

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for Ghana to put in place mechanisms to safeguard the interests of women smallholder farmers in Somanya even as commercial farming interests grow in the area. This requires a comprehensive approach involving families, community organisations and the mass media. Each of these actors will have to embark on a variety of actions to protect the livelihoods of women smallholder farmers.

- Family elders should include female elders in the family land governance. Female elders should be part of the decision making regarding which family land to sell, discussions about how much compensation to receive as well as how to distribute the compensation. Their presence should be evident in written documentation covering land transactions.
- All land transactions whether with kin/indigenes or non-kin/migrants should be documented in a basic written agreement with both signatories and witnesses to the transaction. These agreements should clearly spell out the terms and conditions under which the lease can be abrogated and the avenues for redress if these terms and conditions are violated.
- Small claims courts should be set up across the country that would adjudicate matters including violated land contracts.
- Members of community organisations, especially members of commercial farming associations should play a major role in ensuring that the lands they lease are leased in a manner that ensures free, prior and informed consent of both males and females in a family.
- There is a need for activism on the issue of land rights for women smallholder farmers. The media houses in the Somanya area will be a particularly useful medium for such activism.

## FURTHER READING

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*This Policy brief was produced by the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT). Find out more at [www.netrightghana.org](http://www.netrightghana.org)*



NETWORK FOR WOMEN'S  
RIGHTS IN GHANA  
(NETRIGHT)



May 2018

## CONTEXT

Agriculture plays a crucial role in Ghana's economy. Although the agricultural sector no longer contributes the largest amount to the country's gross domestic product, it continues to be the major sector of employment. For rural communities in particular, agriculture is the main source of employment and income generation. The last two decades have seen the rise of a new phenomenon: land based investments for agribusiness development. Spurred by the triple burden of a food, energy and financial crisis in the early part of the twenty first century, both local and international elites have shown increased interest in purchasing large tracts of land for biofuel or agricultural purposes. In the Somanya area in the Eastern Region of the country, local elites with initial support from the Adventist Development Relief Agency have acquired large sways of land for mango cultivation. There are currently about 120 such farmers with average land holdings of 70 acres in the area. This trend has had major consequences on the livelihoods and well-being of the

# POLICY BRIEF

## Safeguarding Smallholder Women Farmers in the Context of Commercial Farming in Somanya

rural population, and particularly for smallholder women farmers. In this policy brief, the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT) makes a number of recommendations directed at protecting the land rights of smallholder women farmers in the context of land-based investments for the purposes of commercial farming. It is drawn from a scoping and impact analysis study commissioned by NETRIGHT.

### TRADITIONAL LAND TENURE ARRANGEMENTS IN SOMANYA

*In Somanya, married women cannot inherit land from their fathers. They can only access land from their husbands.*

Land inheritance norms in Somanya vary. These variations are dependent on the gender of children. Among the Krobo of Somanya, men have an automatic right to their father's land so long as they are recognized as legitimate sons of their fathers either through a marriage ceremony that took place prior to their birth or a La Pomi rite undertaken after their birth to an unwed mother to

establish paternity. For women though, access to their father's land is not automatic, but dependent on their marital status. Land governance norms among the Krobo basically deprive married women from having access to land belonging to their father. This is due to the belief that such land would eventually be handed over to the woman's husband's family and thus be lost to the original family which owned the land. Unmarried women, whether they be divorced or single have user rights to land that belonged to their fathers. They may or may not be able to bequeath these lands to their descendants depending on decisions by other male kin in the family.

In light of these norms and practices, native Krobo women with the financial wherewithal might seek to purchase lands of their own. Even in these circumstances, they might face challenges because of the assumptions of landowners that women cannot farm on their own. Women are also more likely to be given lands that are downhill which invariably have been farmed for long periods of time without adequate fallow periods and are thus less fertile.

For migrant women, access to land is granted through sharecropping arrangements. Like many other ethnic groups, the Krobo split sharecropping proceeds either in half or three-parts. However, they also have other arrangements that can allow for say a four way split. All of these agreements, whether with kin or migrants are made orally.

## THE ADVENT OF COMMERCIAL MANGO FARMING

In 1997, the Adventist Development Relief Agency with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) began a programme of support to encourage commercial mango farming in the Somanya area due to the fact that the climate there afforded two harvests in one agricultural cycle. Over time, the idea took off and the elite both from Somanya and the country at large bought near contiguous plots of land to farm mangoes commercially. These farmers, numbering about 120 in all own approximately 14,000 acres of land in the Somanya area.

### THE IMPACTS OF COMMERCIAL MANGO FARMING ON LAND TENURE ARRANGEMENTS IN SOMANYA

With the advent of commercial farming, the land tenure arrangements that gave both indigenes and migrants the opportunity to access land without a financial payment have been severely undermined. Smallholder women farmers have access to land so long as an investor for the land on which they farm has not yet been found. Faced with an elite citizen with the financial wherewithal to buy land, these smallholder women farmers are no match. The interest in commercial farming has led to increases in land prices with 0.4 hectares of land going for an average of \$2,500 for the 99-year period. These prices are completely out of the reach of smallholder women farmers.

Beyond the requirement for financial payments in exchange for land, a second impact of commercial farming has been an increasing preference for written agreements documenting the land transfers as opposed to oral agreements that were more pervasive in times past. These written contracts cover the transactions that include financial payments for land transfers and as such are more common for the commercial mango farmers than they are for the smallholder women farmers.

*With the advent of commercial farming, the traditional norms governing land tenure have changed; there is now a land market in Somanya and written contracts governing these land transactions. Women find themselves competing unsuccessfully for land*

### COMMERCIAL MANGO FARMING IS WEAKENING SMALLHOLDER WOMEN FARMERS' LAND ACCESS IN SOMANYA

A major impact of the advent of commercial mango farming on smallholder women farmers in Somanya is in terms of land access. Given that commercial mango farmers have the financial means to pay for the lands on which they farm, family elders are increasingly willing to hand over lands formerly reserved for smallholder farmers to these elite. Although women can protest when they are denied access to lands traditionally due to them, they find it difficult to protest when the lands on which they farm are leased to the elite against financial remuneration. This is especially true when the extended

family requires money to defray a large expense such as a hospital bill or a funeral. Smallholder women farmers therefore face dwindling access to land.

Thanks to taungya, a forestry system that allows for mixed cropping of foodcrops and cashcrops, these smallholder women farmers may not be kicked off the farmlands immediately after the land is sold to a commercial farmer. They will be able to continue to farm while the mango seedlings are immature, a period of roughly four years. Once the mango trees have matured, however, the smallholder women farmers have to look for land elsewhere.

If this process continues unabated, smallholder women farmers will eventually become landless and will have to look for alternative sources of income.



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