

The Gendered Politics of Farm Household Production and the Shaping of Women's Livelihoods in Northern Ghana

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Introduction

An examination of the history of land struggles in Ghana reveals a multiplicity of factors that impinge on land-labour negotiations with implications for the livelihoods of different social groups such as women and men, indigenes and settlers, guardians and guarded, titled and untitled, and farm owners and farm hands among others (Tsikata, 2008; Lund, 2008). The diversity of interests suggests that land holding and land titling are political and negotiable. They are political in the sense that they generate class struggles, but recently there has been a growing trend towards recognising the gender struggles also activated by competing interests for land (Tsikata, 2008; Bugri, 2004; Kevane, 2004; Tadesse, 2003). Various studies on the largely rural agrarian communities of Ghana suggest that land plays a central role in positioning and shaping the livelihoods of various interests groups (Lund, 2008; Dittoh, 2008; Songsore, 2001). In processes regulating customary, crown and state lands, from the Crown Lands Bills of the 1870s to Government Ordinances of the 1950s through to the ongoing Land Administration Project, one finds evidence of struggles and counter-struggles as well as responses and counter-responses that hinge on questions of social equity and justice (Aryeetey *et al.*, 2007; Tsikata, 2008; WMC, 2004). Land issues continue to evoke passions and debates that warrant critical analysis and multi-faceted research that can respond to the varying interests.

Politics shape land titling and holding claims at various levels in formal and traditional land administration systems. Struggles over titles often result in conflicts, some of which have been violent. In northern Ghana, conflicting land interests have tended to underpin many of the ethnic clashes (Lund, 2008; Maasole, 2006; Bacho, 2005) along with associated insecurities over

identity and autonomy. This has been the case for the conflicts between the Dagbamba¹, Nanumba, and Gonja on the one hand, and Konkomba on the other (Tonah, 2007; Maasole, 2006), as also between the Mwampushe² and Kusasi of Bawku and Gonja and Vagla at Tuna. Negotiations and bargains have become important tools for resolving disputes and conflicts and curbing violent outbursts. While the analyses of land and related conflicts in northern Ghana³ highlight the question of territoriality, beneath this are issues of livelihoods and justice (Lund, 2008; Tonah, 2007; Maasole, 2006). Some such analyses have focused on inter-group struggles, with women on both sides portrayed as passive victims rather than interested parties (Bugri, 2004; Nyari, 2005). Analysts tend to suggest that women's interests in land are secondary. An added dimension to the politics of land struggles in northern Ghana is the tendency to ignore non-violent conflicts and intra-group struggles such as those within a production system, between men and women, and within households, families and communities.

This paper, which focuses on livelihoods-based interests in land, draws on the works of Sen (1999), Kevane (2004), Tadesse (2003) and Nussbaum (2000) to inform an analysis that highlights non-violent conflict situations in farm-based households in northern Ghana. In his analysis of household relations and the inscription of inequalities, Sen (1999) offers an interesting model for not only analysing land-labour relations but also for factoring in production and gender relations. Using the "capabilities approach" as an alternative for promoting development that enhances freedoms and enlarges liberties, Sen offers two interrelated concepts – "negotiative conflict" and "cooperative bargaining" – for analysing inequitable socioeconomic systems. Sen's analytical framework sheds light on the household as a dynamic site where various actors negotiate diverse spaces and strike bargains as part of efforts to position themselves for more equitable gains. Aspects of this framework are used here to examine agrarian households of northern Ghana where conjugal relations are underpinned by culturally-specific meanings that trigger gender-based conflicts. The negotiations and bargains propelled by these conflicts are not always just.

The analysis is in two parts. The first examines the household as a critical and contested production site characterised by specific cultural meanings and varying social interactions and relationships that return unequal benefits. The second draws on Sen's (1999) analytical model to examine the negotiative possibilities for women within the contrived spaces as they pursue their

livelihoods options. The concluding part looks at women's gains and losses in these processes. Information and experiences from civil society programming and my university's field practical placement support, gathered through group discussions, informal discussions, unstructured interviews and activity profiles provided the context for the analysis.

The politics of household production

The household as a political space remains a contentious site due to the privileging of some interests and under-privileging of others. For the men and women of the household, who are positioned as super-ordinates and subordinates respectively, this has been found to yield unequal entitlements and capabilities (WMC, 2004; Sen, 1999). This section focuses on the gendering of household farm production with specific reference to provisioning arrangements, tenurial practices and labour appropriations.

Household provisioning and production

Households in northern Ghana depend on collective and individual resources generated largely from agricultural activities (Bacho, 2004, 2005). Under the compound residential arrangements, members of the farm household play specific and critical roles – together and independently – toward its provisioning. These roles are based on culturally-specified gender divisions of labour, authority structures and social obligations.

The community-level interactions drawn on for this analysis reveal that traditionally, men as heads of households and boys as potential heads are socialized as providers and thus owners of the production system. This places men and boys in super-ordinate positions. Their assigned roles position them as heirs of household resources, especially land, over which they exercise decision-making concerning production and distribution. Conversely, women and girls as wives or potential wives are socialised into subordinate positions to depend on male members for resources. Positioned as non-heirs, women and girls have no direct inheritance rights under customary arrangements. They can, however, access family resources, especially land, for so-called secondary production (Millar, 2004; Issaka, 2004). Yet, women, like men, play critical roles in production and provisioning that are hardly secondary and as such, use and require resources, especially land, to support their agrarian livelihoods.

Limitations on the rights and capabilities of women are reflected in their farm production, which focuses largely on non-staples such as rice, beans,

groundnuts and vegetables. Women tend to produce crops used for soup ingredients, minor meals and special diets in accordance with their traditional provisioning responsibilities. Where women are unable to cultivate these crops, they have to engage in non-farm activities such as trading, handicrafts-making and hiring out their labour in order to generate the requisite income to support their household provisioning obligations.

Within the household production structure, one finds a well-defined hierarchical titling structure. Traditional authorities such as chiefs, *tendaamba*⁴, elders and household heads, largely men, are held in high esteem and revered for their decision-making powers and control over resources. Within the agrarian production system, male custodianship is purported to guarantee equitable distribution of resources. Yet, evidence shows that the distribution system is contrived to maintain socio-economic inequalities (Issaka, 2004; Nyari, 2005). Within that gendered space, resource-sharing disadvantages women who are expected to look up to male authorities for support and provisioning.

Within this general picture, there are variations. Among groups such as the Gonja, Nawuri and Nchumburu, there are women leaders such as queen-mothers, but their roles are limited to the mobilisation of women rather than involvement in the politics of land and resources. In some other groups, such as the Nanumba and Mwamprushe, women are chiefs in specific communities and wield the same powers as male authorities. In recent times, where the idea of the *magazia* (women leaders) has spread, there has been a tendency to focus on the mobilisation of women for external resources for resolving internal struggles, although some community-based women's groups have also been recently engaged in political struggles including those over land. The Widows and Orphans Ministry and the Single Mothers Association of Bolgatanga, have also established a history of mobilizing around resource rights, using diverse tools including radio and workshops to engage with traditional authorities and formal structures.

Tenurial arrangements and women's entitlements

In northern Ghana, there is the general perception among traditionalists that people belong to land rather than land to people (Millar, 2004). Hence, land is treated as a divine entity that must be worshipped, and this divine character contributes to sustaining traditional authorities. Land is also recognised as a physical resource to be used for production. Thus, land is held in trust by

particular members of society and is perceived as important and permanent – largely by male traditional authorities. Additionally, land is viewed as an anchor for social identity through which kinship groups trace their origins and commune, and connect with each other, their ancestors and the yet-to-be born. Hence, land has spiritual, physical and social components. Humans, but also animals and spirits, are permitted to use land and enjoy its benefits insofar as they adhere to and respect its values. The gendered character of this world view results in male-dominated administrative systems and structures.

Traditional authorities hold land in trust for the people, in this case families and communities (Lund, 2008; Dittoh, 2008; Bugri, 2004). The two emergent types of land holding – communal and particular – are entrusted to chiefs/*tendaamba* and clan/family/household heads respectively. As holders of lands, chiefs for the Northern Region and *tendaamba* for the Upper Regions have specific jurisdiction over communal lands which include grazing fields, sacred groves, protected areas and unclaimed lands. Particular lands – the dominant category – are held by families, clans and households who acquire them as first settlers, generational heirs or special gifts. Particular lands are held in trust by heads of kinship units. By such traditional arrangements all other members of a community have use rights over communal land, although in practice women and girls depend on men and boys – as real or potential heirs and heads – for access. Use rights generally extend to natural resources such as water, rocks, clay and vegetation (i.e. forests, trees and wood) which can be used for domestic or commercial purpose. Natural resources on particular lands belong to the specific holders, and women of such clans, families and household are assigned use rights on the basis of membership. Traditionally, women control the gathering and use of these natural resources, while men hold the titles.

In northern Ghana, where share-cropping and outright sale practices are relatively new (unlike in southern Ghana), agricultural land acquisition has usually been by settlement, inheritance and gifting. However, belief in the sanctity of land has led to the institution of various rites and rituals that are social, spiritual and physical in accordance with their world views. Such rites and rituals must be performed before titles can be transferred. The largely male custodians conduct transfers and expect the men in the lives of interested women to act on their behalf. This situation has often been found to impede women's access to land (Issaka, 2004; Millar, 2004). Whether women are able to exercise their cultural rights depends on how their interests

in land are perceived and how their labour is culturally prescribed.

In the transitional zones along the fringes of the Northern Region where share cropping practices are emerging and in urban centres where land is being increasingly commercialized, even the limited traditional rights of women are being eroded. Studies reveal that male title holders trade lands without regard to their traditional custodianship obligations (Bugri, 2004; Nyari, 2005). Lands are traded for personal monetary gains without due deference to women's (subsidiary) interests. In irrigated areas such as Tono and Veve in the Upper Region, male-centric projects have placed lands in the hands of men with only a few women beneficiaries. Community-based alternatives are however, beginning to include women in management systems, sometimes in defiance of cultural prescriptions.

Cultural appropriation of women's labour

This section examines two specific cultural appropriations of women's labour in relation to land – where women are considered “farm hands” and where they are considered “non-farm hands”. Although most analyses of northern Ghanaian livelihoods posit women as farm hands, there are in fact several instances where this is not strictly the case. Both arrangements, however, embody a gendered politics in which restrictions are placed on women's livelihoods.

Community interactions reveal that where women are considered farm hands, they serve as primary producers who play both specialised and general roles in on-farm cultivation processes. This arrangement is prevalent among peoples of the Upper East and West regions. Among the Frafra, Kassena, Builsa and Kusasi of the Upper East Region and Wala, Sissala, Dagaaba and Loba of Upper West Region, women's roles on the household farm are critical for production. They are required to work alongside men in many of the stages of production. In this regime, there is a direct relationship between women's labour and land. In this arrangement, women are obliged to play both productive and reproductive roles in the household subsistence process. Their reproductive tasks include cooking, washing and cleaning and productive tasks include activities such as land preparation, sowing, weeding and harvesting. Traditionally, such women are positioned as secondary producers whose culturally-assigned roles also enable them to move out of the household to undertake personal cultivation activities by acquiring land for personal farms (i.e. side farms)⁵, even as they work with their men on the household farm.

In the second case, where women are considered non-farm hands, their roles are perceived largely as non-productive and at best as reproductive. Under this regime, women are not obliged to carry out on-farm cultivation responsibilities. Their obligations are limited to reproductive roles that support men's primary roles, such as cooking for farm hands which may include male members of the household and hired labour. However, women of the household may assist at some cultivation stages such as sowing and harvesting. In the Northern Region, where women are perceived largely as non-farm hands especially among the Mwamprushe, Dagbamba, Gonja and Nanumba, women from the Upper East Region are often engaged as hired hands during sowing, harvesting, carting, cleaning, sorting and storage. When wives engage in farm-based activities, their labour is not considered work on its own merit but as help to the male members. In the Wungu area of Mwamprugu, wives who join hired hands may be rewarded as the hired hands.

Even when women receive rewards like hired hands, their contribution is still framed as help, and their rewards as appreciation. Such rewards – in the form of farm produce and cash incomes – are considered women's personal earnings although they are used – directly or indirectly – to support household or hearth-hold⁶ provisioning. Women may process earned corn for afternoon meals which feed the hearth-hold, while provisions supplied by the husband are used for feeding the entire household. Evening meals, which are considered the main meal of the household, are the responsibility of the head of household. Yet, provisioning is often given in the form of the main staples such as yam, maize and millet, while women are responsible for processing into food and adding other components such as soup ingredients. Each woman in the household has a turn to prepare the collective household meal using jointly produced staples. Women might also sell their individual produce to buy soup ingredients, soap, clothing, crockery and other needs for the hearth-hold or household.

Under both these regimes, the activities of women are shaped by the cultural perceptions of their social location, gender roles and land interests. These same prescriptions and care responsibilities position women to undertake production activities such as the cultivation of vegetables on the household (in both cases) or side farms (for women farm hands) because women's earnings and contributions are key to household provisioning. In addition to these activities, under both regimes women are responsible for gathering and using the natural resources that are directly related to their

gender roles (for example, clay, water, wood) and economically productive trees such as dawadawa and shea. Women's access to natural resources is meant to serve their domestic duties and responsibilities. They use raw clay for medication, plastering and wall designs. They also make pottery for use as crockery and decor. Water is used for cooking and cleaning, and wood for heating. Dawadawa and shea butter are also processed by women for cooking and medications. These resources have in fact become important income sources for women.

In many ways, the characterization of women as either farm hands or non-farm hands is problematic. The two terminologies confound and minimise the diverse and important roles that women play beyond cultivation, as well as the numerous tasks which the two groups have in common. For instance, in both regimes women are involved in the transporting, processing, storing and marketing of farm produce. These post-cultivation activities are burdensome. Whether as 'so-called' secondary producers or reproducers, these demands on women's energy and time serve to complicate their work burdens. Indeed, whether constructed as farm hands or not, women are burdened with both reproductive and productive on-farm and off-farm work critical for farm production. In both cases, compared to men, women's entitlements are limited. While they may have general access to land, the ownership and control of the farms remain largely in male hands. However, women's considerable care responsibilities in both regimes require critical resources beyond their reach, in the absence of full entitlements to important production resources such as land. This situation thus propels women into negotiations around work and responsibilities, resulting in bargains that are not always just.

Above all, whether as farm hands or not, women's contributions are culturally defined as supplementing and at best, complementing men's roles. This gendered contrivance is partly maintained through the dichotomization of productive and reproductive roles, and the association of women with the latter. This results in the conflation of all women's activities with reproductive or at best secondary activities, even when many activities clearly concern production directly. Women's cultivation of vegetables and their tasks in exploiting natural resources for instance, are often treated as unproductive or reproductive work. This falsification serves to undervalue women's labour and to minimize and undermine their interests and entitlements in land.

On the other hand, characterising women as either farm hands or non-farm hands does shed light on some important differences in the challenges

they face. The positioning of both groups in the two household production regimes presents challenges to the exercise of their roles as productive and reproductive agents, constrained as they are by resource limitations. Consequently, both categories of women have to seek ways of negotiating traditional and alternate spaces – nevertheless steeped in the same gendered systems and meanings – for options to address these challenges. The two regimes however, appear to sometimes present different sets of options.

Household production negotiations and the shaping of women's livelihoods

Sen (1999), in his analysis of the household as a site of contestation explains how gendered relations in/capacitate women and men in particular ways, resulting in the creation and entrenchment of inequalities in the domestic and global political economies. His analysis of the household in particular is revealing of how cultural prescriptions and meanings define resource rights for women and men unequally, resulting in a conflict of interests. He further explains that the exercise of agency becomes necessary for negotiating conflicts and striking bargains.

Indeed, in conjugal relations, the subordinate positioning of women, specifically wives, has often meant yielding to the interests and authority of husbands. Within the various ethnic groups of northern Ghana, women as wives or even maidens are considered temporary members of the family (i.e. natal or marital) and as such, their interests and rights are subsumed under those of men who are considered permanent members of the household. Access to the subsumed interests and rights require the negotiation of various spaces and bargains with men as custodians of particular and communal resources.

Bargaining with patriarchy

In her thesis, *Patriarchal Bargains*, Deniz Kandiyoti analyses the gendered environments and effects of what she calls “classic patriarchy”. Attributing the maintenance of patriarchy to the gendered cultural engineering of residence and social positioning, which implicates the state and traditional authorities, she explains that “the patrilineal–patrilocal complex for women is not only remarkably uniform but also entails forms of control and subordination that cut across cultural and religious boundaries...” (1997: 469). Undoubtedly, whatever negotiations occur, they are already prescribed by the patriarchal

regime. This situation explains the normalizations of gender inequalities and the unfair accommodations that the women of northern Ghana make, irrespective of the farm regime (farm or non-farm hand), ethnicity (Frafra, Gonja, Mwamprushe, etc.) and even religion (Traditional, Islam, Christian), as they negotiate their options.

Kandiyoti (1997) illuminates Sen's (1999) explanation that resource limitations, emerging conflicts and gender inequalities force negotiations within and across social groups in order to reduce conflicts and secure entitlements. Sen identifies entitlement perceptions and fall-back positions as functions of negotiation processes. By extension, knowledge and understanding of one's entitlements and back-up options also play significant roles in determining the nature of the bargains. Yet, as argued by Kevane (2004), corroborating Kandiyoti (1997), when women come to the negotiation already disadvantaged by cultural contrivances and resulting gendered mis/appropriations of their entitlements, bargaining becomes a way of merely reaching settlements that maintain the status quo. Fear of reprisals, genuine uncertainties and practical challenges place women in uneasy fall-back positions that propel negotiations towards containment rather than resistance.

Kevane (2004) further explains that household bargains become necessary because men and women enter marriage contracts unclear and uninformed of their options and choices. As such they have to resort to negotiations in order to define and secure their entitlements. Kevane recognises, however, that these negotiations are contrived to perpetuate inequalities. Indeed, women often enter conjugal relationships already socialised to accept as norm, and even protect, gender-based inequalities and their resulting limitations on women. This situation leaves women with hardly any gains as they negotiate and bargain within prescribed limits. Under such circumstances, women are likely to be subtle and conforming rather than resisting and contesting during negotiations. They are more likely to persuade and plead than to claim rights.

In the Tumu area, men are obliged to plough an acre of land for their wives every cropping season, but many women are not able to claim this labour entitlement due to practical reasons (Apusigah and TUDRIDEP, 2007). While applying their labour in household production by working alongside men, women are also expected to find time to cultivate their personal one acre plots. Thus they have to straddle personal and collective interests, and where they have been able to do so, they have enjoyed the benefits. However, the same system that entitles the women to one acre plots also gives husbands

priority entitlement to their labour. As such, it is only when women's services, productive and reproductive, are not in demand that they are able to attend to their personal farms. If women are unable to give the farms the required attention, yields become poor rendering their endeavours unproductive. Hence, some of these women choose to work alongside their men during the rainy season or wait to engage in off-farm activities in the dry season. The bargains reached entail the suspension of personal interests and benefits.

Such accommodations are what Kandiyoti (1997) points to in her famed thesis. Such bargains also manifest in the ways that women of northern Ghana negotiate their limited spaces in patriarchal societies. During community-based interactions, it became evident that in the Sissala and Mwamprushe areas where cultural taboos do not permit women to participate in yam farming, they have applied their labour elsewhere. When men apply their labour in yam farms, women occupy themselves on their personal farms or trading activities. Here, women are denied access to an important cash income source but this has released them to pursue personal interests.

In the Frafra, Builsa and Kusasi areas of the Upper East Region, where women are considered farm hands, they often are only able to acquire less productive land (Millar, 2004; Issaka, 2004). For these resource-poor women, one of two options is presented: to spend more resources to add value to the land, by for instance investing in soil fertility improvement, or to put the land under cultivation of legumes and/or vegetables, which are seen as women's crops. Here, women do not only negotiate their culturally-specific spaces but also negotiate their options within the limited space they are able to occupy. More importantly – and especially in the Upper East Region, as land in urban and peri-urban areas gets mis/appropriated for commercial and personal gains, which limits the commons – women's subsidiary title to land is eroded, thus compelling them to seek opportunities elsewhere, e.g. through seasonal migration. This situation accounts for the growing incidence of female seasonal migration (Apushigah and Mohammed, 2005; Mohammed, 1991). Women, who hitherto were secondary migrants, have become primary migrants who leave their homes during the dry season to find temporary jobs elsewhere. They migrate to find work as farm hands in the Northern, Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo regions, where they earn food and incomes. Others migrate to big towns and cities where they work as assistants in eateries while others work as head porters, popularly called '*kayayee*'. Yet others migrate to border towns where they work in bars, markets, parks and streets.

Also, in the Upper regions, especially in the Frafra and Kusasi areas where population density is high and commercial interests are fast replacing household provisioning interests, not only are peri-urban households losing their main source of production but they are also experiencing remarkable changes in their livelihoods. While men are seeking jobs elsewhere in construction and non-farm work, women and children are pushed to take on men's work on farms in order to sustain families and livelihoods. Thus, in addition to the cultural prescriptions, the practical realities of the times as well as women exercising their agency have propelled negotiations that are usually conforming, but also sometimes non-conforming. These accommodations and life-changing decisions can result in both gains and losses.

Women's livelihoods – gains and losses

Cultural appropriations, entitlement restrictions and practical needs frame what it means for women to optimise their options in negotiations. For the so-called farm hands, women have largely positioned themselves in direct agricultural production to pursue their livelihoods ventures. For non-farm hand women, trading – even if it is in food stuff or cooked food – takes precedence over any other activities. Women in the latter category often abandon even the opportunities to grow vegetables on household farms and rely on trading incomes to support their provisioning obligations. In Dagbong and Mvamprugu in the Northern Region of Ghana, but also among urban working class women, trade in farm and non-farm products has become an important occupation. The construction of the farm space as a masculine site crowds out women and compels them to find alternatives elsewhere. In both cases women have tended to carve their livelihoods activities from those spaces that are socially permissible. For non-farm hand women, permissible space related to land is where they can apply their labour to non-cultivation activities. In this case, they engage largely in collection, processing and/or marketing activities such as sale of firewood and charcoal, processing of shea butter and dawadawa, spinning of cotton and selling of food stuff and cooked foods. Farm hand women, on the other hand, are able to cultivate side farms during the farming season, in addition to non-farm activities during the off-farm season.

Interestingly, natural endowments play a significant role in determining not only cultural prescriptions of women's roles, but also the resource entitlements permissible. In the Northern Region, where land is relatively plentiful, women,

especially among the Mooba⁷ and settler groups such as Tampulma, Frafra, Kassena and Dagaaba, are able to access farm land more easily. Among the indigenous communities (Mwamprushe, Dagbamba and Gonja, among others) where women are treated as non-farm hands, some are nevertheless able to explore spaces for planting vegetables in the large farms that their men cultivate. In some cases, even within this non-farm hand regime, women are not only able to grow sufficient women's crops (vegetables and legumes) but are also able to take advantage of men's labour on their side farms or personal plots of family farms.

Also, in the Northern and Upper West regions where shea and dawadawa trees abound, women exercise their rights to natural resources by picking shea nuts and dawadawa fruits from communal and other holdings. These products are processed for domestic consumption and income generation. This situation is different for the women of the Upper East Region, where the impoverished and scarce lands are less endowed with shea and dawadawa except in areas along the wooded fringes of the Northern Region and Burkina Faso. Under such circumstances, the few economically productive trees such as shea and dawadawa contribute significantly to household incomes and as such men have tended to maintain their control over these resources, especially in the case of dawadawa.

Apart from harvesting from nature, women in production regimes that position them as non-farm hands may assist their husbands in the marketing of farm produce. The decision to involve women in the sale of the produce is made by men. Hence, in the largely polygamous farm households, a man might assign his right to sell farm produce to his favourite wife, leaving out the less favoured. He might also decide to use women other than his wife or wives or even conduct the sale himself. Women of the household have to lobby for such rights to apply their labour in return for rewards in the form of cash revenue or leftover produce. They engage constantly in negotiating and bargaining for such opportunities. Some successful women have been able to carve occupations as grain dealers due to their marketing skills. They haul cereals and legumes from farm gates and farmer markets such as Langbensi, Zebilla, Fumbisi, Diare and Namoo to commercial centres such as Bolgatanga, Tamale and Bawku for sale at good profits.

In the case of farm hand women, there has been the tendency to optimize skills in farm production through the carving of livelihoods around direct cultivation activities. Women have thus been key players in NGO-led food

security initiatives by participating in dry season gardening. They also grow vegetables and supplementary crops in small irrigation schemes. Additionally, their labour contributions on the family farm also allow them to make claims to some titles, although these remain limited. Their labour is critical to harvesting, processing and storage and/or marketing of farm produce. By virtue of being there throughout the production process, women are better positioned to make informed demands that enhance household provisioning entitlements and their benefits from sales incomes. Moreover, although men are not obliged to offer labour on women's farms, unlike in the Tumu area noted above, women are sometimes able to pursue their rights to land for side farming under arrangements which allow them to utilise men's labour. Like their non-farm hand counterparts, they access men's labour primarily for growing women's crops of vegetables and legumes on family farms, but unlike non-farm hand women, they are also able to negotiate for exchanged labour on side farms. During community interactions, Kusasi and Frafra men explained that if they did not support wives on their side farms, the women would use tactics such as poor sowing, feigned illness, delayed harvesting and side sales as sabotage. In fact, traditionally, men do not market side farm produce. Hence, women have the opportunity to leverage incomes or leftover gains by taking on this task. This is in addition to what the man might offer for soup ingredients on occasion. Women who sell and/or process and sell their husband's rice or groundnuts are able to benefit from leftovers as well as receive monetary rewards for their efforts. Conversely, unauthorised sale of household staples is near taboo for women. They may make such sales only when authorized by men.

On the whole, evidence from community interactions reveals that women from farm hand regimes are better placed than non-farm hand women to access and utilise land and for that matter, to stretch their entitlements beyond what is traditionally permissible. These possibilities allow them to better meet their care responsibilities without necessarily having to seek alternatives elsewhere. Indeed, while women from northern Ghana generally embark on yearly migrations during the off-farm season to seek jobs and incomes in the towns and cities of southern Ghana, studies reveal that the practice is more popular with women from the Northern Region in particular (Apusigah and Mohammed, 2005; Mohammed, 1991). Conversely, it was also evident that women's work burdens are heavier for farm hand women than for non-farm hand women. Not only are farm women obliged to share their labour in the

family but they also work on men's side farms. This was in addition to other reproductive and productive engagements. However, neither category of women has full control over the use of their labour. Men have priority use of women's labour whether on farm or off-farm. In addition, whatever livelihoods options women pursue are subject to men's endorsements.

Perceptions of farm ownership do, however, differ slightly between these groups of women. While farm hand women perceive the farm as family-owned, non-farm women consider them as men's farms. As a result, beyond household provisioning, women position themselves as entitled to limited rights on the basis of which they negotiate with men. In the second case, women have no expectations and receive support from men as acts of generosity rather than entitlements. Whether as farm hands or non-farm hands, when women make gains in terms of production, these primarily support household needs – with personal needs considered secondary. Yet, when they engage in bad bargains, their losses remain personal. Bad bargains erode women's rights and undermine gender equality. It is also clear that negotiations and bargains for both groups of women thrive only in permissible spaces.

Above all, women's land interests in farm-hand regimes are clear, whereas in non-farm regimes they are indirect. This clarity makes it possible for activists and agencies to emerge in farm hand regimes that enhance women's rights to this most important resource in their agrarian setting and opens up possibilities for lobbying and negotiations through appeals in the name of culture. Under non-farm hand regimes, cultural limitations remain huge blocks to negotiations for land-based resource rights of the farm women, whose access to non-farm resources also remains limited.

Conclusion

Clearly, the social positioning and land-labour ascriptions of women in the farm household are important determinants of their livelihoods im/possibilities. As members of farm families, their livelihoods options and choices are determined largely by the cultural constructions of their labour in relation to land. Although both categories of women, as farm and non-farm hands, are positioned in subordinate spaces, those culturally permitted to offer direct labour towards farm cultivation activities have tended to carve their livelihoods on agricultural activities, and through this process they can express their land interests and exercise their traditional entitlements to secure livelihoods. For those whose labour is directed toward secondary activities,

their weak connection to the land denies them such entitlements and pushes them to seek alternatives that further undermine their land interests and traditional entitlements to secure livelihoods. Yet in both cases, unjust accommodations underpin negotiations and bargains, bringing into question the possibility for change and placing limits on possibilities for agency and activism which might enhance women's land interests and rights.

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Endnotes

1. Original form of Dagomba.
2. Original form of Mamprusi.
3. Northern Ghana is divided into three administrative/political regions: Northern Region, Upper West Region and Upper East Region. This savannah area of Ghana is the poorest regarding literacy and school enrolment rates, levels of infrastructure development and availability of economic resources.
4. Plural for tendaana, meaning land or earth priest.

5. Side farms are independent farms on which men and women cultivate non-staple but important food crops. These crops – considered female crops – are used to supplement household feeding, especially lunch and snacks. Side farms are also important sources of independent incomes for men and women, especially non-titled men, youth and married women.
6. Ekejiuba (2005), in her criticism of households as a male-centric unit of analysis, offers the hearth-hold as an alternative. The hearth-hold is the consumption unit headed by women, as an alternative. The household is the production unit which comprises the hearth-hold(s). Although there is evidence of female-headed households in northern Ghana, in this paper, the focus is on the male-headed household to facilitate the analysis of household gendering.
7. The Mooba are people of the Nakpanduri-Bunkpurugu area of the Northern Region. They are popularly known as the Bimoba and wrongly as Gurma. They speak Moare.