, local peoples and communities cannot bargain on the same terms with large-scale land investment companies. This highlights the need for a more proactive approach from national and regional governments in protecting the rights and livelihoods of communities implicated in LSLA. We find that although a majority of the population in the study areas were unhappy with the activities and operations of land-investing companies in their local areas, some still preferred to hang onto the promises of social and economic developments that had been made by the investing companies prior to the onset of their operations. Those who preferred that the company continue operations in their local area did so with the hope that the situation will change for the better.

Such findings emphasize the need for more critical research into the relationships between the motivations of investor bodies, acquiescence of national governments, and levels of acceptance and acceptability of such investments in affected local communities. They also point to the need to revisit the role and implementation of PPIC in large-scale land deals, to properly understand the role of the International Finance Corporation and its Performance Standards, and to put local communities and households at the center of the analysis of outcomes of LSLIs.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2015.09.028.

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