



**How and why chiefs formalize relationship with land users in recent times:
Illuminating the politics of land dispossessions during land transactions for biofuels
investments in Ghana**

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Abstract

Conventional understandings of land dispossession following the recent surge in land transactions for biofuels investments in Africa have been influenced by the perceived exploitative tendencies of investors as ‘land grabbers’ and the consequent deleterious livelihoods implications. However, this paper contributes to land grabbing debate by illuminating that the recent surge in large scale land transactions in Ghana for biofuels investments has rather coincided primarily with chiefs’ urge to re-establish authority over land for two compelling reasons: first to regularize relationship with users of their land areas with the hope of generating higher economic benefits for residents of project villages compared to the contributions from the perceived irresponsible and noncompliant land users (tenant/migrant farmers). Second, to formalize the boundaries of their land areas to avert potential future land litigation or contestations by adjacent traditional councils. This consequently creates situations where social groups or individuals who lack recognition before the chieftaincy institution become ‘invisible’ and thus lose their land areas during large land transactions whereas those with powerful agency gets recognized by chiefs and have their land use rights ‘protected’ even sometimes regardless of citizenship status in the project communities. The paper thus concludes that, an impeccable interpretation of land dispossessions following large scale land transactions in Ghana and hence the offer of astute recommendations should be based on rigorous investigation of the local political structures or institutions that mediate access to and use of land resources for different social groups, instead of the usual lop-sided analyses that focus almost exclusively on the perceived exploitative tendencies of investors.