

# LAND AND FOOD PRODUCTION IN A GHANAIAN FOREST COMMUNITY\*

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## I. Introduction

This article is an outcome of an in-depth ethnographic and ecological study which was carried out in 1982-83. The study focuses on the responses of the peasant farmers of Ayirebi to the national economic crisis of the 1980's. The crisis had been triggered by the world recession and later aggravated by the socio-environmental stresses of drought, bush fires (that were destroying both food and cash crop farms) and the return of over a million Ghanaians deported from Nigeria (see Dei 1987).

Ayirebi is a food farming forest community of about 4,300 people<sup>1</sup>. It is located in the Eastern Region of Ghana, about 45 kilometres from the major urban centre of Akyem Oda, nearly 180 kilometres from the Ghanaian capital, Accra. The town occupies an area of approximately one and three-quarter square kilometres, and its inhabitants are predominantly Twi-speaking, belonging to the Akan sub-group known as the Akyem. In 1982-83, the people of Ayirebi experienced their fair share of the national economic and environmental stresses, which had repercussions on the nature of their contemporary subsistence adaptation. In the past, rainfall in this community has averaged over 1,650mm annually. Starting in the 1980's, however, there has been a gradual decline in the amount of rainfall. In 1982-83, the town recorded its poorest rainfall ever as reflected both in the total amounts and number of days of rainfall. Between October, 1982, - September, 1983, for example, the total annual rainfall had dropped from the average of 1,686mm for the 1970's<sup>2</sup> to 933mm.

The prolonged drought and the lengthy and unusually strong spell of harmattan<sup>3</sup> dryness encouraged a series of bush fires that destroyed field crops such as plantain, yams, cocoyams, and cassava, as well as cocoa farms. An additional stress on the local food economy came with the return of 298 Ayirebi town residents who had been deported from Nigeria in the early months of 1983.

In examining the processes and mechanisms at work in the contemporary adaptation of the Ayirebi people, special attention was paid to the nature of the subsistence economy and the particular responses of the research community to local seasonal food supply cycles. It was found that the success of Ayirebi village adaptation, during these trying moments, can in part be attributed to the resilience and adaptability of the peasant economy.

## **II. Land and Food Production**

Modes of land ownership and cropping patterns of a people are relevant and crucial to understanding the nature of their food supply and food use patterns. Within the Ayirebi community, land rights and use are only comprehensible in relation to the social structure of which they are a part. Land potential (in terms of both fertility and for crop production) is high here, and the supply of land can be said to be adequate. Most of the land here is held and worked by subsistence and small-scale farmers. Nevertheless, the varied methods of contemporary land acquisition (within the broad framework of the traditional system of collective ownership) have served in some respects to the disadvantage of the poor, and have created various inconveniences in land use and dispensation.

There are various methods of land acquisition and use available to members of this community. These include: (i) lineage or communal land; (ii) land obtained from a spouse's family; (iii) tenancy; (iv) leasehold; (v) stool land; (vi) outright sale and purchase of land; (vii) "Sasamansie" land, i.e., lineage land given by a father to his children or spouse upon the consent of the lineage elders; and, (viii) mortgaged or pledged land.

An examination of each of the above will be conducted using a theoretical perspective of the three different modes of production which have long been in operation, and which continue to be articulated in the contemporary local economy. These are the kin-ordered, tributary, and the capitalist modes of production<sup>4</sup>.

### 1. Lineage "Abusua" land

Under the traditional kin-ordered mode of production, all land was communally owned, with the village chief acting as the principle custodian. With his consent, land was vested in the matrilineages as corporate groups. Every adult member of the lineage had the right to farm freely and to build on family or lineage land. Custom, however, demanded that the individual first secured the permission of the head of his or her segment of the matrilineage, usually, a mother's brother (maternal uncle) before developing a portion of such land (see also Manoukian 1964).

Ideally and customarily, an individual could claim a landholding for his sustenance and other basic economic needs, and not purposely for self-esteem or aggrandisement<sup>5</sup>. An individual upon maturing into adulthood and/or marriage, would usually set up a separate household (which would either be within the confines of his kin or maternal home, or elsewhere in the village community). He would then request and be allocated a piece of lineage land to cultivate and feed his new household. The farmer holds only the usufruct of the acquired land, and is not permitted by custom to alienate it. Such usufruct is lifelong and transfer of rights to the land upon the holder's death follows matrilineal inheritance. The owner of such a piece of land is ideally subject not only to the control of his family and lineage elders, but also, "...in virtue of his spiritual trusteeship to the dead" (Rattray 1923:229).

The lineage land could be cultivated jointly by members of the holder's household with some periodic assistance from other kin and friends. It should be stressed here that such family or lineage land was and is not necessarily associated with collective farming (Le Franc 1981:8).

Within this traditional kin-ordered production system there were also other avenues for obtaining communal land for cultivation. Such land did come through channels other than one's lineage.

### 2. Land acquired from a spouse's lineage

Through marriage, one may gain access to a spouse's share of lineage land. A man may be given a piece of land by his wife's family (usually the mother) upon which to farm, build, or settle. Such a grant is usually made to the man and his issue and not to his heirs,

and it can be held as long as he is married to the woman. Upon his death, or in the event of divorce, the land would be claimed by his wife and children on behalf of the donor lineage or clan. Similar to this arrangement in some respects is the possibility for sons and daughters to use portions of the family land during their father's lifetime. But such land must be returned to the father's lineage-estate when he dies.

Existing alongside the kin-ordered production system is the tributary mode of production which received its impetus from the emergence of a new market economy that gradually turned land into a "revenue producing commodity" (Mikell 1984:197). Within this tributary production system, the individual farmer is allowed access to land as a means of production, and, in turn, would pay tribute in the form of either a tax or rent to the landlord or custodian. Typical examples of such a system of land allocation and use include tenancy, leasehold, and in some cases, stool land.

### 3. *Tenancy*

Tenancy is basically a sharecropping arrangement between the landlord and the farmer. It is a form of tenure in the community, whereby an individual obtains a portion of land from a landlord in return for a fixed annual payment. Such payment can either be rent-in-kind (in the form of a proportion of the produce derived from the soil), or rent-in-cash (deriving from the sale of the produce on the market), or it can be in the nature of the farmer providing certain services to the landlord, or a combination of these. A few farmers are found to be renting plots of land on "abusa" basis, whereby one-third of the farm produce or its cash sale price is for the landlord or the farmer, depending on the nature of the sharecropping arrangement as to who pays for the operational costs. A tenant could also operate under an "abunu" system, where the entire produce or the amount derived from its sale is shared equally between the landlord and the farmer.

### 4. *Leasehold*

Leasehold is also a form of tenure in which the landlord may lease his land to another farmer for a fixed period such as one or two years. During this period, the farmer will cultivate the land and the lease cannot be terminated by landlord until the stipulated period is over. The leasehold gives usufruct rights to tenants; and the rent paid to the landlord is usually in kind (farm produce), rather than in cash.

In a situation where the land involved is lineage or family property, the landlord can only lease it with the prior consent of his lineage elders, and in the presence of witnesses. As Rattray (1923:230) rightly pointed out, such a lease gives the farmer only tenancy at will, but the arrangement could run indefinitely and even be carried on by the heirs of the original individuals involved.

#### *5. Stool land*

Stool land belongs to the town (royal) stool, and generally, it includes all land under the immediate and sole political authority of the Ayirebihene (chief of Ayirebi). It includes land of the royal *Bretuo* clan that first settled and founded the Ayirebi settlement, as well as land received as gift or in the form of tribute from other communities within the vicinity of the town. The Ayirebihene may either loan or give (as a gift) a portion of such land to any individuals or families in the community to help them alleviate temporary economic hardships. If the land is loaned for farming, the farmer is expected by custom to provide part of the farm produce to the royal household. A typical example of such land transaction is the Ayirebihene's allocation of a portion of stool land to one of his servants or court attendants for subsistence production. In the event of the land being given as a gift, the chief may assign stool land to a local resident or citizen in recognition of the latter's contribution to the wider community, and the recipient has to go through the public payment of "*aseda*" (thanks), in the form of token cash payment and customary drinks to the chief and his elders (Mikell 1984:202-3).

Since the early part of this century, with the emergence of a new money economy, the commercialization of agriculture and the introduction of wage labour, and with it a capitalist mode of production, new and supplementary ways of land acquisition and use have also evolved. These include the outright sale and purchase of land, and "*Sasamansie*".

#### *6. The Outright sale and Purchase of land*

Rattray (1923:237) argued that outright sale of land is a post-colonial innovation encouraged by the influence of a cash economy, and that the whole phenomenon demonstrates the "... growing tendency of individualism to assert itself and to resist the communistic regime". The general attitude in this community is that no land should be sold outright, because this would deprive the

seller's heirs or descendants of their inheritance. Increasingly, land over the years has come to be seen by most people as the most secure form of investment. And, as such, most individuals in the community prefer to acquire land through their own efforts. The land so acquired may not necessarily be subject to the constraints of matrilineal inheritance.

The culminating effect is that today, the idea of collective ownership of land conveyed by the traditional tenure system is under attack, and the traditional institutional measures and sanctions to contain the situation are either proving inadequate or are not being strictly followed. There exist, although relatively on a much smaller scale in this community than elsewhere in the country, disputes between a chief and his elders and subjects, or between families and lineage heads over misappropriation of communal lands. Land litigations and disputes that prevail in Ayirebi have mainly resulted from the improper appropriations of monetary compensations on land transactions contracted by traditional elders. The apparent, increasing contemporary intransigence of certain custodians of lineage lands, can be traced to the necessity for individuals to operate successfully in a competitive economy. Such circumstances encourage individuals not only to rent-out land, but also, to purchase land when and where they can. Some custodians of collectively-owned land demonstrate their greed by the manner in which they alienate such land, and make use of the savings accrued from the land sales.

The society, however, has sanctioned ways through which one can honestly appropriate communal land.

#### 7. "*Sasamansie*"

"*Sasamansie*" (literally meaning that which is left by the spirits) involves a father's desire to "lawfully" transfer a portion of his lineage land to his wife and children. The whole process appears to have been set in motion after the capitalist penetration of the domestic economy through cash cropping. Through the continuing investment in farmland, individuals holding lineage land have also been able to increase the value of such lands. And, in recognition of the individual's personal initiative and effort, the farmer may be able to reach a mutual agreement with his lineage whereby he would be permitted to leave a portion of the lineage land under his care to his children and/or spouse.

The transaction is a verbal gift or will made by the farmer in the presence of his lineage elders, and other witnesses. The deal may take

effect during the farmer's lifetime or immediately after his death. To seal the transaction, the children and/or spouse would be expected to give *aseda* (thanks) in the form of token monetary payment and drinks to the elders and ancestors.

### **8. Mortgaging or Pledging**

Mortgaging or pledging ("*awowa*") is yet another form of tenure whose roots can be traced to the kin-ordered mode of production, but which achieved prominence both in the tributary and capitalist production systems. In this tenurial arrangement, a piece of land would be mortgaged or pledged to another individual in order to obtain a cash credit or loan. Ideally and customarily, the landlord (pledger) is expected to consult all his family and lineage members to give them first option when a piece of land is being considered for pledge. In this transaction, the creditor gets temporary usufruct rights to the piece of land in question as security for his loan. The deal involves no specified period of time and the land would be in the possession of the creditor as long as the debt remains to be settled. Land pledging is flexible in that the debtor or pledger has the right to harvest the crops he had planted on the land. Since the creditor does not get compensation for any permanent improvement on the land when it is being redeemed, it is always recommended by the community elders that pledged land not be planted with perennial crops.

In the event of the death of the debtor before the loan is paid, the creditor (if he happens to come from another lineage) may seek the help of the bereaved family or lineage. Should the family or lineage be unable to settle the debt, they would be asked to relinquish their claim to the mortgaged land to the creditor. Although it is very rare for a piece of land to be alienated from a lineage in this manner, it is nevertheless possible for permanent alienation to result if evidence of the transaction gets lost. The rights of a deceased creditor are inherited by this or her heir, if redemption has not been effected prior to death (Okere 1983:142).

### **III. Discussion and Analysis**

From the responses given by a total research sample of 412 household heads regarding the dates and chief sources of their farmlands, it has been possible to put together some information on lands in use prior to 1970 and between 1970 and 1980. What is revealed is a slow but gradual shift from the traditional emphasis on

lineage lands to include more and more of the other sources of individual land acquisition discussed above. Only the responses of 345 farmers are presented here in Table 1, which includes the farmers who could give complete information on land acquisition and use that go back at least over a decade. The remaining 67 householders in the sample were mostly not established as independent household heads before the 1970's. [For the decade (1970-1980) then the rate of household formation was 16.3% (i.e., 67 of 412 households)].

Table 1: Chief source of land acquisition for farming prior to 1970 and before 1980 by sampled household heads.

Source	Before 1970		1970-80	
	No. (households)	%	No. (households)	%
Lineage (incl.) from spouse	301	87.3	280	81.3
Stool	15	4.3	11	3.2
Rent (incl. tenancy leasing)	10	2.9	10	2.9
Outright Purchase (incl. all land alienated from lineage - e.g., Sasamansie & Pledging)	19	5.5	44	12.7
Total	345	100.0	345	100.0

More specifically, the 412 household heads were asked to identify the source of acquisition of the land for the main food farm newly planted in the agricultural seasons of 1981, 1982, and 1983<sup>6</sup>. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the patterns of land acquisition and use as revealed by the analysis of the data.

Table 2: Land allocation and use among 412 household heads between 1981-1983 farming seasons

Year	Lineage land		Purchase		Rent		Stool		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1981	300	80.1	54	13.1	12	2.9	16	3.9	412	100
1982	308	74.8	75	18.2	21	5.1	8	1.9	412	100
1983	305	74.0	71	17.2	27	6.6	9	2.2	412	100

Although the data reflect the slow but growing importance of individually-acquired land in the community, caution must be exercised in attaching too much interpretative importance to the figures. For example, additional supporting data may be essential if one is to arrive at firm conclusions on major changes in land



ownership patterns. In order to understand actual patterns of inheritance, paths of transmission of all the farmlands held by 17 deceased adult Ayirebi citizens (10 males and 7 females), whose funerals took place in the community during the research period, were examined. Table 3 summarizes the findings. What the figures point out is that, despite minor variations, generally, lineage land is inherited by maternal kinsmen while land acquired through the individual male's personal efforts (outright purchase) is normally transmitted by the deceased to his children<sup>7</sup>.

Table 3: Land Inheritance Patterns for 17 deceased Ayirebi Residents during 1982-83 Research Year

Deceased	Type of land held* (i.e., total of No. of farm plots held by sample)	System of Inheritance	Details of Matrilineal** System of inheritance
A. Male	19 Lineage farm plots	-----> 17 Maternal Kinsmen 2 Sons	-----> 11 Nearest brothers 1 Mother's Sister's Son 5 Sister's Sons
(Total 10)	7 individually acquired plots (outright purchase)	-----> 2 Maternal Kinsmen 3 Sons 2 Sons & Daughters (no specification)	-----> 1 Nearest Sister's
	1 Rent land	-----> Son	
	1 Stool land	-----> Son	
B. Female	8 Lineage farm plots	-----> 8 Maternal Kinsmen	-----> 4 Sisters by seniority 4 Daughters
(Total 7)	3 individually acquired	-----> 3 Maternal Kinsmen	-----> 2 Sisters 1 Daughter

\* The figure takes account of the fact that normally the individual owns more than one of a particular type of farmland.

\*\*Note that two of the three basic principles that govern inheritance and succession rights in this community literally state that: (a) "a woman inherits from a woman and a man from a man"; and (b) "when one's brothers are not exhausted the sister's child does not inherit" (Rattray 1923: 39-44).

The rapid acceleration of trends and the differential in rates of change in land acquisition and use found in Tables 1 and 2 warrants some discussion. A steady decline in the number of individual households dependent on lineage land for cultivating their main food farms can be noted. The data for the period before 1970 when

compared to that of the period between 1970 and 1980 (table 1) shows that for about a decade, 21 households (about 2 households per year) did not rely on the lineage land as their major plots of land for food farming. The shift is mainly reflected in the increase in land obtained by outright purchase. For the same period, 25 additional households (about 2.5 households per year) relied more on purchased land.

In trying to find an explanation for this increase in land purchases, it is important to note that this period (1970-80) coincided with certain national political and economic developments. The early years of the decade saw the Second Republic under the leadership of Dr. Busia and his civilian government's attempts to improve upon commercial agriculture in the countryside within a capitalist development framework. Equally significant is the fact that the greater part of the decade (1972-1979) constituted the years of the infamous military regime of Colonel Acheampong. During his rule, the craze and greed for individual land acquisition became common nationwide and many Ghanaians saw land possession as the most secure form of investment in an uncertain future.

Between 1981-1983, 25 households (about 8%) left lineage lands. Around the same period, there was an increase in the number of households (17, about 6 households per year) cultivating their main food farms on individually-acquired lands. Renters also increased by 15 households (5 households per year) during this same period. These developments apart from bearing direct relation to the events of the previous decade, can further be explained by the worsening economic times, the net effect of which encouraged local farmers to look for additional and supplementary lands for food cultivation. The decline in stool land from 16 in 1981 to 9 in 1983 can be attributed to the local chief's decision to allocate stool land to community groups rather than individuals for joint farming ventures during the 1982-83 crisis period.

In 1981 (see table 2), 67 new households which had formed in the previous decade are in the sample. Of these new households, 56 (83.6%) initially in 1981 cultivated lineage lands, 8 (11.9%) depended largely on stool land, while 3 (4.5%) became renters. No new household was found to be cultivating their major food farms on land acquired by outright purchase. With regard to the original sample of 345 households, coming into 1981, 6 (2.1%) out of the 280 households using lineage land (see table 1), 3 (27.3%) of the 11 households on stool land, and 1 (10%) of the 10 renters left their respective lands to cultivate their main food farms on purchased land.

To some extent the above-noted slow but growing importance of land obtained through rent and by outright purchase in particular, gives an indication of some changes in relations of production and property relations in the research community. It is important therefore that the questions of who is buying and renting land and from whom be further addressed. Consequently, an attempt has been made to relate the data contained in tables 1 and 2 to the income status of the respective sampled household heads. Table 4 has been arrived at on the basis of a survey of household cash income from all economic activities during the 1982-83 research period<sup>8</sup>. The income brackets expressed here were chosen arbitrarily<sup>9</sup>.

Table 4: Income Status of Total 412 Representative sample household heads

Status*	No. of Households	%
Wealthy	66	16.0
Middle rich	185	44.9
Poor	161	39.1
Total	412	100.0

\* Wealthy = Annual cash income (i.e., market proceeds of all economic production) of Cedi 8,000 +  
 Middle rich = Annual cash income of between Cedi 4,000-Cedi 8,000  
 Poor = Annual cash income of less than Cedi 4,000.  
 Where: one cedi = US\$ 0.36 (1982-85)

The following tables 5-9 give a summary of the findings in the attempt to relate the data contained in Tables 1<sup>10</sup> and 2 to the income status of the respective sampled household heads. [They point to how the system is unravelling at the top and bottom but not so much in the middle].

Table 5: Responses of Household heads on chief source of land Acquisition for farming prior to 1970 by income status (Refer to table 1).

Income Status	Lineage land		Outright purchase		Rent		Stool		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*	No.	%*
Wealthy	38	73.1	8	15.4	2	3.8	4	7.7	52	100.0
Middle rich	147	88.6	9	5.4	4	2.4	6	3.6	166	100.0
Poor	116	91.3	2	1.6	4	3.1	5	4.0	127	100.0
Total (refer to table 1)	301	87.3	19	5.5	10	2.9	15	4.3	345	100.0

Table 6: Responses of Household heads on chief source of land acquisition for farming for the period between 1970-1980 by income status (refer to table 1)

Income Status	Lineage land		Outright purchase		Rent		Stool		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wealthy	30	57.7	18	34.6	1	1.9	3	5.8	52	100.0
Middle rich	140	84.3	20	12.1	3	1.8	3	1.8	166	100.0
Poor	110	86.6	6	4.7	6	4.7	5	4.0	127	100.0
Total (refer to table 1)	280	81.3	44	12.7	10	2.9	11	3.2	345	100.0

\* The given percentages (except for the 'total' column), are based on a calculation using the known income status of the 345 sampled household heads.

Table 7: Responses of Household heads on source of land acquisition for main food farm cultivated in 1981 by income status (refer to table 2)

Income Status	Lineage land		Outright purchase		Rent		Stool		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wealthy	39	59.1	23	34.8	-	-	4	6.1	66	100.0
Middle rich	155	83.8	23	12.4	2	1.1	5	2.7	185	100.0
Poor	136	84.5	8	5.0	10	6.2	7	4.3	161	100.0
Total (refer to table 2)	330	80.1	54	13.1	12	2.9	16	3.9	412	100.0

Table 8: Responses of Household heads on source of land acquisition for main food farm cultivated in 1982 by income status (refer to table 2)

Income Status	Lineage land		Outright purchase		Rent		Stool		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wealthy	38	57.6	27	40.9	-	-	1	1.5	66	100.0
Middle rich	149	80.5	34	18.3	1	0.6	1	0.6	185	100.0
Poor	121	74.8	14	8.7	20	12.4	6	3.7	161	100.0
Total (refer to table 2)	308	74.8	75	18.2	21	5.1	8	13.9	412	100.0

\* The given percentages (except for the 'total' column), are based on a calculation using the known income status of the total 412 sampled household heads.

Table 9: Responses of Household heads on source of land acquisition for main food farm cultivated in 1983 by income status (refer to table 2)

Income Status	Lineage land		Outright purchase		Rent		Stool		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wealthy	35	53.0	30	45.5	-	-	1	1.5	66	100.0
Middle	156	84.3	26	14.0	2	1.1	1	0.6	185	100.0
Poor	114	70.8	15	9.3	25	15.5	7	4.4	161	100.0
Total (refer to table 2)	305	74.0	71	17.2	27	6.6	9	2.2	412	100.0

\* The given percentages (except for the 'total' column), are based on a calculation using the known income status of the total 412 sampled household heads.

Table 10: Number and percentage of sampled households depending on purchased land by income status (refer to table 1 & 2)

Income Status	before 1970		Farming period*							
			1970-80		1981		1982		1983	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wealthy	8	15.4	18	34.6	23	34.8	27	40.9	30	45.5
Middle	9	5.4	20	12.1	23	12.4	34	18.3	26	14.1
Poor	2	1.6	6	4.7	8	5.0	14	8.7	15	9.3
Total (refer to Tables 1 & 2)	19	5.5	44	12.7	54	13.1	75	18.2	71	17.2

Table 11: Number and percentage of sampled Households depending on rented land by income status (refer to Tables 1 & 2)

Income Status	before 1970		Farming period*							
			1970-80		1981		1982		1983	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wealthy	2	3.8	1	1.9	-	-	-	-	-	-
Middle	4	2.4	3	1.8	2	1.1	1	0.6	2	1.1
Poor	4	3.1	6	4.7	10	6.2	20	12.4	25	15.5
Total (refer to Tables 1 & 2)	10	2.9	10	2.9	12	2.9	21	5.1	27	6.6

\* The given percentages (except for the 'total' column) are based on a calculation using the known income status of the sampled household at the appropriate period.

Table 12: Number and percentage of sampled Households depending on Stool land by income status (refer to tables 1 &amp; 2)

Income	before 1970		Farming period*							
			1970-80		1981		1982		1983	
Status	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wealthy	4	7.7	3	5.8	4	6.1	1	1.5	1	1.5
Middle										
Rich	6	3.6	3	1.8	5	2.7	1	0.6	1	0.6
Poor	5	4.0	5	4.0	7	4.3	6	3.7	7	4.4
Total (refer to Tables 1 & 2)	15	4.3	11	3.2	16	3.9	8	1.9	9	2.2

Table 13: Number and percentage of sampled Households depending on lineage land by income status (refer to Tables 1 and 2)

Income	before 1970		Farming period*							
			1970-80		1981		1982		1983	
Status	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Wealthy	38	73.1	30	57.7	39	59.1	38	57.6	35	53.0
Middle										
Rich	147	88.6	140	84.3	155	83.8	149	80.5	156	84.3
Poor	116	91.3	110	86.6	136	84.5	121	75.2	114	70.8
Total (refer to Tables 1 & 2)	301	87.3	280	81.3	330	80.1	308	74.8	305	74.0

\* The given percentages (except for the 'total' column) are based on a calculation using the known income status of the sampled household at the appropriate period.

A breakdown of Table 5-9 in terms of the specifics regarding each category of land is presented in Tables 10-13. Analysis of the data contained in the tables suggest some differentials in rates of change in land acquisition and use in terms of income status. For example, in Table 10, there is a disproportionate high rate of increase or a rapid rate of acceleration in the land purchases made by the wealthy and middle rich in the community (relative to the poor) reaching its highest point in 1982-83. Incidentally, the same period (1982-83) also witnessed a marked increase in rent and stool land among the poor (in contrast to a sharp decline for the rich). A major explanation for this situation can be found in the economic strain at this time which induced some poor households to rent additional new lands from the rich and some community leaders for farming.

It is interesting to note that prior to 1970, and between 1970 and

1980, no increases in renters were reported. However, as can be seen in Tables 11 and 12, the composition of the renters and those primarily dependent on stool land altered in terms of their income status around the same period. The decline in stool land is reflected more in the rich population than in the poor.

The on-going discussion next raises the question of who is selling and renting out land? Owing to the problems of land litigation, land purchasers usually maintain good accounts of who the sellers are. These sellers include the local chief, sub-chiefs and elders, as well as other lineage and family heads. Other sellers include individuals in the community with uncultivated land initially acquired through such traditional avenues as pledging or mortgaging, "Sasamansie", or those who received the land as a gift from the stool in recognition of their past services to the wider community. Similarly, land that might have been purchased outright from the local chief and community leaders may be sold by some individuals for economic or humanitarian reasons to the needy. In other instances too, portions of land rented out to individual farmers by their wealthy absentee landlords may eventually end up being sold to the former after the lapse of some time.

Table 14 is a summary of the responses of the sampled household heads who cultivated land obtained by outright purchase, regarding who the seller was.

Table 14: Breakdown of landlords and land custodians from whom land cultivated in the various farming seasons were purchased (refer to tables 1 and 2)

Farming Period	Landlord or Land custodian									
	Town chief:		Sub-chief:		Lineage/ Family heads:		Other Individuals*:		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
prior to 1970	6	31.6	2	10.5	11	57.9	-	-	19	100.0
1970-80	9	20.5	5	11.4	28	63.6	2	4.5	44	100.0
1981	6	11.1	8	14.8	26	48.1	14	26.0	54	100.0
1982	3	4.0	14	18.7	37	49.3	21	18.0	75	100.0
1983	3	4.2	11	15.5	46	64.8	11	15.5	71	100.0

\* The distinction between lineage/family and 'other' individuals is on the basis of whether the land in question was individually-owned or lineage property.

The data show that the principle land sellers in the community are land custodians, specifically, the heads of lineages and clans and their

constituent minimal lineage or family heads. These land custodians defend their decision to sell lineage and group lands by making references to community, clan, or lineage responsibilities. Usually, these claims are disputed by the lineage's rank and file.

The data regarding the few household heads in the research sample who sold land in the farming season of 1982-83 show that most land sellers are either wealthy or middle rich. Of the 21 household heads who sold land in 1982, none belonged to the low income category. Six (28.6%) of them can be said to be middle rich and the remaining 15 (71.4%) very wealthy. On the other hand, it was discovered that between 1981 and 1983, a total of 11 household heads belonging to the poor category had pledged portions of their farmlands to money lenders in the community (2 in the 1981 farming season, 5 in 1982, and 4 in 1983). With regard to rented land, all except 3 (21.4%) of the total 14 households who rented out portions of their land in 1982-83 came from the wealthy group. The 3 household heads were middle rich<sup>11</sup>

Payments for land purchases are generally made in monetary terms, the specific conditions of which are subject to the individuals involved. In 1982-83 an acre of land sold between Cedi 600 - Cedi 800, the price of a goat. Such land transaction had to be sealed with customary drinks supplied by the purchaser. Deferred payments, although rare, are not uncommon. For example, in 1983, 2 of 71 household heads who cultivated land obtained by outright purchase said they had entered into a special arrangement with the landlord at the time of the transaction to defer part payment till the end of the farming season. Further inquiries, however, showed that the landlords involved here were in fact wealthy relatives of the buyers. The former are not in the original sample, but the latter incidentally belong in the low income group.

The discussion so far illustrates the varied ways land can be acquired and used in the community. The cumulative effect is a tendency towards proliferation and fragmentation of individual landholdings<sup>12</sup>. There are some disadvantageous consequences of such development, such as the problem of work-hours lost in commuting between widely scattered plots, the difficulties in rationalizing the provision of farm services in such a situation, and the land disputes and power struggles both within and between families and individuals that emerge upon one's death<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, on the whole, the situation has the net advantage of expanding the resource base of the farmer. Consequently, it ensures even if it does not necessarily increase



the variety of household food supply, especially, in the event of crop failure on some farmlands. Furthermore, the varied ways of land acquisition available in the community also ensure that an individual can have access to some land one way or another. It should further be pointed out that the number of farm plots available to the average farmer may enable him/her to take some tracts of land out of production and allow them to fallow for a while.

A survey of the number of food farm plots owned by the sample population shows that the average household has between 2 and 3 separate farms. These could either be a garden or a field of permanent tillage, an intensive fallow system, or a bush and extensive cultivation<sup>14</sup>. The model size of a garden or permanent tillage would be between 0.25 - 0.75 acres, for an intensive fallow, between 1 - 3 acres, and for the bush and extensive shifting cultivation, 3 - 5 acres. Tables 15 gives a breakdown of the total size of cultivated plots held by the sampled 412 households heads<sup>15</sup>.

Table 15: Total Size of all Food Farm Plots owned by the respective 412 sample household heads:

Hectares	No. of Households	%
0-3	124	30.0
3-6	140	34.0
6-9	86	20.9
9-12	41	10.0
12 & over	21	5.1
Total	412	100.0

Largest = 14 hectares.

Figure 1 shows the spatial organization of land use in the community (see also Pelissier 1966:224). Closer to the settlement houses are the gardens, while the intensively and extensively cultivated fields tend to be farther away. Bush and extensive shifting cultivation, and intensive fallow systems in Ayirebi are the equivalent of what Gleave and White (1969:275 ff) have identified as rotational bush fallowing or shifting agriculture, and semi-permanent cultivation fields respectively. Except for the bush and extensive shifting cultivation fields which may be planted with non-food cash crops (e.g., cocoa, oil palm), all other farm fields in the community are largely devoted to the cultivation of food crops both for household consumption and for market sales. These farm fields or plots are scattered throughout the Ayirebi territory at distances up to about 12 kilometres from the settlement.

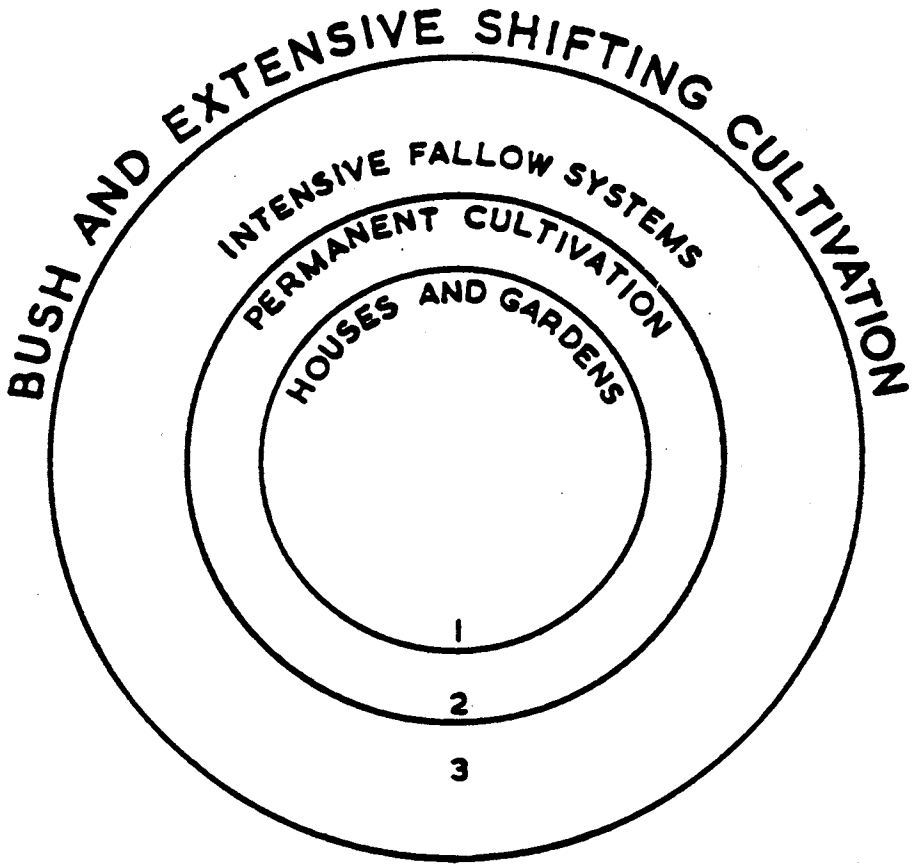


FIG. 1:

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF LAND USE IN AYIREBI.

One noted feature was the tendency for more and more farming households to use the bush and extensive shifting cultivation land, and the intensive fallow systems for cultivating purposes during the stress period of 1982-83. A breakdown of the sampled households in terms of the nature of land used for cultivating most of the household food requirements in 1983 shows 210 (51%) of households using bush and extensive shifting cultivation; 177 (43%), intensive fallow; and 25 (6%), permanent cultivation.

## **V.- Conclusion**

The existing literature on West African land tenure systems show an excess of generalized studies and a dearth of micro-level studies (see Ofori 1978; West and Sawyer 1975). While the concern of the majority of current scholars or writers on the topic has often been with the micro-level policy making and analysis, very few look at the issues from a grassroot perspective (see Ghai and Radwan 1983, O'Keefe and Wisner 1977). Perhaps a contribution this paper brings to the discussion regarding calls for changes in land ownership patterns in these communities is the necessity to primarily appraise the problem from the grassroot, micro-level. This way, the peculiar conditions and exigencies of each society can be better understood and generalizations sought in the aftermath.

The near or complete failure of conventional development strategies or frameworks to effectively produce socio-economic change in the Third World has become a problem of increasing magnitude for development strategists, planners and policy makers, particularly, over the last few decades. The more recent concerns over Third World economic problems have been triggered by the socio-environmental stresses of continuing desertification, poor water quality and quantity, soil erosion, deforestation, decreasing biological diversity, natural resource depletion, energy shortages and rising population growth rates (see Dei 1978a).

The existing situation calls for new approaches to development in the Third World. There is an urgent need for alternative solutions to the acute problems dealing with the satisfaction of the basic human needs of food and nutrition, water, energy, shelter, clothing, health care, meaningful education and productive employment. One such alternative approach is the eco-development strategy that seeks to analyse social and economic development within a sound ecological framework or perspective. Specifically, eco-development seeks to integrate and articulate ecological issues and problems of development.

It implies the satisfaction of basic human needs and aspirations through self-reliance, resource autonomy and ecologically sustainable development - all within the framework of social justice and respect for fundamental human rights (see Daugherty et.al. 1979:122; Francis 1976, 1976a; Dasman et.al. 1971).

Self-reliance and/or eco-development as alternative development strategies emphasize small-scale solutions, popular participation and establishment of community (see Hettne 1984:95). But self-reliance cannot be fully realized in the Third World if only a minority continue to have access to social, political, and economic power and other material resources. If social justice is to be locally defined and determined, then, it must begin at the local community level with the empowerment of the people to demand equal access to the valued goods and services defined by society and deemed necessary for the functioning of one as a member of that society.

In most rural community of Africa, land is a critical resource for the satisfaction of basic needs and wants. It is therefore necessary that we fully understand the various factors impinging upon or facilitating people's access to this resource if certain aspirations are to be met.

#### Notes

\* This paper is based on part of the material collected during my field research in Ghana in 1982-83 for my doctoral dissertation in the Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto. I am deeply indebted to the University of Toronto for the award of a Connaught Scholarship which helped finance my field study.

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1. This figure is based on projections of Ghana's population growth rate for the 1980's from the 1970 census data of 3,450 for the Ayirebi town (see Central Bureau of Statistics, Census Office Report, 1982, available at the Institute of Scientific, Social, and Economic Research, Legon). It should be mentioned that the official report of a late 1984 population census carried out in the country is not yet available to this researcher.

2. See Ghana Meteorological Services, Annual Rainfall Reports, Headquarters, Accra.

3. The word 'harmattan' is derived from a local Akan vocabulary, haramata. And, it has been used since the medieval ages to refer to the dry parching landwind which blows along the coast of Upper Guinea during the months of November-March. This wind raises a red dust-fog which obscures the air.

4. Wolf (1982:73-100) is recommended to the reader for the author's theoretical discussions of each of these three modes of production.

5. Perhaps this remark may be qualified by the observation that traditionally, the way one builds self-esteem or aggrandizes is by increasing his economic requirements, as for example, through the marriage of another wife.

6. For comparative purposes, the year 1980, was omitted here because at that time six of the total research sample of 412 household heads had not established themselves as independent production units.

7. It is important to note the male-female difference in inheritance patterns in Ayirebi. The distinction between lineage and individually-acquired property is more visible with males than with females. In the case of the female, her children are part of her lineage group. A man's children, on the other hand, are considered outside his kin group and can therefore only inherit his individually-acquired property.

8. In providing the above information it is borne in mind that monetary income alone may not always give a complete and accurate picture of the economic status of the individuals involved. The income data should be supported by additional consideration of other important assets in the form of such immovable property as house and land. Before drawing conclusions on economic status, therefore, I tried as much as possible to compare the income data and my own observations of household property (e.g., land, house) with the views of other community members regarding the economic status of some of the sampled households. On the whole, the cash income data turned out to be a good index, or a close approximation of economic status.

9. In choosing these income brackets, however, it was considered that the minimum daily wage was Cedi 12 at the beginning of the research period. Also, the incomes expressed here may appear to be rather high for the predominantly small-scale rural farming households. If anything at all they are on the low side. It is important to note that due to the prevailing high inflation levels in the country (inflation in 1982-83 was running at over 350%), these incomes do not reflect actual purchasing power.

10. In giving the respective data for Table 1 it is cautioned that not too much interpretative importance should be placed on it because of the possibility that income status for household heads, particularly for the period prior to 1970, might not have been the same as known for 1982-83 research period.

11. An interesting discovery from the analysis of the sex composition of the household heads involved in the various land transactions is that in almost all cases, the participants are males. This is particularly so when it comes to the selling, renting, pledging or mortgaging of land. When female heads are involved (as in land purchases, renting out of land), they account for less than 20% of the population transacting such business.

12. Similar observations have been made by such scholars as Meyerowitz (1951:42-49), Rattray (1923:213-44), Fortes (1947:170), and Okere (1983:139 ff).

13. See also Le Franc (1981:8-9).

14. Pelissier (1966:474 ff) also makes similar distinctions regarding the N'Gayene of Senegal.

15. Nearly, 70% of the land under cultivation in the town is held by males who also constitute the majority of household heads. The situation can be attributed to the continued importance of the matrilineal system of inheritance, and specifically, to the fact that it is usually a son's first marriage (rather than his father's death), which is the crucial event that launches him on an independent career as a farmer and the decision to set up a household production unit of his own (see also Hill 1975:122 ff).

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## Résumé

*Cet article étaié sur des documents certaines des mutations qui interviennent actuellement au niveau du régime foncier en vigueur dans une communauté forestière du Ghana. Il met également en exergue le fait que l'évolution observée au niveau de l'attribution des terres et des modèles d'utilisation de celles-ci constitue en fait une réaction d'ajustement des petits producteurs vivriers d'Ayirebi (dans le S.E. du Ghana près d'Akyem Oda) aux contraintes socio-politiques et écologiques dont souffre l'économie alimentaire de cette région forestière. L'examen des diverses méthodes d'acquisition foncière dans cette communauté est suivi d'une présentation des données de façon à souligner quelques-unes des transformations actuelles par lesquelles passe le système traditionnel.*

*Une consultation du répertoire des écrits relatifs aux régimes fonciers en application en Afrique de l'Ouest révèle la pléthore d'ouvrages généraux existant sur le sujet par rapport à la pénurie d'études micro-économiques effectuées. Cet article apportera donc peut-être son concours aux débats en cours sur les changements requis au niveau des modèles de propriété foncière appliqués dans ces communautés grâce à la nécessité qu'il met en relief d'apprécier tout d'abord le problème à la base, au niveau micro-économique ce qui permettrait une meilleure appréhension de la situation particulière de chaque société et de ses exigences, appréhension propre à frayer par la suite la voie aux généralisations.*

*Les stratégies ou canevas classiques de développement qui ont quasiment manqué ou totalement raté leur objectif, à savoir générer véritablement des transformations socio-économiques dans le Tiers Monde constituent désormais et en particulier depuis quelques décennies un problème d'une ampleur croissante pour les stratèges et les planificateurs du développement ainsi que pour les décideurs.*

*Les contraintes exercées sur la société et le milieu par l'avancée de la désertification, la qualité médiocre de l'eau et son insuffisance, l'érosion des sols, la déforestation, le recul de la diversité biologique, l'amenuisement des ressources naturelles, les pénuries énergétiques et la montée des taux d'accroissement démographique sont à l'origine de l'intérêt porté depuis peu aux problèmes économiques du Tiers Monde.*

*Au regard de la situation qui prévaut, de nouvelles approches de*

développement s'imposent pour le Tiers Monde. Au nombre de celles-ci, figure la stratégie de l'éco-développement qui tente de partir d'un point de vue ou cadre écologique solide pour analyser le développement économique et social. L'une des tentatives spécifiques de la stratégie de l'éco-développement consiste à faire des questions écologiques, une partie intégrante des problèmes de développement.

Cependant si l'accès au pouvoir économique, social et politique ainsi qu'aux autres ressources matérielles continue à être réservé à une minorité, l'auto-suffisance ne saurait se réaliser pleinement dans le Tiers Monde. De même pour que la justice sociale soit définie par les populations locales il convient de conférer tout d'abord aux collectivités locales pleins pouvoirs pour exiger de disposer comme tous des biens et services définis par la société comme étant précieux et estimés primordiaux pour l'appartenance à la société concernée.

La terre constitue dans la majorité des communautés rurales africaines une ressource vitale pour satisfaire les besoins essentiels. Partant, la réalisation de certaines aspirations ne sera possible que si nous appréhendons pleinement les divers éléments qui empêchent les populations de disposer de cette ressource et ceux qui en facilitent l'accès.