

Encountering the Global Countryside  
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# Experiences and responses to land grabbing in rural Liberia

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# Outline (Liberia case study)

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- Points of departure;
- Research questions;
- Case study location;
- Methodologies;
- Key arguments;
- Conclusion.

# Points of departure

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- Globalisation is transforming rural places globally;
- The speed and scope of globalisation created some by-products: for example climate change and food insecurity;
- Efforts to mitigate these global challenges include increased food production and greener alternative fuels;
- All of those strategies are dependent on land, increasing the demand for land;
- Countries in the Global South are considered to have abundant land;
- Land scale land deals (land grabbing) emerged as a by-product of globalisation and the everyday lived experience of rural communities in Global South;
- Emergence of a dominant narrative led by civil society and media (land grabbing is hegemonic, threat to livelihoods, identity and land tenure – passive rural communities).

# Key and subsidiary questions

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- How are rural communities in Senjeh District, Bomi County in western Liberia experiencing or addressing the conversion of subsistence farmland into large scale oil palm plantation to meet global demand?
- Subsidiary questions:
  - Impact on livelihoods?
  - Power relations?
  - Identity?
  - Land rights?





# Methodology

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- Ethnographic approach;
- Three months of fieldwork in Senjeh District, Liberia between April and June 2017 following a scoping visit in December 2016;
- Worked with a research assistant familiar with that part of Liberia;
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with 30 residents and 7 key informants. Snowball sampling;
- Qualitative analysis using Nvivo and thematic approach.















# Experiences of land grabbing

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- Jobs (on and off farm, distribution);
- Higher prices for basic livelihoods;
- Shift in power dynamics (consultation);
- Changed identity (landscape, language and faith);
- Eroded customary land rights (legal tools);
- Gendered dynamics:
  - Bias towards men (jobs);
  - Seat at the consultation table;
  - Pushed others further unto the margins.

# Responses to land grabbing

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- Alternative sources of livelihoods;
- Shifting cultivation practices;
- Political reactions from below - retained agency (RSPO complaint);
- Changed roles of women;
- Dual income homes;
- Land Rights Act (2018).



# Implications of the findings

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- Patriarchal nature of rural governance is under threat (women having larger roles);
- No longer business as usual for government and large concessionaires;
- Legal protection for land tenures in rural communities in Liberia;

# Conclusion

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- Land grabbing has threatened livelihoods, erode power, identity and land rights of rural communities in Africa (Liberia);
- Findings suggests a complex experience;
- Highlighted the resilience of rural Liberians in Senjeh;
- Gendered and generational dynamics limitation, needs future researchers to take forward;
- Not entirely passive and victims; winners and losers.

Thanks for  
listening